

Taras Chernata

Vinnitsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University
Department of Psychology and Social Work
Postgraduate student (Ukraine), chernata.taras@gmail.com

PERSONAL BOUNDARIES: DEFINITION, ROLE, AND IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

В даній статті було зроблено спробу згенералізувати та систематизувати в психології наявні знання про феномен особистісних кордонів та їх вплив на психологічне благополуччя індивіда. У першому розділі статті аналізується поняття особистісних кордонів, їх функції та типи. Пояснюється, що особистісні кордони визначаються як внутрішній і зовнішній простори, що відокремлюють особистість від оточуючого світу та інших індивідів. Розглядаються різні типи кордонів, включаючи фізичні, емоційні, ментальні та духовні. У другому розділі статті обговорюються особливості формування особистісних кордонів та типові порушення їх функціонування. Зазначається, що формування здорових кордонів відбувається впродовж усього життя та залежить від взаємодії з батьками, оточуючим середовищем та власною індивідуальністю. Також розглядаються типові порушення кордонів, такі як недостатня свідомість, стрес, страх відмовити та інші. У третьому розділі розглядається запорука формування здорових особистісних кордонів. Аналізується роль асертивності у підтримці здорових кордонів та ефективній взаємодії з оточуючим світом. Пояснюється, що асертивна поведінка допомагає зберегти баланс між власними потребами та інтересами інших, сприяючи побудові стабільних та конструктивних відносин. Висновки підкреслюють важливість розуміння та усвідомлення особистісних кордонів для збереження психічного здоров'я та покращення якості життя. Вони наголошують на значенні розвитку асертивності та інших ключових навичок для підтримки здорових кордонів і побудови гармонійних відносин зі світом. Ця наукова стаття є важливим джерелом для тих, хто цікавиться психологією особистості, взаємодією з оточуючим середовищем та розвитком психічного здоров'я. Вона пропонує глибокий аналіз основних концепції особистісних кордонів та надає практичні рекомендації для їх збереження та підтримки.

Ключові слова: автентичність, незалежність, особистісні кордони, психологічний простір, самоусвідомлення.

This article attempts to generalize and systematize existing knowledge in psychology about the phenomenon of personal boundaries and their influence on an individual's psychological well-being. The first section of the article analyzes the concept of personal boundaries, their functions, and types. It explains that personal boundaries are defined as internal and external spaces that separate the individual from the surrounding world and others. Various types of boundaries are considered, including physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual boundaries. The second section of the article discusses the peculiarities of forming personal boundaries and typical disruptions in their functioning. It is noted that the formation of healthy boundaries occurs throughout life and depends on interactions with parents, the surrounding environment, and individuality. Typical boundary violations are also considered, such as lack of awareness, stress, fear of refusal, and others. The third section examines the guarantee of forming healthy personal boundaries. The role of assertiveness in maintaining healthy boundaries and effective interaction with the surrounding world is analyzed. It is explained that assertive behavior helps maintain a balance between one's own needs and the interests of others, contributing to the construction of stable and constructive relationships. The conclusions emphasize the importance of understanding and awareness of personal boundaries for maintaining mental health and improving the quality of life. They highlight the significance of developing assertiveness and other key skills to support healthy boundaries and build harmonious relationships with the world. This scientific article is an important source for those interested in personality psychology, interaction with the environment, and the development of mental health. It offers a deep analysis of the basic concepts of personal boundaries and provides practical recommendations for their preservation and support.

Keywords: authenticity, independence, personal boundaries, psychological space, self-awareness.

Formulation of the problem. Personal boundaries are one of the key concepts in modern psychology, reflecting important aspects of internal and interpersonal dynamics. This topic attracts the attention of researchers and practitioners as it directly influences emotional well-being, the quality of relationships, and the overall state of individuals' mental health.

The issue of establishing and maintaining personal boundaries becomes particularly significant in the conditions of modern society, which, due to the high speed of transformative changes in all spheres of life, often threatens individual identity and psychological well-being. Given this, research in this area becomes extremely relevant and should be directed towards understanding the mechanisms of formation, functioning, and protection of personal boundaries.

Analysis of recent research and publications. A number of scientific works by both domestic (Hryhoryeva O. V., Drapak A. V., Maleychuk H., Marchynkovska T., etc.) and foreign (Rosenberg M., Smith M., Brown N., Gibson L., Levin K., etc.) researchers are dedicated to the influence of personal boundaries on the resilience of the individual as an adaptive resource of the organism. Works by L. Alexandrov, B. Ananiev, S. Bogomaz, T. Larina, D. Leontiev, M. Loginov, S. Maddi, R. May, K. Rogers, A. Fominov are devoted to this issue. Despite significant achievements in studying this topic, many aspects of personal boundaries remain unresolved or require further in-depth research. Checking the previous researches and publications in this field, it is important to continue to deepen knowledge of this problem and contribute to expanding our understanding of its aspects.

The aim of this article is to provide a qualitative overview of the concept of personal boundaries, their importance, and their impact on mental health and relationships. Through the analysis of existing research and literature, we will attempt to elucidate the main aspects of this topic and form a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of personal boundaries.

Outline of the main material. Personal boundaries, or limits, refer to the internal boundaries that an individual establishes for themselves in their interactions with the surrounding world and other people. These boundaries determine what types of behavior, communication, or influence she accepts from others, as well as what she is willing to give or receive in interaction with others. The concept of personal boundaries reflects the level of self-awareness, self-esteem, and interaction of the individual with the surrounding world.

Historically, the concept of personal boundary was studied in the context of borderline states of personality (between norm and pathology) in psychiatry. Active attempts to study and analyze personal boundaries were made in the early 20th century by psychologists of several directions. The concept of boundaries entered the scientific discourse of personality psychology from psychoanalysis and was described as obstacles that others put in the way of satisfying their needs, as well as boundaries between internal structures of personality (Id, Ego, Superego).

The domestic researcher O. Hryhoryeva defines personal boundaries as a psychological formation that arises as a result of interaction or establishment of equal relations between the desire to preserve authenticity and the need for adaptation in society. The main tasks of personal boundaries are maintaining harmony and establishing contacts with the surrounding world[2, p.102].

V. Moskalenko describes the internal boundaries of personality as invisible internal boundaries that protect thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Awareness of one's own personal boundaries helps understand the areas of one's own influence, not take responsibility for the actions and feelings of other individuals, and also not succumb to manipulation.

M. Rosenberg, a renowned psychologist specializing in communication and conflict resolution, refers to personal boundaries as internal boundaries that a person establishes for themselves to protect their mental and emotional well-being. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's own needs and boundaries, as well as developing effective communication skills to maintain and protect these boundaries[7, p.28].

Contemporary researcher N. Glover defines personal boundaries as expectations and needs that help one feel safe and comfortable. According to her, understanding when to refuse or agree is the basis of comfortable communication with other people.

The prominent German psychologist and philosopher E. Fromm, in his book "The Art of Loving," considers the concept of expanded boundaries - he asserts that a healthy person has expanded boundaries that allow them to openly interact with the surrounding world and other people, while maintaining inner independence and individuality. Fromm emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's own needs and desires, as well as developing the ability to interact with others without losing one's own "self." He believes that expanded boundaries allow a person to freely express their individuality and develop deep and mutually beneficial relationships with others[8, p.78].

The famous Canadian psychologist and philosopher S. Pinker often emphasizes the importance of personal boundaries in the formation and preservation of individual identity in his research and publications. He points out that intense social trials, such as war or fear, can lead to the loss of personal boundaries. The researcher views this process as a possible absorption of identity into the collective unconscious, which affects individual psyche and highlights the importance of recognizing one's own boundaries and protecting personal identity in conditions of collective trials and social influence.

The primary concepts M. D. Smith utilizes in the context of individuals' personal boundaries are:

- Passivity: a state in which an individual cannot express their thoughts, feelings, and needs and typically follows the will of others;
- Aggressiveness: a state in which an individual expresses their thoughts and needs but does so with tactlessness, dominance, and may violate the boundaries of others;
- Assertiveness: a state in which an individual expresses their thoughts, feelings, and needs openly, honestly, and without aggression. They are capable of establishing personal boundaries without violating the boundaries of others[12, p.216].

Overall, contemporary psychologists often distinguish three main types of personal boundaries:

1. Physical (indicating how close bodily an individual can interact with others)
2. Emotional (allowing differentiation of feelings, emotions, and attitudes of the individual towards others)
3. Mental (aiding in constant growth of spiritual resilience and self-love)

In addition to the mentioned classifications, there are several scholars who expand the classification of personal boundaries, including practicing psychologists and researchers in the field of relationships. B. Weinhold, J. Weinhold, and V. James, for example, distinguish a spiritual type that aids in the constant growth of spiritual resilience and self-love.

Psychologist N. Tavvab expands the list with three additional types:

Sexual boundaries (include issues of consent, comfort, intimacy, safety, and personal limits that individuals establish for themselves in sexual situations).

Material boundaries (encompass questions of privacy, ownership, expenses, and limits regarding an individual's willingness to share material resources with others, which may be established to maintain comfort, safety, and personal well-being).

Time boundaries (determine how individuals spend their time, whom and what activities they prioritize, and also define the boundaries of accessibility for others in relation to their time, may include questions about personal time for self-development, leisure, work, interaction with friends and family, as well as addressing personal needs and priorities).

A practicing psychologist believes that violations of time boundaries are the most common among all six proposed types[3, p.93].

Additionally, in his works, K. Levin considers external (determining how individuals interact with others and what boundaries they set in their external environment) and internal (reflecting internal beliefs, values, experiences, and attitudes towards oneself, determining how individuals react to their own emotions, thoughts, and internal conflicts) boundaries.

In his practice, F. Perls classifies personal boundaries as whole and torn. Whole boundaries are stable and clear. People with intact boundaries can clearly define their limits and interact with the world with a sense of integrity and stability. They may be open to new experiences and relationships while maintaining their independence and integrity. Torn boundaries are blurred and unclear. People with torn boundaries may have difficulty defining their limits or establishing healthy relationships with others. They may feel scattered, uncertain, or unprotected in their relationships and interactions with the world. Perls believed that understanding these two types of boundaries can help people develop greater self-awareness and improve their relationships with others[11, p.227].

Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences Nina Brown proposed her own classification of personal boundaries based on permeability level:

- Soft
- Spongy
- Rigid
- Flexible

Individuals with soft boundaries tend to allow others to penetrate their space and life without significant resistance or protection. They may easily sacrifice their own needs and desires for the sake of others and become victims of psychological manipulation.

Those with spongy boundaries may demonstrate elements of both soft and rigid boundaries depending on the situation. They may be open to interaction with others and willing to share their feelings and thoughts, but they may also have some defensiveness or protection to safeguard their privacy or personal boundaries.

Personalities with rigid boundaries tend to rigorously defend their personal space and establish boundaries. They are usually reluctant to share their feelings, thoughts, or emotions with others and may tend towards isolation. Such boundaries often result from physical, psychological, or sexual violence. It is important to note that rigid boundaries can be selective depending on circumstances, time, or place, typically based on past negative experiences.

Flexible personal boundaries are considered the healthiest and most adaptive. People with flexible boundaries can effectively establish boundaries and defend their needs while also being open to interaction and communication with others. They can work on maintaining a balance between their own needs and the needs of others[9, p.147].

The scientist T. Levy distinguishes six main functions of personal boundaries:

- Protective: involves defense against negative external influences perceived as threatening. Personal boundaries become strong and restrict the internal psychological space of the individual.

- Permeable: reflects the ability of boundaries to allow influences to pass through. This becomes possible if a person feels sufficient self-confidence and trust in another person, as well as the absence of dangerous influencing factors.

- Absorbing: helps to "absorb" what is necessary and desired from the surrounding world. This ensures the internal right to satisfy needs, allowing a person to openly express their needs and ask for help.

- Expressive: helps to express internal impulses outwardly, expressing feelings and emotions.

- Inhibitory: helps to restrain external influences when necessary for effective interaction with external stimuli.

- Neutral: represents a calm and neutral state of the individual, who has no intention of interacting with external stimuli at the current moment[4, p.43].

S. Nartova-Bochaver also points out the following functions of personal boundaries:

- Define subjectivity and establish boundaries between the individual and the surrounding world.

- Help to define personal identity by allowing individuals to self-identify and express themselves in chosen ways.

- Create the possibility of equal interaction, where both parties remain free individuals. Failure to perform this function can lead to manipulation or aggression.

- Provide protection from external influences and the ability to choose what affects us.

- Define the area of personal responsibility, indicating what the individual is responsible for.

Violation of these functions can lead to a constant feeling of stress and overload, the emergence of emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, and anger, conflicts in interaction with other people, loss of self-identification, psychosomatic manifestations such as insomnia, decreased immunity, and overall deterioration of health[6, p.89].

Thus, the concept of personal boundaries is an important aspect of mental health, as healthy boundaries help individuals remain true to themselves, feel harmony, define their needs and desires, and protect their psychological and emotional integrity. Personal boundaries are studied both in the context of individual personality development and in the context of interpersonal interactions. This is an important aspect for understanding relationships, conflicts, and the development of psychological therapy.

Key features in forming personal boundaries and typical disruptions of their healthy functioning. Various researchers of the phenomenon of personal boundaries emphasize their non-normativity and non-linearity of development throughout an individual's life. The process of boundary formation involves a sequential transition from indivisibility in childhood to independence and autonomy in adulthood. This process is not fixed and does not have a rigidly defined moment of maturity - it is individual for each person. The development of psychological boundaries begins in early childhood and reflects the child's relationships with parents. Initially, the child does not perceive themselves separately from the mother, but gradually increasingly sees themselves as an independent part of the "self." The sense of social space develops in children aged 3 to 6 years old. Mental and spiritual boundaries are formed in adolescence. Adolescents learn how to interact with peers, teachers, and other authority figures. They also develop their own values, beliefs, and attitudes towards the world, which define their individual boundaries. In adulthood, personal boundaries can also undergo changes. An individual may review and reassess their values and, in the process of establishing new relationships, define their personal and professional boundaries[10, p. 21]. Violations in the formation of personal boundaries can arise from various reasons and have diverse

consequences for an individual's psychological and emotional state. Numerous studies by leading researchers in this field, including F. Perls, M. Smith, N. Brown, N. Tavvab, and others, are dedicated to this issue. F. Perls identified several types of violations of personal boundaries, which he called "Ego-boundaries": merging, retroreflection, projection, introjection, projection, and deflection. These violations can cause traumatic neuroses resulting from conflicts or external intrusions. They are all characterized by difficulties in distinguishing between one's own personality and the external world.

In merging, a person loses their individuality and begins to identify with another person; some mergers can be mutual. They feel like another person, think their thoughts, sympathize with their interests, and life. The individual does not see a difference between themselves and the other person, losing the ability to understand who is performing what actions. In normal circumstances, such merging is only observed between a mother and a newborn baby. Pathological merging underlies many psychosomatic disorders.

Retroreflection refers to the phenomenon where a person directs their attention and energy inward instead of influencing the external environment. They divide their personality into two parts: the active and the affected, and treat themselves as they would like to treat other people or objects. This can lead to self-destructive actions when a person becomes their own enemy.

The phenomenon of projection is the opposite of retroreflection, where a person with disrupted boundaries resorts to doing for others what they would actually like to do for themselves. This can lead to a breakdown in relationship communication, as interaction is based on fantasies, imaginations, illusions, and expectations, without considering agreements with the external object.

Introjection is the process of absorbing and incorporating various concepts, facts, norms of behavior, moral, ethical, aesthetic, and political values from the external world without their analysis, changes, or transformations, even if they do not correspond to the individual's own views. Often, this process occurs under the influence of political propaganda, when a person is persuaded to take responsibility for what is actually part of the external world. The individual absorbs others' thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and relationships, thereby losing the ability to develop their own personality because they are preoccupied with retaining foreign elements within themselves. The more introjects they accumulate, the fewer opportunities they have to express themselves or even define who they really are.

Projection embodies the tendency to shift responsibility to the external environment for what is actually happening inside the individual. Such individuals perceive in others what is actually characteristic of themselves: for example, a deceiver will see deceit all around. They alienate not only their own impulses but also parts of themselves where these impulses arise. Projection can cause confusion between one's own personality and external influences. These individuals attempt to rid themselves of the imagined "introject," considering it a foreign aspect, although in reality, it reflects their own personality [11, p.189].

According to the research of O. Bondarchuk, the formation of personal boundaries in individuals can encounter various challenges due to inadequate awareness (individuals may not be sufficiently aware of their values and needs), fear of refusal (individuals try to please others and thus often fear refusal, which in turn leads to neglecting their own interests), implicit expectations from others and stress (workload, stress, and the demands of professional activity can make individuals less capable of defending their own needs and boundaries), and cultural peculiarities (in some cultures, it may be more challenging to refuse or establish boundaries)[1, p. 116].

Thus, disruptions in the formation of personal boundaries can have various causes and consequences. Studies by F. Perls and other scientists in this field indicate the existence of several types of violations that can lead to traumatic neuroses and difficulties in interaction with the world. Additionally, the reasons contributing to the disruption in the formation of personal boundaries have been highlighted, such as inadequate awareness, fear of refusal, implicit expectations from others, stress, and cultural peculiarities. It is important to emphasize the need to be aware of these factors and develop self-regulation skills to support healthy personal boundaries.

Forming healthy personal boundaries. The formation of healthy personal boundaries is a crucial prerequisite for psychological and emotional well-being, as well as for successful social interaction and self-realization. Therefore, a number of psychologists and researchers have devoted considerable time to studying the topic of healthy personal boundaries and the strategies and techniques for their effective development.

M. Smith, in exploring the realm of interpersonal boundaries and their effective maintenance, introduces the concept of assertiveness. Assertive behavior involves advocating for one's own interests, articulating one's goals and intentions clearly, while respecting the interests of others. It is a system of actions and reactions that reflects an individual's level of assertiveness. An assertive style helps maintain

constructive relationships even in challenging situations, allowing for the free expression of one's views and beliefs without disregarding the interests of others. It also facilitates conflict resolution and the search for optimal compromises. Assertiveness promotes equitable relationships where each party has the opportunity to freely express their rights and defend them without harming others. Partners trust each other and act with confidence, calmness, and responsibility.

Various scientific studies indicate that psychologically healthy individuals typically have a higher level of assertiveness compared to those with mental disorders. Assertiveness serves as an important factor in psychological well-being and an effective tool for personality harmonization. These qualities enable the maintenance of stable psycho-emotional states, which directly impact productivity, efficiency, development, and self-improvement. The ability to independently shape one's perception of the world, self-confidence, trust in others, as well as openness to expressing internal potential, are key aspects of an assertive approach to establishing personal boundaries[5, p. 38].

Obviously, assertiveness is a complex and multifaceted personality trait. Its development is associated with various skills and abilities, such as self-confidence, attentiveness to the needs of others, empathy, taking responsibility for events in one's life, as well as understanding one's strengths and weaknesses. This concept reflects the principle of gestalt therapy: "I exist not to meet your expectations; you exist not to meet mine."

Among the key advice and methods for maintaining healthy personal boundaries, the following aspects can be highlighted:

- Effective communication (based on three key qualities: honesty, openness, and straightforwardness in expressing thoughts and feelings, but without using emotional pressure on the other person. It is the ability to express one's beliefs or feelings while considering the thoughts and feelings of the conversation partner, without causing harm to them);
- Self-respect and respect for others (the ability to listen to and understand the viewpoint of others, refraining from judgment and mutual aggression);
- Identifying one's own needs (the ability to clearly express one's needs and desires, without fear of displaying authenticity and uniqueness);
- Ability to listen attentively and understand (being attentive and receptive to the needs of other people, showing interest in their thoughts and feelings)[12, p. 62].

N. Tavvab, a renowned therapist and psychologist specializing in self-awareness and relationships, provides the following principles and advice for building healthy boundaries:

1. Self-awareness and cognition (understanding one's own needs, desires, boundaries, and values is a key aspect of building healthy boundaries. It is important to pay attention to how you feel in different situations and how it affects your well-being).
2. Resilience (the ability to remain true to your boundaries and confident in your values and needs).
3. Boundary setting (learning to say "no" in situations where it is necessary. It is important to understand that this is not a selfish or unfriendly act, but rather an expression of self-preservation and self-respect).
4. Clear understanding of personal space (being aware of the space, both physical and emotional, needed for comfortable functioning. It is important to learn to recognize when this space is being violated and to act accordingly).
5. Supporting healthy relationships (seeking support from people who respect boundaries and help maintain them. This can be family, friends, or professional consultants)[3, p. 126].

Therefore, establishing healthy personal boundaries is a key aspect of psychological well-being and successful social interaction. Maintaining these boundaries can be achieved through assertive behavior, which allows expressing one's own needs and thoughts while respecting the interests of others. Psychologists such as M. Smith emphasize the importance of assertiveness in creating constructive relationships and resolving conflicts. N. Tavvab considers aspects of self-awareness, resilience, boundary setting, and support for healthy relationships as key principles for building healthy boundaries. Thus, developing assertiveness and awareness of personal boundaries are important components for psychological self-improvement and harmonizing relationships.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. This article examines various approaches to understanding and researching personal boundaries that arise in the context of an individual's interaction with the surrounding world. Various scholars, such as O. Hryhoryeva, V. Moskalenko, M. Rosenberg, N. Glover, E. Fromm, M. Smith, and others, have made significant contributions to understanding this

psychological phenomenon. Different approaches to the classification and functions of personal boundaries are considered, emphasizing their importance for mental well-being and social adaptation. Violations of personal boundaries can have serious consequences for mental health, so understanding, awareness, and protection of personal boundaries are important tasks for each individual. Various studies, including the work of M. Smith on assertiveness, confirm that assertiveness acts as an important factor in supporting stable and constructive relationships. Assertiveness allows for effectively expressing one's needs and thoughts while refraining from aggression or neglecting one's own interests. Furthermore, the methods and advice from N. Tavvab underscore the importance of self-awareness, resilience, setting clear boundaries, and supporting harmonious relationships for successful formation of healthy personal boundaries. These principles and practical methods can help each individual establish boundaries in interaction with the surrounding world and achieve harmony with both internal and external environments.

References

- [1] Bondarchuk O. I. Model psykholohichnoi pidhotovky kerivnykiv osvitykiv orhanizatsii do diialnosti v umovakh zmin. Kyiv: Instytut psykholohii imeni H. S. Kostiuka NAPN Ukrainy, 2015. – № 1. – 412 s.
- [2] Hryhorieva O., Drapaka A. Psykholohichni mezhi osobystosti ta metod otsinky yikh sformovanosti. Kyiv: Nauka i osvita. 2013. (№ 1 – 2). 386 s.
- [3] Glover N. T. Osobystisni kordony. Kerivnytstvo zi spokiinoho zhyttia bez travm ta kompleksiv. Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2023 – 304 s.
- [3] Levi T. Metodyka diahnostyky psykholohichnykh kordoniv osobystosti. Pytannia psykholohii. 2013. (№ 1). – 189 s.
- [4] Marchuk L. M. Sotsialno-psykholohichni osoblyvosti formuvannia asertyvnoi povedinky u profesiinomu stanovleni maibutnykh psykholohiv. Kyiv: Instytut psykholohii imeni H. S. Kostiuka NAPN Ukrainy, 2016 – 225 s.
- [5] Nartova-Bochaver S. Psykholohyia lychnosti y mezhlychnostnykh otnoshenyi. Kyev: ЭКСМО-Press, 2001. – 346 s.
- [6] Rozenberh M. Nenasyllynske spilkuвання. Kharkiv: Ranok, 2020 – 256 s.
- [7] Fromm E. Mystetstvo liubovi. Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2023 – 192 s.
- [8] Brown N. Children of the Aging Self-Absorbed. Oakland: New Harbinger, 2020. – 264 p.
- [9] Gibson L. C. Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2015. – 216 p.
- [9] Perls F. Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality Gouldsboro: The Gestalt Journal Press, 1951 – 512 p.
- [10] Smith M. J. When I Say No, I Feel Guilty: How to Cope, Using the Skills of Systematic Assertive Therapy. New York: Bantam Books, 1975. – 352 p.

Review received 04.03.2024