

HPEPA 2019**Humanistic Practice in Education in a Postmodern Age 2019****THE PHENOMENON OF PSYCHOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES**

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Abstract

The article considers the problem of determining the boundaries of the personal psychological space. The intensity of social processes in modern society makes special demands on personal autonomy, freedom and responsibility of each person. The high interdependence of social interactions, information and communication overloads make a person need to create an independent, non-conformal, authentic being, at the same time they require him to harmonize relations with the outside world. The problem of self-determination and correlation of the world of the Self with the world of the non-Self, i.e. the problem of forming borders. The influence of the boundaries of the psychological space on the socialization of the individual, their self-actualization and determination of the needs and capabilities of the individual is shown. An analysis of theoretical approaches allows us to assert that a psychologically healthy, mature individual has stable and dynamic boundaries of the Self, while being able to flexibly build relationships with others and have the quality of autonomy. This study is devoted to the problem of the emergence and development of the incentive role of the border in the process of formation of the personality as a subject of activity. The article presents an analysis of foreign and Russian approaches to understanding the essence, content and parameters of psychological boundaries. The results of an empirical study of the structural components of the psychological boundaries of the student's personality are presented.

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1. Introduction

The intensity of sociohistorical processes in the modern society makes a special demand concerning personal autonomy, freedom and responsibility of every person. High interdependence of social interactions, informative and communicative overload present with the need for selection of environmental influences and strengthening of human ability to create independent, non-conformal and authentic existence. Deindividuating influence of modern civilization is accompanied by an increasing need for personal identity development.

Social significance of our research is determined by the necessity for balancing the relationships between the subject and the surrounding world. If the relationships take distorted forms, the efficiency of activity and personal efficiency decrease. The problem of forming boundaries appears as the problem of personal identity and the correlation between “Ego” and “non-Ego”.

A number of phenomena reflecting the problems of “I” boundaries formation, the central of which is the dependence phenomenon, are noted in psychology and mental therapy. My self-identity is the other side of “not-I” boundary. According to Petrovkii (2008) “ego” is exactly where the “non-Ego” begins (p. 10). Identified “Ego” has stable and flexible boundaries, one of the main functions of which is establishing and maintaining relationships with the object of non-ego. Thus, a mental disorder can, in its turn, be presented as a consequence of disrupted communication between the objects of reality, which can manifest itself as boundaries defect (Pikuleva, 2017).

A mature and mentally healthy individual has both resilient and dynamic boundaries of Ego, and is capable of building relationships with others and having the quality of autonomy.

Relevant to the study is the approach to understanding psychological boundaries from the point of view of freedom. “Knowing their own boundaries, a person has more freedom, but at the same time they face the terror of the world and their own helplessness” (Jaspers, 2016, p. 17) wrote. According to Shulakevich (2017), “boundaries divide and limit, but at the same time they protect and secure”. The authors highlight the significance of psychological boundaries in feeling personal power, safety and concentration. They let one to perceive “oneself” rather than “the other”. In these boundaries we live through our values, convictions, thoughts and feelings and become aware of them. This is how the sense of identity is born.

2. Problem Statement

The present research is dedicated to the problem of appearance and development of motivational roles of boundaries, frames and opportunities in the process of socialization of a person as the subject of activity.

In mundane consciousness, the category of “boundary” is connected with many notions and it has many meanings. A boundary is a line dividing territories, a border, an edge, a lineament, a line as well as it is that which separates different spheres of human activity, feelings, beliefs. A boundary can be considered as an extreme manifestation of something, an edge, a measure. The ambiguity and the range of application of the term “boundary” leads to think about its underlying essence, “root” nature of this notion (Shulakevich, 2017, p. 2).

By this moment an increase in research interest in application of topological and environmental categories in psychology is noted. Such terms as “lifeworld”, “psychological time and space”, “personal space”, “contact boundary” (Matsinovskaya, 2008, p. 55) have long since been introduced into the academic use.

In Russian psychology, one speaks about lifeworld, subject topology, internal and external “Ego”, inner world, place factor and personality separation, psychological experience, existential space (Beskova & Tkhostov, 2014, p. 128) while describing subjective existence of a person.

Turning to the analysis of the notion of boundaries in Russian psychology, it is necessary to single out the main lines of research. In the framework of phenomenology of corporeality boundaries are a representation of subject’s activity based on the balance of autonomy-predictability, their functions are the interaction with non-ego and control over it. Boundaries are regarded in their social aspect – as opposition of oneself to others and to society, inaxiological aspect – I – the other, I am good – I am bad, I am real – I am ideal. Authors consider trespassing these boundaries a form of instability, malformation, inadequate localization, violation of integrity and permeability.

We favor Nartova-Bochaver and Silina’s (2018) position which regards boundaries in the framework of personal psychological space sovereignty study. She defines boundaries as components of personality organization, characteristics of main aspects of its functioning in society and components of self-consciousness. The author postulates that integrity of psychological space boundaries determines a person’s mental health state.

Generally it is possible to note that the high need in the study of psychological borders phenomenon and creation of its concept stems from the change of the direction of Russian psychology of personality towards the subject.

In theory and practice the insufficiency of pragmatist study of human and the necessity to consider a person as the subject of existence interacting with the world were noted a number of times. A number of authors indicated the following problematic fields: macro units of human existence as situations and events, internal determination of a person, environment personalization mechanisms of subject, personal autonomy under stress, development of lifeworld (Matsinovskaya, 2008).

The possibility of operationalization and validation of basic terms of our study (“psychological sovereignty”, “psychological space of person”) is determined by a high level of existing theoretical and psychometric culture. Basic theories and subtheories dedicated to substantiation of the concept of “psychological boundaries” are worked out and methodological instruments for its research and diagnosis are created (Nartova-Bochaver & Silina, 2018).

At the same time it is necessary to note that the majority of works concerning the problems of personal sovereignty treat this phenomenon in a highly-specialized way, for example, in the aspect of development and preserving of corporeality as a form of agency, in relation to deprivation phenomena, in terms of psychological defense of a person. The analysis of foreign and Russian literature showed that a unified theory of psychological sovereignty integrating all significant dimensions of psychological space still does not exist.

Thus, it is possible to state a strong social, psychological and scientific need to develop a framework of categories allowing to describe psychological boundaries phenomenon, diagnose qualitatively and quantitatively and establish a system of individual and personal correspondents.

All the above mentioned makes the present study exceptionally timely and relevant.

3. Research Questions

We stated the main object of our research – psychological boundaries of a person and we make the following assumptions:

-in the first place, psychological boundaries of a person are a mobile system which forms in ontogenesis under the influence of different conditions – internal (individual and topological peculiarities of person, motivational and need sphere) and external (establishment of subject-subject relationship);

-in the second place, formedness of psychological boundaries of person is needed for their successful interaction with others and preserving own psychological sovereignty.

As the result of the conducted theoretical analysis, we understand the notion of “psychological boundaries” as personality configuration aimed at preserving identity manifesting itself through interaction with the environment. The state, the entirety and the integrity of psychological space determine and reflect the state of mental health of individual.

Violation of psychological space boundaries can simultaneously be a manifestation and a cause of different forms of mental disorders. The formedness of psychological space dimensions and the state and stability of psychological boundaries can be regarded as important components of personality (Nartova-Bochaver & Silina, 2018).

Theoretical analysis of philosophical and psychological concepts of “psychological boundaries” category allowed us to single out the following structural components.

The motivationally-axiological component is researched in the works of many outstanding researchers. It is interpreted as the system of values influencing all spheres of human life defining goals and the direction of activity. The boundary here is a primary incentive and is a way of differentiation of subjective significance of objects, values, implications (Jaspers, 2016).

The cognitive component of psychological boundaries is studied in the framework of psychoanalytic direction. Individual resources of personality determining peculiarities of cognitive attitude of subject towards a personal physical state, surrounding world and society are revealed in it. The cognitive component is interpreted through the notion of “sovereign personal space” and manifests itself as a complex of convictions about oneself including values, self-esteem, and understanding of the fluctuating and dynamic nature of one’s inner world.

Operational component is to a large extent regarded in the framework of gestalt-oriented development results of K. Lewin, F. Perls and J-M. Robine. It is implemented in ensuring separation of man from the environment, the opportunity and the ways to interact with it. This component is considered in the framework of phenomenology of corporeality where it functions to provide interaction with the world by means of building different strategies and control over information (as cited in Ryaguzova, 2011, p. 89).

4. Purpose of the Study

The actualization of the problem and the specified contradictions allowed to determine the goal of research: elaboration of the essence and functions of psychological boundaries of person; definition of the content of structural components (motivation-axiological, cognitive, operational) of psychological boundaries of students with disturbed and non-disturbed boundaries.

5. Research Methods

The instruments for diagnosis and the respondents were chosen in accordance with the goal of the research. The total number of 150 students of the faculty of psychology of Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M. Akmulla and Bashkir State University were surveyed.

In the course of the research the following goals were set:

-to define psychological content of motivationally-axiological, cognitive and operational components of psychological boundaries of students personality with disturbed and non-disturbed psychological boundaries;

-to carry out quantitative and qualitative analysis of the obtained results of diagnosis and to compare the extent of disturbance of psychological boundaries of person among the traumatized and the non-traumatized surveyed;

-to check the validity of differences in psychological boundaries of person among the traumatized and non-traumatized respondents by means of mathematical statistics.

The empirical results were subject to statistical analysis. Mann-Whitney U-test was applied.

“Psychological space sovereignty” (Nartova-Bochaver, 2003, p. 27) was used in order to study the integrity/disturbance of psychological boundaries of a person. Based on the obtained raw data we contingently divided the students on those who had a psychological trauma and those who did not. The ratio is 80 (non-traumatized) and 70 (traumatized) students.

Then we studied the components of psychological boundaries of person which we singled out in the theoretical part of our study:

-motivationally-axiological component – the methods of “Morphologic test of life values”, “Life-purpose orientations test” (Nosov, 2016);

-cognitive component – the methodology of research of self-conception, a modified personal self-actualization diagnosis questionnaire, the method of social frustration level diagnosis (Sorokowska et al., 2017);

-operational component – the method of “socio-psychological adaptation diagnosis”, interpersonal relations questionnaire, “SACS” questionnaire (Shulakevich, 2017).

6. Findings

Raw data on the basis of Nartova-Bochaver and Silina’s (2018) “Psychological space sovereignty” questionnaire allowed us to single out 2 groups of respondents – the students who were traumatized and the ones who were not. Qualitative and quantitative characterization of both groups is present. According to the results of mathematical processing of the obtained data by “Psychological space sovereignty” (Nartova-

Bochaver & Silina, 2018) 5 significant differences were found on the following scales: “Sovereignty of physical body”, “Sovereignty of psychological space of person”, “Sovereignty of territory”, “Sovereignty of habits” and “Sovereignty of social connections”. The data are given in Figure 01.

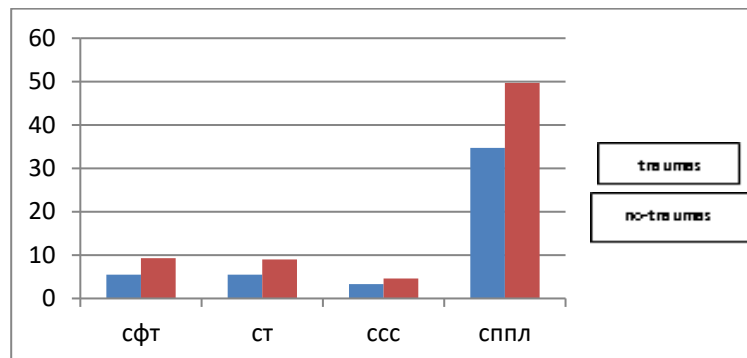


Figure 01. Significant differences on scales

CΦT – “Sovereignty of physical body”

CT – “Sovereignty of territory”

CCC – “Sovereignty of social relations”

CΠΠI – “Sovereignty of psychological space of person”

The results on the scale of “Sovereignty of physical body” suggest that among the non-traumatized students there was no significant disturbance of psychological space. They can be referred to the somatically unharmed. In contrast, judging by the results, the students who suffered a psychological trauma often experience discomfort which can be caused by smells or touching. In regard to feeling the sovereignty of physical body the non-traumatized students have twice as little of the size of more distinct body boundaries as the traumatized students which implies amorphous state and non-specificity of the psychological boundaries of the latter. Significant differences on the scale of “Sovereignty of territory” are obtained. The “Sovereignty of territory” scale means worrying about the safety of physical space where the person is (of the personal part or one’s own room, game model of accommodation). The non-traumatized students have more distinct awareness of personal territory sovereignty. The boundaries take less space but they are well-pronounced. Blurriness of territorial boundaries is observed in the sample group of traumatized students which is a consequence of constant personal territory disturbance. As the result, the boundaries of traumatized students are wider and vaguer.

According to the results on the scale of “Sovereignty of social relations” we can also see significant differences. The traumatized students are deprived of social interactions more often because of their psychological or physical trauma. The traumatized students avoid contacts for the reason of lack of trust towards others.

We obtained notable differences on the scale of “Sovereignty of values” which implies freedom of taste and world view which is characteristic of the sample group of non-traumatized respondents, while it is a forcible acceptance of values for the traumatized group as they do not perceive these values as something trusted, and the suppression of freedom is a painful process.

Then we study the components of psychological borders of person which we singled out in the theoretical part of the study.

We obtained the qualitative characteristic of the motivationally-axiological component of the 2 groups of respondents according to the results of “Morphologic test of life values” (V.F. Sopov, L.V. Karpushina), where we find differences between the traumatized and the non-traumatized students on practically all of the scales. This suggests that crisis situations and psychological traumas significantly influence personal well-being. In our case disturbance of the most important for mentally safe well-being components draws a fairly distinct line between normal and borderline and, in some cases, disturbed psychological life, which is a vulnerable and pregnable defense for the traumatized people, and it contributes to the increase in information flow, destruction of the integrity of these borders.

We note differences on all of the scales of questionnaire which is designed to study individual system of values of person. In this method the values are divided into moral - spiritual and egoistic – prestigious (pragmatic). This defines the direction of activity of a person. The first group includes: self-evolution, spiritual satisfaction, creativity and active social intercourse, reflecting morally-practical direction; the second group includes: prestige, achievements, financial state, keeping individuality. They reflect egoistically- prestigious direction of person.

We see that among the non-traumatized students these values constantly differ and not in favor of the traumatized. This means that not only basic needs of the latter become vulnerable, but also their moral and spiritual ones. As a rule, such state leads to crisis, depressive conditions and can even lead to hypochondria and alienation.

We can observe that egoistically-prestigious direction of personality dominates in the traumatized group, whereas morally-practical direction dominates in the non-traumatized group. Thus, the non-traumatized have constant aspiration for self-improvement, surmounting the limits of their abilities, while the traumatized consider the boundaries of their abilities, incompetence and inability insurmountable.

The results of life-purpose orientations test by D. Leontev complete the picture of traumatized respondents' borders. In this study guide as well as in the previous ones, the picture of border disturbance is fairly clear and stably different between the scales of the traumatized and the non-traumatized students. We see that the traumatized are to a lesser degree interested in goals of life than the non-traumatized. We can assume that there were goals but they were shattered by traumatizing events which happened in their lives. The traumatized are, to a lesser extent than the non-traumatized, interested in the emotional intenseness of life. It is understandable because the poorness of emotional life is often a consequence of heavy emotions accompanied by depressive and frustration conditions, anxiety and even morbid states leading to borderline manifestations in behavior. It is natural that the traumatized are less interested in the productivity of situations they live through as well as the lack of interest for self-actualization. The correlation between elements and time is important. In the traumatized sample group there is the impossibility of correlation between future and goals, emotional intenseness and the present, satisfaction and the achieved result, the past.

We applied the above mentioned methods in order to study the cognitive component of psychological boundaries of person. The method of self-conception study completes the characterization of the traumatized respondents. They are to a lesser extent able to control their conduct, they are bad at self-reflection of situations in which they can play a prominent role, they do not control the situation, they do not perceive themselves as individuals and do not treat themselves as important people. Overall, they do

not perceive themselves as they are and they are not satisfied with their Ego-image, they do not separate themselves from others and do not stand out as important individuals. The data are provided in Figure 02.

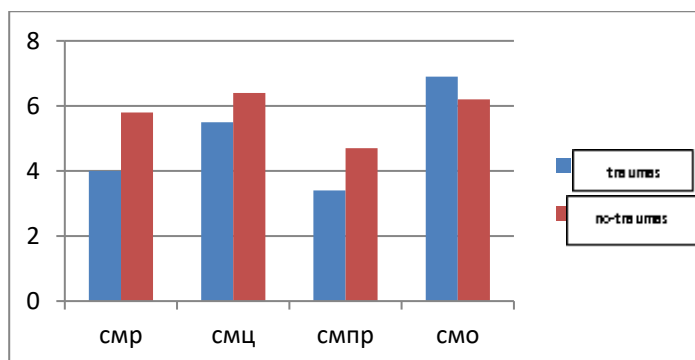


Figure 02. Comparative characterization of cognitive component scales

CMP – “self-guidance”
CMЦ – “self-value”
CMПP – “self-affection”
CMO – “reflected self-attitude”

We discovered significant difference on the following scales:

- “Self-confidence” scale reveal self-esteem, an attitude towards oneself as to a confident, independent, strong willed person. We observe high indexes in the non-traumatized sample group which speaks of marked self-confidence, the feeling of the power of one’s own “Ego”. Low indexes in the traumatized sample group speak of disrespect towards oneself related to lack of confidence in one’s potential and a doubt in one’s abilities. These people do not trust their own decisions and frequently doubt their ability to overcome hardships and obstacles, achieve one’s goals. In the framework of gestalt therapy we can conclude that all of this is a failure of Ego-function or the function of choice;

- “Self-guidance” scale reflects one’s convictions about the main source of one’s own activity, results, achievements and the development of one’s personality, and it puts emphasis on domination of either one’s own “Ego” or the circumstances. In the traumatized sample group the mechanisms of self-direction are weakened, volitional control is insufficient to overcome external and internal obstacles to achieve the goal. The main reason of the events happening to a person is thought to be the circumstances. Internal reasons are either negated or, quite often, are pushed into the subconscious. It is possible to say that one of the primitive defenses – the negation – as a way of overcoming difficulties is characteristic of the traumatized.

- “Reflected self-value” characterizes the belief of the subject to be able to make other people respect or like them. In the traumatized sample group we observe the attitude to oneself as to a person who can only make others condemn or reprove them, but cannot make themselves be respected. It is possible to say here that the traumatized are familiar with the experience of being rejected as personalities with their own values, interests and needs;

- “Self-affection” scale reveals the extent of desire to change in relation to the given state. It is possible to note a high level of “Ego”-concept constriction in the traumatized sample group, which assumes the aspiration to leave one’s qualities, self-requirements, self-conception and self-esteem intact. It is

possible to speak about the rigidity and the inability of creative adaptation in the traumatized sample group. There is a high level of readiness to change one's "Ego"-concept, openness to new experience in understanding oneself, and the search for correlation between the real and the ideal "Ego" in the non-traumatized group.

- - "Self-value", "Self-acceptance" and "Inner proneness to conflict". Judging by these three scales it is possible to conclude that in the traumatized sample group there is a dominance of narcissistic tendencies in personality structure. Narcissistically structured people are on some level aware of their psychological weaknesses; they fear separation, a rapid loss of self-respect or self-concordance under criticism. It is characteristic of them to avoid feelings and actions expressing the realization of self-incapacity or real dependence on others; they also need external acceptance to feel inner concordance. It is necessary to note here about the narcissistic teeterboard, where a person is on one of the poles – a colossal state of "Ego" or a state of helplessness and embarrassment. In the non-traumatized sample group we note the dominance of positive attitude towards oneself, the balance between one's abilities and the requirements of the reality, between aspirations and achievements, which speaks of adequate evaluation of one's abilities.

Studying self-actualization of person, we find confirmation to the above mentioned characteristics, for example, on the scale of "Time orientation" the traumatized are unable to live in the present, they more often live in the past or build unreal plans. All these destructive tendencies only exacerbate their situation. Low indexes on the scale of autonomy as one of the main criteria of mental health, integrity and fullness of person are obtained.

The results of "The method of social frustration level diagnosis" demonstrated that the traumatized students are to a greater extent exposed to social frustration, that is the inability of a person to satisfy their urgent social needs. The dissatisfaction with socio-established hierarchies is accumulated and forms a constant setting of emotional tension of person. When the emotional tension reaches the critical level, a person resorts to psychological defense measures.

Thus, the empirical study of psychological boundaries through the analysis of their main components allows us to state that it is a complex phenomenological category defining "Ego"-concept of personality and its potential abilities. A person with disturbed boundaries is characterized by a low level of self-evolution, self-acceptance, self-attitude and personal identity which eventually influences their lives.

7. Conclusion

The pace of our time increases the interest in the changes and stability of boundaries and their feature as personality potential. In science there is an increasing demand in a good-quality universally applicable definition of boundary, its nature and essence.

In Russian psychology, according to the considered theories, we define borders as the components of personality structure which ensure interaction with the world, integrity and realization of Ego, separation of "Ego" and "non-Ego", and determine activity incentive. An optimal psychological boundary is a functional organ built by a person's own efforts during their life. It matches attitudes which do not contradict Ego's needs and feelings; it helps adequate interaction between a person and the world. The notions of "Ego boundaries" and "psychological boundaries" are synonymous in Russian research.

In the framework of foreign psychology research boundaries are defined in the following way: these are structural components of Ego which are internal barriers (frames) which separate Ego from the world and provide interaction with it; they also protect the internal space of person, their integrity, and determine the direction of their activity.

A psychological boundary expresses the state of Ego which is primarily characterized by the level of activity and the motion vector from it or towards it. Formation of currently optimal boundary suggests correlation of internal and external spaces. An optimal boundary is able to change its features depending on the state of the world or a person's own will.

It is necessary to note that the notions of "Ego boundaries" and "psychological boundaries" are possible to be considered as identical in the framework of foreign psychology.

The results of empirical study allowed making conclusions which match the theoretical assumptions. We discovered significant differences between the traumatized and the non-traumatized respondents on practically all scales of diagnostic methods.

The obtained data indicates that the sovereignty of psychological space was not disturbed in a significant way in the non-traumatized sample group. These students can be regarded as somatically unharmed. In contrast, according to the results, the traumatized students often experience discomfort caused by smells or touching. In regard to feeling the sovereignty of physical body the non-traumatized students have twice as little of the size of more distinct body boundaries as the traumatized students which implies an amorphous state and non-specificity of the psychological boundaries of the latter. The non-traumatized students have better awareness of the sovereignty of their territory. The boundaries take less space but they are well-pronounced. Territorial boundaries are vague in the traumatized sample group which is a consequence of constant personal territory disturbance. As a result, the boundaries of these students are wider and vaguer.

This can indicate that crisis situations and psychological traumas significantly affect personal well-being. In our case disturbance of the most important for mentally safe well-being components draws a fairly distinct line between normal and borderline and, in some cases, disturbed psychological life, which is a vulnerable and pregnable defense for the traumatized people, and it leads to the increase in information flow, which is able to destroy the integrity of these borders.

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