



## ВАЖНОСТЬ РАЗВИТИЯ ЗДОРОВЫХ ЛИЧНЫХ ГРАНИЦ СТУДЕНТОВ ДЛЯ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ УСТОЙЧИВОГО БАЛАНСА МЕЖДУ РАБОТОЙ И ЛИЧНОЙ ЖИЗНЬЮ

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**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматривается важность создания личных границ у студентов для формирования устойчивого баланса между работой и личной жизнью в их дальнейшей профессиональной деятельности. В работе исследуются виды личных границ и способы их отстаивания. Данная цель достигается посредством решения следующих задач: изучить основные теоретические подходы к описанию личных границ; выявить типологию, виды и функции личных границ; проанализировать виды нарушения личного пространства у студентов; рассмотреть способы исправления нарушений и отстаивания границ. Упор делается на выявление наличия личного пространства и умения отстаивать социальные границы у студентов. Студенты находятся на заключительном этапе процесса формирования своей личности, в моменте перехода от детства к взрослой жизни, и потому их психологическое состояние особенно противоречиво: заложенные родителями основы отходят на второй план, а все недосказанное восполняется за счет личных амбиций и самостоятельного изучения окружающего мира. Часто неверный подход родителей к воспитанию детей в детстве находит отражение в студенчестве и порой может быть главной причиной нарушения личных границ, которая часто имеет весомое значение в студенческой жизни и дальнейшей рабочей деятельности. Потому изучение темы суверенного пространства у студентов приобретает особую актуальность. В качестве методов изучения обозначенной проблемы был применен комплексный анализ теоретических основ темы личных границ и результатов проведенного анкетирования, которые подтвердили предположение о необходимости более глубокого освещения данной темы и ее дальнейших исследований. Подобные методы в дальнейшем могут быть полезны для реализации грамотного подхода к воспитанию людей с устойчивой и здоровой психикой, которая окажет положительное воздействие на их положение в обществе и трудоспособность.

**Ключевые слова:** личные границы; типы; суверенное пространство; студенты; способы отстаивания; функции; отделение.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING HEALTHY PERSONAL BOUNDARIES OF STUDENTS FOR BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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**Abstract.** The research deals with the importance of formation of students' personal boundaries to build sustainable work-life balance in their future careers. The paper investigates types of personal boundaries and ways of defending them. This goal is achieved by solving the following tasks: learning the main theoretical approaches to describing the concept of students' personal boundaries; identifying types and functions of personal boundaries; analyzing violations of personal space; considering ways of defending boundaries. Emphasis is placed on identifying the presence of personal space and the ability to defend social boundaries among students. Students are in the age of their personality development, somewhere between childhood and adulthood, and therefore their psychological state is especially contradictory: the foundations laid down by their parents are fading into the background, and everything left unsaid is replenished through personal ambitions and personal study of the world around them. Often, the wrong parents' approach to bringing up children in the past is reflected in the present and can sometimes become the main cause of the violation of personal boundaries, which often has a significant impact on students' life and future work. Therefore, the study of the topic of sovereign space among students becomes relevant. The following methods for studying this problem were used: a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical foundations of the topic of personal boundaries and the survey's results, which confirmed the assumption of importance, its deeper coverage and further research. In future, such methods can be useful for implementing a competent approach to raising people with a stable and healthy psyche, which will have a positive impact on their position in a society and ability to work.

**Keywords:** personal boundaries; types; sovereign space; students; how to assert; functions; separation.

## Introduction

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the topic of personal boundaries has been explored very actively. Individual autonomy is one of the main goals towards which people go throughout their lives. People are born without any understanding of boundaries, and in the course of their life they acquire different types of boundaries. The topic of personal boundaries has recently become the most relevant and researched very actively. Many psychologists (E. Hartman, Z. Freud, W. Bion, D. Winnicott, M. Klein, M. Mahler, W. Tausk, P. Federn, D. Bradshaw, K. Levin, N. Brown) — have devoted their works to personal autonomy.

Many researchers have studied the topic of personal boundaries of children. It is well known that foundations of personal and social boundaries emerge at a young age. This paper, however, focuses on the study of personal boundaries among students during the stage of preparing a person for his or her professional activity. The topic of the importance of personal boundaries in the period of professional activity is extremely relevant, because an employee, who is able to assert their personal boundaries, does not only adapt easier in a team, but also in the process of activity is able to assess their internal state. What is more, such a man understands when he or she needs rest, and is not afraid to talk about it with management [1]. As a result, the employer receives a psychologically stable employee who is fully immersed in the work process, and is able to rest well in their free time. Such an employee will be particularly in demand in a sustainable world. Unfortunately, due to digitalisation, fast-changing economic crises, constant stressful situations and high competition, it is becoming increasingly difficult for modern people to maintain personal boundaries.

Thus, the idea of personal boundaries, and particularly the problem of their violation, is significant for almost every person. In addition, violation of personal boundaries can lead to development of various neurological and other diseases, and as a result, interfere with the development and formation of an individual's personality. Creating healthy boundaries and a more sustainable work-life balance will help employees achieve well-being and productivity. But this requires overcoming perceptions and sometimes even cultural peculiarities. In any case, understanding of personal boundaries should create a healthier rhythm between work and private life.

## Literature review

The topic of personal boundaries has always been relevant, and is actively studied in such sciences as psychology, sociology and philosophy. Psychologists O.O. Andronnikova, V.I. Volokhova [2] and S.K. Nartova-Bochaver [3] in their works have thoroughly studied psychological boundaries and the space of personality. E.V. Ryaguzova [4], N.A. Sakharova, Y.V. Shchukin [5], N. Buravtsova [6] studied the phenomenon of «personal boundaries», their types and functions. Separately, «Fundamentals of Modern Psychotherapy» by N.L. Linde [1] should be singled out as this source examines both a personality in general and personal boundaries.

O.O. Andronnikova and V.I. Volokhova in their article «Psychological boundaries of a victimized personality» [2] draw attention to what psychological boundaries are, describe their types and show the importance of the forming of a victim personality. Thus, this research suggests that there are a number of features of the formation

of psychological boundaries of a victimized individual. It is important to note that violations of psychological boundaries of a personality are directly related to the experience of destructive childhood events and violation of emotional bonds with the existing significant network.

N.L. Linde identifies different types of violation of personal boundaries [1]. Among them she mentions merging, retroflection, introjection, projection, and diflexia. Moreover, the author gives her own advice on Gestalt therapy to strengthen personal boundaries [1, p. 107].

At the same time, a famous Russian psychologist S.K. Nartova-Bochaver provides a detailed description of scientists' theories regarding personal boundaries as well as expresses her own theory on a psychological space of a personality [3]. The author concludes by stating that the main idea of the study was to consider the individual as a person seeking to protect his or her psychological space and individuality. These aspirations are at the core of personal boundaries.

Personal boundaries are the boundaries that separate the inner world, the personal self of man from the outside world [7]. In philosophy and psychology, psychological boundaries are defined differently. Thus, such items as "personal psychological space", "boundaries of the spiritual Self", "personal space", "contact boundaries" can be met. Not to go deep into details, all of them are considered to mean the same in the paper.

According to S.K. Nartova-Bochaver, a child is gradually being separated from the mother, creating physical boundaries from birth onward. The author emphasizes that physical boundaries are the human body and the limits of personal space [3, p. 89]. These boundaries separate the body of a person, his or her territory, everything that belongs to a child from everything else that is not his or her property. They also include awareness of where part of their property ends, and someone else's begins.

Over time, a person develops spiritual boundaries. Children separate their personalities from the personalities of their parents. Spiritual boundaries include a person's beliefs, values, and interests. The absence of clear spiritual boundaries allows others to influence self-awareness of a human-being, impose opinions and interests.

Next stage is devoted to kindergarten or school attendance, where children find themselves in society and must contact new people. S.K. Nartova-Bochaver depicts that social boundaries are determined by a place, position, status of a person in a group and are associated with their assimilation of the rules and norms of the social group where they are included [3, p. 89]. These boundaries delimit the level of responsibility where one person's boundaries end and another one's begin. Basically, they are enshrined in the rules and laws of society.

Personal boundaries have some functions and properties. Different authors and researchers distinguish different functions of personal boundaries. So, Sakharova and Shchukin described some functions of the psychological boundaries of a personality [5, p. 5].

First of all, the authors point out an inaccessible function. This term means that borders can become impenetrable for any external influence, and that a person is able to refuse the impact being made on him or her, to push it away.

The next function to be distinguished is a permeable function. It is the inverse of the inaccessible function. It is characterized by the fact that if a person trusts

another person and has self-confidence, boundary skips this external influence. That is, this function is responsible for acceptance of some ideas, influencing a personal space, if a man desires it.

Next an accepting function comes. It means that borders draw in what's needed from the outside world. This function presupposes an internal right of a person to satisfy his or her needs [5, p. 5]. A person can ask for help, show, and satisfy his or her needs.

The next one is a giving function. It is responsible for a person's expression of feelings and emotions. Boundaries release personal internal impulses to the outside world.

A restraining function, in contrast to the giving function, is responsible for the ability to restrain, if it is necessary. Borders do not release personal internal emotions and energy into the surrounding world.

And the last function is calm-neutral. It expresses a calm state of a person if he or she is not interested in active interaction with the external environment now.

Moreover, there are other functions of personal boundaries. The ones described above are just one of the variants of the typology. In comparison, Ryaguzov's article singled out such functions as: integrative; differentiating; protective; accentuating; the function of forming the ability to distinguish, allowing people to establish signs of difference; developing [4]. So, in modern psychology there is a fairly large variety of functions that personal boundaries perform.

However, it is worth noting that there is no clear and generally accepted concept of the term «personal boundaries». Researchers adapt personal boundaries to their areas of activity and, depending on them, give their own definitions of the concept. The same goes for functions and types of personal boundaries.

A separate important path in the study of personal boundaries is devoted to types of their violations and ways of upholding them. Many modern books have been written on this topic, which indicates its relevance to this day. The most important and urgent are methods of upholding the boundaries of a personality. However, it is impossible to clearly identify ways to protect boundaries without knowing how to violate them.

N.D. Linde in his book «Fundamentals of Modern Psychotherapy» underlines the importance of methods of Gestalt therapy in treating personal boundaries [1, p. 107]. Linde identified five main types of ego boundary violations: fusion, retroflexion, introjection, projection, and diflexion.

**1. Merging.** This type of violation of boundaries of a personality is characterized by the fact that a person does not share his or her own feelings and other people's feelings. Such a man cannot distinguish own boundaries from the outside world, other people, and can perceive others' feelings as his or her own. It is a kind of merging. In case of relations between a mother and a newborn child this fusion is the norm. But if in the future the child is not separated, such a merger leads to serious mental disorders and distortion of relations with a society. The person continues to perceive himself or herself as a part of the personality of another person, which prevents the emergence of autonomy and independence.

**2. Retroflexion.** N.D. Linde notes that this term means a sharp turn on oneself [1, p. 114]. In this violation, people divide themselves internally. They draw a line between an individual and their environment and, as a consequence, treat themselves as an object of influence. That is, their personality is divided into that which carries

out the activity and that to which the same action is directed. Such people can be ashamed of themselves. [1, p. 114]. They become enemies of their own.

**3. Introjection.** The word “introjection” is made up of two parts intro (in) and iacio (throwing, putting), based on this we can understand that introjection is when something is put inside a person, inside their personality, laying down some ideas, thoughts and beliefs. People with an ego disorder in the form of introjection partially take on attitudes and beliefs of personalities of other people without selection and processing. These parts of someone’s personality are assimilated in a person with introjection, and such a person cannot control them, they can come into conflict with each other. Two conflicting beliefs in one person do not allow him or her to agree with any of them, they tear such a human apart [1, p. 114]. A person cannot develop as a person, find his or her own thoughts by assimilating other people’s beliefs and thoughts.

**4. Projection.** In this situation, a person transfers parts of his or her personality to other people, and attributes own feelings and emotions to another person. The person is not aware of their own thoughts, possibly denies them, and tries to project them onto other people.

**5. Diflexia.** It manifests itself in the fact that a person goes to stop direct contact with other people and does not even want to think about problematic topics. Such a human does not realize own desires and boundaries, hides, and blurs own words to avoid contact and transfers the conversation to safe topics. A man talks about trite topics and speaks in generalities, hiding emotions and ignoring the importance of the conversation — he or she does it to avoid intimacy with people and own experiences.

So, violations of personal boundaries can be of different types, but they all lead to the same sad consequences for a person and the nervous system of such a man. Therefore, it is necessary to correct violations of personal boundaries and be able to defend them for human health, to achieve a holistic personality.

Perhaps, the most important part, at least for ordinary people, in learning personal boundaries is the ways of protection and assertion. Unfortunately, most people have violations in the formation of boundaries. As a result, many adults cannot refuse a request, sort out other people’s problems, can hardly express their own opinion and agree to work that they did not intend to do. Famous researchers do not usually study so much upholding, but how to harmonize personal boundaries in the cases they have already been violated.

Personal boundaries allow people to build and protect their unique world. They protect personal self-esteem and help set priorities in life. Thanks to personal boundaries, a person can be at some point either strong or weak and, most importantly, always remain true in their own perception.

The main feature of healthy boundaries is their flexibility. They allow people to adapt to stressful factors. To change your life it is necessary to:

- move away from situations that are dangerous or unpleasant (if not physically, then at least emotionally),
- refuse people calmly, without guilt, if the situation requires it
- be close only to those people with whom it is comfortable and safe to communicate
- take into account your own interests and the interests of others.



It is important to mention that violations of personal boundaries usually originated in childhood, so it becomes the starting point when boundaries begin to develop. Many personal problems are also associated with unformed boundaries. When psychological boundaries of a person are violated, a person is not able to build social communications adequately. Such a man tends to immerse themselves in the experiences of other people. As a result, many schools of psychotherapy develop ways to form personal boundaries in childhood and among adults.

One of these methods is a Bodynamic analysis by L. Marcher, which is briefly described in the article by N.A. Sakharova and U.V. Schukin. This is a direction of a body psychotherapy based on a model of motor, social and psychological development, which emphasizes the awakening of the client's body ego through the activation of his or her motor and psychological resources [5, p. 6]. Marcher identified ten areas of ego development and several stages of boundary development. Each of them establishes a connection between specific motor and psychological functions. That is, each muscle of the body embodies a certain psychological content and is associated with the ego function. Within this approach, certain blocks of exercises aimed at the muscles associated with personal boundaries were developed. Theoretically, they will allow changing the state of psychological boundaries. This approach is still being explored.

Frederick Perls also wrote about therapy for the treatment of borders. In general, gestalt therapy is aimed at creating and strengthening a holistic image of a person, which is impossible without building clear personal boundaries. In general, there are a lot of techniques in gestalt therapy aimed at creating a holistic «I», therefore they also help with the development of personal boundaries.

The presence of moderate personal boundaries allows people to feel more relaxed, confident in relationships with other people. These circumstances also make them more competitive, ready for change. A well-built sovereign person's space allows him or her to devote more time to their own mind investigation, gives value to their own feelings and needs, which reduces the risk of mental and other diseases [8].

So, to correct violations of personal boundaries, there are quite a lot of different ways. It is important that violations occur from the beginning of the development of personal boundaries, so one of the primary tasks for parents is to correct interaction with their child's personal space and learn how to defend his or her personal boundaries.

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, the violation of personal boundaries can happen both in student and adult lives. Undoubtedly it affects the performance of employees in companies. Personal and professional identity have a direct impact on professional competences. If an employee cannot dispute their personal opinion and space, it will lead to the fact that they will not be able to stand for the company's position. What is more, it can lead to misperception of their own state, needs and demands. Such people do not feel tired or overworked, and lose work-life balance. As a result, they have problems not only in private life but also in health. So in the end, an employer gets a disabled employee, not being able to control their own needs.

## Materials and methods

Within our personal boundaries research, we have conducted an empirical study. Students of Humanities Faculty at St. Petersburg State University of Economics

took part in it. All respondents have completed secondary general education and are currently the second, third and fourth-year students of the university. The total survey sample was 30 students ( $N = 30$ , men — 16,7%, women — 83,3%, an average age — 19,7 years old).

To implement the tasks set, the sample and the research methods were determined; all the respondents gave informed consent to the data processing. The students were asked to pass 2 tests called “What about your personal boundaries?” and “Do you know how to protect your personal space?”

The first inquirer created specially for the research including the most relevant for us and our environment’s questions:

- 1) Do you know the concept «personal boundaries»?
- 2) Do you use this term in your daily life?
- 3) When does a person start developing personal boundaries?
- 4) Is it important being a parent to respect personal boundaries of a child and teach them to defend themselves?
- 5) Have your parents ever told you about personal boundaries and their importance?
- 6) Do you think that the topic of personal boundaries is covered enough or it should be investigated further?

7) Does the presence of stable personal boundaries give an advantage to a person at work and in interaction with a society? In this part of our investigation an interview method was used, which looks like the most detailed and deep one, allowing us to identify questions that can worry students.

The second test is called “What about your personal boundaries?” [9]. The choice of this method of theoretical analysis aimed at studying the theoretical part and comparing with the answers of respondents, helped us to reveal the problem of students’ ignorance about the presence or absence of their sovereign boundaries.

The third test is named “Do you know how to protect your personal space?” [10]. It allows reflecting the issue according to the benchmarking method. It has shown a full picture about the understanding of the topic among students.

The results of all three tests were studies, analyzed with the help of the content analysis method and used for understanding the topic and psychological component of students’ thinking.

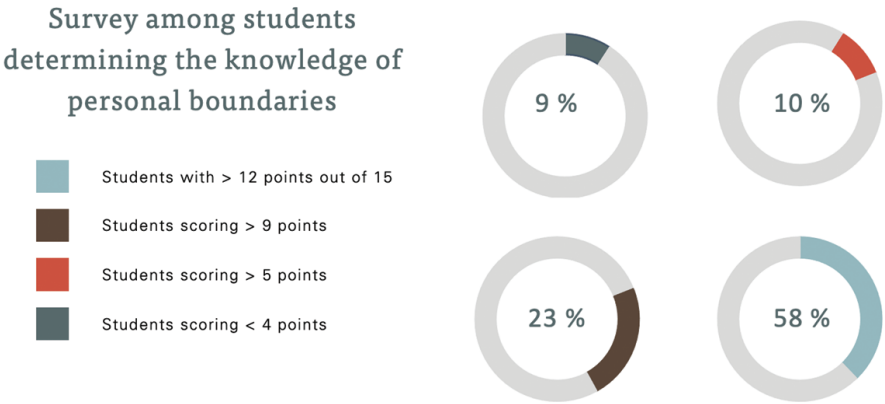
## Results

For a detailed consideration of the research topic the totals of two tests were visually presented in the diagrams and summed up the authors’ inquirer findings.

A questionnaire composed of 7 questions. It has shown how a person reacts to requests from colleagues, loved ones, whether they can set boundaries in communication and say «no» if it is necessary, or whether they are always ready to help, even if it is to their own detriment.

According to its results, we were able to find out that the topic of personal boundaries is not sufficiently covered in our society. A half of the students have never used the considered concept in everyday life. 90% of students noted that their parents have never told them about personal boundaries and the significance of this phenomenon in their lives. Moreover, 50% of students believe that a person begins to form personal boundaries in the process of life. But all students are sure that stable





**Fig. 1.** Test 2. What about your personal boundaries?

personal boundaries give an advantage in the working process and can influence career growth greatly. All this indicates that the topic we touched on remains “in the shadows” and is important for its further and more detailed consideration.

Then, due to the results of the test “What about your personal boundaries?” more than half of the students happened to be familiar with the concept of personal boundaries and ways of asserting them. What is more, they try to apply it in practice in their private lives. However, none of the young people chose 15 «correct» points out of 15, which indicates that this topic is not fully widespread. The survey is especially interesting as it includes statements on life situations and advice on how to resolve them.

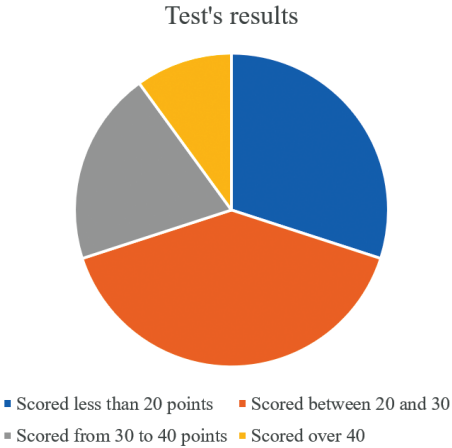
The third step of the survey was performed as a psychological test consisting of 12 questions called “Do you know how to protect your personal space?”. The results of the test were scores from 1 to 47 and brief characteristics of students and their ability to defend personal boundaries. Based on them, it was possible to identify 4 characteristics of students:

1. Those who scored less than 20 points — allow others to occupy their personal space.
2. Students scored between 20 and 30 — invade other people’s territory.
3. People who scored from 30 to 40 points — know how to protect their space.
4. Students who scored over 40 — defend their territory.

The results are shown in the diagram.

Thus, this test helps to understand whether a person has problems related to their personal boundaries and an ability to protect them. It also allows the participants to recognize weaknesses, and makes people think about a more detailed consideration of this topic. The uniqueness of this experiment is in the fact that each person, in addition to the results, receives a small description of his character and the relationships they build with others.

So, to sum up all the above outcomes, it’s necessary to notice that most students are not



**Fig. 2.** Test 3. Do you know how to protect your personal space?

familiar with the concept of personal boundaries or face it quite rarely. Such a picture indicates adults' misunderstanding of the topic and obvious violations' presence of their own space.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Currently, personal boundaries are a topic that worries many people: not only researchers, but also ordinary people, especially curious students who have an unstable psyche at this stage of their self development. It certainly affects their life process while they are acquiring working skills necessary for further life. Therefore, the problem of personal boundaries is relevant to the study.

The study investigates the issue of personal boundaries, their types and functions, as well as problems of violation and defense of boundaries. To achieve this goal, a number of tasks based on several publications were completed: we studied the main theoretical approaches to the description of personal boundaries and found out that this topic has been studied by many scientists from different angles; we also identified the types and functions of personal boundaries. There are many investigations devoted to types of personal boundaries classification.

During the research the typology of violations of F. Perls's personal boundaries based on gestalt therapy was analyzed. Five types of border violations were considered, each of them is undoubtedly detrimental to the individual's personality: merging, retroflexion, introjection, projection and diflexion. Different ways to correct violations of personal space and defend borders were investigated. The Marcher's method seems to be the most interesting and innovative. However, it has not been fully explored yet. Then we put all the theoretical received knowledge in practice. All the tests students have passed demonstrate that the students' community is not always aware of personal space and cannot successfully work with it.

Our research clearly indicates the necessity to study the sovereign space in a student community. Such an approach can lead to raising a healthy and employable society, which is important for future progress. So, we believe that this article can be a good basis for future beneficial researches.

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