

Drawing the Line: How Personal Boundaries Shape Peer Interactions in Islamic Higher Education Context of Indonesia

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Abstract—In the increasingly complex social landscape of higher education, the ability to maintain individual autonomy while fostering group cohesion remains a critical psychological challenge. While proximity and shared tasks are often credited for student friendships, the underlying role of psychological demarcation, personal boundaries, is frequently overlooked. This study aims to empirically examine the influence of personal boundaries on the quality of friendship relations among university students, specifically focusing on the first-year cohort at STAIN Majene. Utilizing a quantitative approach with a simple linear regression design, data were collected from 80 respondents (Class of 2022) using validated psychometric scales measuring personal boundaries and relational quality. The statistical analysis reveals that personal boundaries exert a positive and significant influence on friendship relations, contributing 10.8% to the variance in relational quality. Notably, intellectual boundaries emerged as the most dominant dimension, characterized by high levels of mutual respect for divergent beliefs (mean score = 4.24). Despite the modest effect size, which is contextualized by the high levels of social conformity and cultural collectivism inherent in the Indonesian academic environment (accounting for the 89.2% residual variance), the findings identify personal boundaries as a vital "safety valve" against interpersonal intrusion and burnout. This research underscores that healthy boundaries are not barriers to intimacy but are foundational to sustainable and dignified social interactions. Practically, institutions should integrate assertiveness training into student development programs to bolster long-term relational resilience.

Keywords—Personal Boundaries, Friendship Relations, Higher Education, Intellectual Boundaries, Relational Resilience.

I. INTRODUCTION

As social beings, humans require others in their lives, interacting and exchanging information through communication. According to Harold Lasswell, communication is defined by the formula: "Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?" [1]. This indicates that the communication process is the transmission of information from a source to a receiver through a medium, with the expectation of achieving a specific influence or effect. Through communication, we gain an understanding of who we are and how we function. Furthermore, communication exists in various forms or levels—ranging from intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and organizational to mass communication—categorized by the number of participants, degree of proximity, channels used, and nature of the feedback received [1]. This research focuses specifically on interpersonal communication, as friendships are intrinsically linked to this level of interaction.

A friend is an individual with whom we share a close social bond. Friends can originate from various backgrounds and age groups, such as peers at school or colleagues at work. A good friend is someone who listens well, provides support, and offers comfort during difficult times. In communication science, friendship is categorized under interpersonal communication. As stated by Mulyana (2021), interpersonal communication involves face-to-face interaction that allows participants to capture reactions—both verbal and non-verbal—instantly. The characteristics of this communication include relational closeness, a limited number of participants,

physical proximity, simultaneous and spontaneous message exchange, and the sharing of private information based on mutual trust [1]. Consequently, interpersonal communication can be defined as private, involving deeper topics of discussion and a foundation of mutual trust between the communicator and the communicant.

However, the closeness of a friendship can sometimes lead to the violation of personal boundaries. It is not uncommon for individuals to engage in “oversharing,” disclosing private matters without hesitation. A notable case of fraud committed by a friend due to misplaced trust is the instance of the influencer “*Ajudan Pribadi*” who defrauded a friend (identified as AL) of Rp 1.350 billion. In this case, the perpetrator offered two luxury cars for sale; the victim, trusting a friendship of nearly five years, transferred the funds without suspicion (Kompas.com). This case demonstrates that a friend, who is expected to provide mutual aid and trust, may instead exploit that bond. Trusting someone implicitly without establishing personal boundaries makes an individual vulnerable to influence, deception, and loss.

Establishing personal boundaries and privacy is essential as a matter of principle and self-protection. As Sandra Petronio explains, individuals in a relationship manage the boundaries between what is considered private and what is public. This creates a “dialectic of disclosure,” a tension between revealing and concealing information. Once information is disclosed, the boundary becomes permeable; when it is withheld, the boundary remains intact. Boundaries regulate the categorization of private versus public domains [2]. Personal boundaries are central to Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory, introduced by Sandra Petronio. This theory explains how individuals manage the dialectical process regarding rules of ownership and relationships. Private information is defined by the individual as something they “own,” granting them the right to control its distribution and flow. CPM assumes that disclosure within relationships requires managing public and private boundaries, navigating the space between feelings one wishes to express and those one wishes to keep hidden. This theory is highly relevant to daily life—whether interacting with family, friends, neighbors, or social media followers—as it focuses on privacy management.

In reality, setting personal boundaries in friendships can be difficult. Research by Musfiah Saidah (2021), titled “*Communication Privacy Management in the Era of Information Transparency*,” found that privacy violations in friendships often occur because there is no mutual understanding of what privacy entails. Furthermore, the blurring of friendship levels in the digital era encourages individuals to disclose private information for public consumption as a form of self-disclosure, often disregarding boundaries [3]. This suggests that boundaries are frequently breached because there is no prior agreement regarding privacy within the relationship.

The correlation between personal boundaries and friendship lies in the principles we set to protect ourselves and determine our levels of tolerance. Personal boundaries are a form of “self-love” that fosters peace and comfort [4]. Conversely, a lack of healthy boundaries makes one easily influenced, providing opportunities for others to access private aspects of one’s life. In daily interactions, individuals often fail to assert their boundaries, especially with those they consider friends. When a person feels comfortable and trusts another, they may reveal sensitive information without hesitation. In interpersonal communication theory, individuals often strive to meet the expectations of those around them to form a self-concept and assert their existence [1]. This indicates that an individual’s understanding of personal boundaries significantly influences how they interact within their social circles.

The objective of this study is to determine whether personal boundaries influence friendship relations. This research is vital because many individuals still lack an understanding of the importance of boundaries, as evidenced by the frequent intentional or unintentional disclosure of private information in both real life and on social media. This study focuses on university students, specifically those at STAIN Majene. Students, typically aged 18–25 (late adolescence), are in a transitional phase toward adulthood and possess responsibilities for their own developmental progress. As social beings, students naturally require others, yet their interactions often lead to conflict due to differing opinions [5]. Despite being educated individuals approaching maturity, many students have yet to implement healthy personal boundaries fully and remain easily influenced by their peers. Through this research, it is hoped that students will become more aware of and protective of their personal boundaries.

Before conducting this study, a literature review was performed. Fasty Rahma Hidayati and Irwansyah (2021) explored “Teenage Friendship Privacy on Social Media,” finding that teenagers are more open with peers about private information, such as topics related to sex or pornography, while concealing it from their parents. Their study showed that, as “owners” of their information, teenagers control their privacy within established boundaries, though the focus was strictly on social media. Additionally, Musfiah Saidah

highlighted that privacy boundaries are often breached in friendships due to a lack of mutual agreement and the ease of digital expression [3]. While these studies addressed privacy in the digital realm, the current research aims to provide a broader understanding of personal boundaries in friendships. The benefits of this study include enhancing public awareness of the importance of boundaries and serving as an academic reference for future research on personal boundaries in interpersonal relationships.

The methodology employed in this study is a survey or correlational research design. This involves collecting data from a large sample through questionnaires to measure individual perceptions of personal boundaries and friendship quality. The correlational approach focuses on identifying the relationship between two variables; personal boundaries and friendship relations—to determine the extent of their association.

II. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative method with a correlational research design[6] Correlational research focuses on identifying the relationship between two variables, specifically, personal boundaries and peer relationships—to determine the existence and direction of their association.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of personal boundaries on peer relationships among students at STAIN Majene. The research sample consists of the Class of 2022, comprising both male and female students. Data collection was conducted via an online questionnaire distributed between May 23, 2024, and June 9, 2024, yielding a total of 80 respondents. Respondent characteristics recorded include full names, study programs, and their 2022 academic cohort. The distribution of respondents across various study programs is detailed in the following section.

To ensure the integrity of the research instrument, validity and reliability tests were conducted. Instrument validity indicates the extent to which the measurement tool accurately captures the intended variables. This test was administered prior to the full-scale distribution of the questionnaire. Data validity was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions). With a significant level of 5% for a 20-item questionnaire, the critical value R_{table} was established at 0.396. An item is deemed valid if its calculated correlation coefficient (R_{xy}) exceeds the R_{table} value.

Subsequently, a reliability test was performed to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire as an indicator of the variables. The results indicated that all 20 items in the instrument are reliable and consistent, as the calculated reliability (R_{count}) exceeded the R_{table} threshold of 0.396. Finally, the hypothesis regarding the influence of personal boundaries on peer relationships was tested using simple linear regression analysis [7].

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Personal Boundaries Theory

Personal boundaries are defined as the limits, guidelines, or rules an individual establishes to identify reasonable, safe, and permissible ways for others to behave toward them, as well as how that individual will respond when these limits are transgressed (Wee, 2021). Within the field of Communication Studies, personal boundaries are a core concept of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory, introduced by Sandra Petronio. This theory elucidates how individuals regulate the dialectical process of privacy through rules of ownership within relationships. According to CPM assumptions, disclosure within a relationship necessitates the management of public and private boundaries. These boundaries exist between the emotions an individual chooses to express and those they intend to keep private. This theory is highly applicable to daily life; whether interacting with family, friends, neighbors, or social media followers, individuals must manage their private information. CPM theory is situated within interpersonal communication research, having evolved from Social Penetration Theory, which focuses on self-disclosure as a primary mechanism for developing intimate relationships (Griffin, 2008).

Metaphorically, personal boundaries act as a fence around one's home. To lack these boundaries is akin to leaving the gate wide open, allowing others to enter and potentially engage in undesirable behavior at will. To prevent such occurrences, an individual must discern when to open or close that gate and recognize when someone has overstepped their limits.

Establishing boundaries effectively requires introspection. If one is not honest with oneself about past behaviors and issues, it becomes impossible to identify, establish, and enforce boundaries accurately. Learning to set boundaries is an act of self-respect and self-love. It is our responsibility to protect and care for ourselves when necessary. This process requires self-knowledge, conviction, and accountability.

Furthermore, it is essential to articulate these boundaries verbally rather than assume others know them. Boundaries are unique to each individual; one should not assume that others share the same limits or operate at the same level of comfort. Ultimately, healthy relationships are unattainable with individuals who lack boundaries or are incapable of direct and honest communication. In the contemporary era, personal boundaries have become increasingly vital as social media has emerged as a primary platform for individual expression. Users frequently disclose private information publicly, making it easily accessible to others. Therefore, maintaining self-boundaries serves not only to preserve mental health but also to provide comprehensive personal protection.

Individuals may inadvertently violate the convictions of others without malicious intent, often due to a lack of understanding regarding specific personal boundaries. To minimize these occurrences, it is essential to recognize the various dimensions of personal boundaries as categorized by Laksono (2022). First, Emotional Boundaries: These refer to the respect for an individual's feelings, encompassing one's emotional state and the level of comfort felt when disclosing personal problems. Essentially, emotional boundaries serve as a mechanism for self-protection against external factors that may trigger distress or emotional instability. Second, Physical Boundaries: These concern personal space and the degree of comfort regarding physical touch and expressions of affection. They also regulate the physiological balance between labor and rest. Explicitly communicating these limits is crucial to ensure that one's personal space is not violated.

Third, Sexual Boundaries: These encompass the principles of consent, mutual respect, and self-restraint. Healthy sexual boundaries involve seeking explicit consent prior to any activity, discussing mutual preferences, and maintaining transparency regarding contraception and privacy. Fourth, Intellectual Boundaries: This dimension involves respecting cognitive differences and accepting the thoughts, beliefs, and opinions of others. A healthy intellectual boundary is characterized by a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue even with those who hold opposing views. Fifth, Time Boundaries: As time is a finite and precious resource, establishing these boundaries is essential for distinguishing between competing priorities and responsibilities. By understanding one's own time constraints, an individual learns to respect the time boundaries set by others. Sixth, Material Boundaries: These refer to the ownership of physical property and assets, such as residences, vehicles, and electronic devices. It is prudent for individuals to understand their own material limits before lending or gifting possessions to others to prevent future resentment or conflict.

As social beings, humans require interpersonal connections; however, implementing firm boundaries ensures that others accord the necessary respect. Without firm boundaries, there is a risk that others may act arbitrarily. For instance, without physical boundaries, an individual may be subjected to unauthorized touch or even abusive behavior by "toxic" individuals. To prevent such risks, consistency in boundary enforcement is required.

The following strategies are recommended for implementing personal boundaries (Makarim, 2022). The establishment of clear boundaries is a fundamental prerequisite for maintaining mental health and interpersonal integrity. This process necessitates a comprehensive self-assessment to identify specific limits that align with an individual's psychological needs. For those unaccustomed to such practices, a methodological, incremental approach is recommended. By initiating minor adjustments, individuals can facilitate a gradual adaptation process, allowing for the refinement of these boundaries as they integrate into daily social dynamics.

The efficacy of boundary setting is largely contingent upon clear and direct communication. Boundaries should be articulated with composure and transparency, avoiding the inclination to provide excessive justification or apologies. Such non-confrontational assertion ensures that peers understand established limits without fostering unnecessary hostility. Furthermore, consistency serves as the cornerstone of this practice; allowing sporadic transgressions creates cognitive dissonance for others and may inadvertently reinforce the habitual disregard of one's personal space.

In the contemporary landscape, these boundaries must also extend to digital environments. The inherent blurring of privacy on social media platforms necessitates the establishment of explicit protocols regarding the dissemination of personal information or

imagery. However, it is essential to maintain a balanced perspective. While a lack of boundaries is detrimental, an over-fixation on them can also be counterproductive to mental health. Therefore, individuals should incorporate external perspectives to gain objective insights, while ensuring that final decision-making remains self-governed and tailored to their unique socio-psychological context.

This section of the study provides a comprehensive presentation of the empirical data and subsequent statistical interpretations derived from the research. The primary objective was to utilize simple linear regression analysis to evaluate the extent to which **Personal Boundaries (X)** influence **Friendship Relations (Y)** among students at STAIN Majene, specifically focusing on the cohort of the 2022 academic year. To ensure the robustness of the findings, this research utilized a sample size of 80 respondents, representing the primary stakeholders in the student social ecosystem.

The initial stage of the analysis involved estimating the model parameters to understand the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. Data processing was conducted using specialized statistical software, resulting in the following model summary:

Table 1. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,329 ^a	,108	,097	3,709

a. Predictors: (Constant), total_x

Based on the statistical output provided in Table 1, several critical interpretations can be made regarding the relationship between Personal Boundaries and Friendship:

1. Correlation Coefficient (R). The analysis yielded an R-value of 0.329. In the context of social sciences, this indicates a positive correlation between an individual's ability to maintain personal boundaries and the quality of their friendship relations⁸. Although the value suggests a low-to-moderate correlation, it confirms that as boundaries become clearer and healthier, the quality of interpersonal bonds tends to improve.
2. Coefficient of Determination (R^2): The R-Square value was calculated at 0.108. This metric is vital as it signifies that the Personal Boundaries variable accounts for 10.8% of the variance in the quality of friendship relations among students. This implies that while boundaries are a significant factor, they are part of a much larger, more complex web of social dynamics.
3. External Variables: The remaining 89.2% of the variance in friendship quality is determined by factors residing outside the scope of this specific research model. These external determinants likely include psychological and situational variables such as emotional intelligence, communication proficiency, frequency of social interactions, and shared values or interests.

Model Feasibility Test (F-Test)

To validate whether the proposed regression model is an appropriate fit for the data and possesses predictive power, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed. This *F-Test* is crucial for ensuring that the relationship observed is not merely a result of random chance.

Table 2. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	130,564	1	130,564	9,491	,003 ^b
Residual	1072,986	78	13,756		
Total	1203,550	79			

a. Dependent Variable: total_y

b. Predictors: (Constant), total_x

The results of the F-test indicate an F-calculated value of 9.491 with a corresponding significance (p-value) of 0.003. Given that the significance level is substantially lower than the alpha threshold of 0.05 ($0.003 < 0.05$), the model is officially declared fit and statistically feasible. This justifies the use of Personal Boundaries as a reliable predictor for understanding the dynamics of friendship relations within this specific student population.

Partial Hypothesis Testing (t-Test)

To assess the influence of the independent variable on an individual basis and to construct a mathematical model of the relationship, a t-test was conducted on the regression coefficients.

Table 3. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	9,103	2,253		4,040	,000
total_x	,127	,041	,329	3,081	,003

a. Dependent Variable: total_y

Regression Equation:

$$Y = 9.103 + 0.127X$$

- Constant (9.103). This value suggests that in the absence of the Personal Boundaries variable (where X equals zero), the baseline quality of friendship relations is maintained at a score of 9.103
- Regression Coefficient (0.127). This indicates that for every one-unit increase in the Personal Boundaries score, there is a corresponding increase of 0.127 points in the quality of friendship. This positive coefficient reinforces the argument that setting healthy boundaries leads to more constructive social outcomes

The statistical significance was further tested by comparing the t-calculated value against the t-table value. With a significance level of 0.05 and degrees of freedom ($n-k-1 = 77$), the t-table value is 1.994. Since the t-calculated (3.081) is greater than the t-table

(1.994), and the p-value (0.003) is less than 0.05, the Alternative Hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. This confirms that Personal Boundaries exert a positive and significant influence on the Friendship Relations of students at STAIN Majene.

These findings provide empirical evidence that personal boundaries are a significant determinant of the quality of students' social interactions. Although the contribution is at a moderate-to-low level (10.8%), the positive influence confirms the theoretical argument that psychological health in relationships depends on an individual's ability to set boundaries. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan and Deci (2017), which posits that high-quality interpersonal relationships are built on autonomy rather than a fusion of identity[8].

The data suggests that students who are capable of asserting their boundaries are demonstrating a healthy level of self-differentiation. This is critical because, as Knoke et al. (2022) noted in the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, individuals with clear boundaries tend to experience higher relational satisfaction[9]. This satisfaction stems from the fact that their social interactions are based on conscious, autonomous choices rather than a sense of obligation, external pressure, or guilt. In essence, the ability to say "no" or to define one's limits serves to deepen the "yes" within a friendship, making the bond more authentic and less coercive.

Analysis of individual indicators shows that the "Intellectual Boundaries" dimension is the most dominant element. The item *"I am able to respect others' beliefs"* recorded the highest average score of 4.24. This suggests that STAIN Majene students possess high cognitive awareness in valuing divergent opinions.

In psychological literature, intellectual boundaries allow individuals to shield their thoughts and values from being overwhelmed by others while simultaneously acknowledging the validity of different perspectives. This creates a state of psychological safety within a friendship group. When a student respects a friend's beliefs, they are effectively creating a boundary that prevents ideological intimidation or forced conformity.

Furthermore, this high score points toward the presence of intellectual humility. As Whitcomb et al. (2017) argue, this form of boundary-setting involves recognizing the limits of one's own knowledge and appreciating the cognitive contributions of others [10]. This prevents intellectual arrogance, which is often a source of friction in academic environments. Instead, boundaries act as a "relational catalyst" (Feeney & Collins, 2015), providing the structure necessary for healthy, non-combative discussions [11].

The research highlights that personal boundaries serve an essential protective function. They act as a psychological filter that regulates the "input and output" of a relationship. Students who possess clear boundaries are empowered to act assertively, refusing requests or behaviors from peers that violate their personal values or exceed their emotional capacity.

Without such boundaries, friendships are highly susceptible to burnout and resentment. If a student feels constantly exploited, whether for academic favors, time, or emotional labor, the quality of the friendship will inevitably decline. By establishing boundaries, students maintain a vital equilibrium between social intimacy and individual privacy. This balance ensures that the relationship remains a source of support rather than a source of exhaustion.

Contextual Factors for the Limited Influence (10.8%)

While the influence of Personal Boundaries is statistically significant, the fact that it only explains 10.8% of the variance requires a nuanced explanation. This "low" R-Square value is not a failure of the model but rather a reflection of the specific developmental and cultural context of the respondents:

1. **Transition and Emerging Adulthood:** The respondents belong to the class of 2022, placing them in the "emerging adulthood" phase (Arnett, 2000)[12]. This stage is characterized by identity exploration and a strong drive for social acceptance. During the transition to university life, students often prioritize "belonging" over "boundaries". They may engage in boundary blurring to ensure they are included in social "circles" or groups, fearing that strict boundaries might lead to social isolation.
2. **Cultural Collectivism and Social Harmony:** In the Indonesian context, and specifically within religious educational institutions, the values of collectivism are deeply ingrained. Hofstede (2011) suggests that in collectivist societies, individual boundaries can sometimes be perceived as a form of social withdrawal or even impoliteness. Consequently,

variables such as “Social Harmony” and “Relational Maintenance” likely hold a much higher weight (within that 89.2%) in determining the success of a friendship than individual autonomy does.

3. Proximity and Pragmatic Interests: For new students, friendships are often formed based on proximity (sharing a dorm or a classroom) and pragmatic needs (working together on assignments). These external factors often dictate the frequency and intensity of interactions more than internal boundary-setting strategies do at this early stage of their academic journey.

Despite the modest percentage of influence, the significance of the t-test (3.081) proves that boundaries are a critical predictor for the *sustainability* of a relationship. Without boundaries, relationships are prone to “Interpersonal Intrusion”. As Vargas et al. (2020) noted in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, repeated violations of personal space and values lead to an accumulation of negative emotions[13].

These negative emotions often result in sudden relationship dissolution, a phenomenon frequently referred to in modern social contexts as “ghosting” or resulting in open conflict. Therefore, personal boundaries act as a “safety valve”, allowing students to communicate their need for space and individual identity. This ensures that as students mature and move past the initial phase of “conformity,” their friendships have the structural integrity to evolve into resilient, long-term bonds.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research successfully demonstrates that personal boundaries play a strategic role in enhancing the quality of friendship relations among STAIN Majene students, providing a tangible contribution of 10.8%. Specifically, the intellectual boundary indicator was identified as a pivotal factor that mediates harmonious relationships through the cultivation of mutual respect.

In practical terms, these findings imply that educational institutions should provide dedicated spaces for education regarding the significance of mental health and assertive communication skills for students. Given the substantial influence of external factors (89.2%), subsequent research is encouraged to explore moderating variables, such as emotional intelligence or attachment styles, to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the architecture of student peer dynamics. Ultimately, personal boundaries are not about erecting walls of separation; rather, they serve to construct gateways that facilitate social interactions that are healthy, dignified, and sustainable.

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