

**The Increasing Significance of Boundary Psychology  
as a Theoretical Perspective in International Relations**

**by Charles L. Mitchell  
Grambling State University**

Prepared for delivery at the Western Political Science Association Meeting,  
Las Vegas, Nevada, April 2, 2015.

## Abstract

Boundaries are always important in international politics. Disputes between countries are often explained to begin out of border conflict. Protagonists on both side of a border continually assess the strength and capability of their neighbor across the border. Conflict can result as there are perceived disequalities across boundaries. Managment of tensions and conflict across boundaries has become more complex as Internet as introduced significantly different information capabilities. The extent of Internet penetration among policy making influentials is uncertain. The extent Internet affects misunderstandings across boundaries becomes a variable. Whether perceptions of issues can successfully globalize is still uncertain.

This paper suggests that boundary psychology is a useful theoretical perspective for better analyzing across border conflicts. Two models of personality are presented to explain the reasons this observation is valid. The Five Factor Model of personality is one relevant model that exemplifies boundary psychology's importance. Often associated with the acronym OCEAN, this model's traits include openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Emphasis is placed on how well the personality can move from one experience to another successfully. In terms of boundaries, the Five Factors Model values personality that is low and rigidity and capable of effortlessly accommodating many realities. Many psychologists explain personality in terms of the Five Factors Model. The Identify Negotiation Model of Personality is a second example that agrees with the emphasis on boundary psychology. This personality model is associated with Ting-Toomey. Individual difference in the Identity Negotiation Model occurs as people differ in their cognitive strengths and abilities at integrating several identity influences. Identities can be divided into primary and situational identities. Primary identity includes four personal identity domains including cultural identity, ethnic identity, gender identity, and personal identity. These identity domains can be contrasted to situational identities' four domains: role identity, relational identity, face work identity, and symbolic interaction identity. People are continually negotiating their personal identity within these the eight identify domains in the Identify Negotiation Model.

Possible of qualitative data to analyze conflicts such as in the Ukraine and potentially between North and South Korea is discussed. The paper questions whether narrative qualitative data could usefully improve analysis of boundary conflicts in international politics. The Interpretivism required to move from qualitative narrative data to results about border conflicts is discussed. Boundary psychology and the two models of personality presented in this paper are suggested as possibly valuable in accomplishing the interpretivism required in qualitative methods to produce knowledge building results.

## **The Increasing Significance of Boundary Psychology as a Theoretical Perspective in International Relations**

Boundaries have always figured significantly in how international conflicts are understood. Opposing states divided by borders have been extensively analyzed since competition often is explained to overheat and result in war. Perceived disparities across boundaries have frequently led to one state attempting to forcibly dominate the second state. Complex International Politics models have been developed explaining when the balance of power across a border becomes unstable. Present concerns in international politics identify several realities where there is a lack of harmonious International Relations across boundaries. Whether border disputes still have the potential to plunge the world into conflict is a concern that cannot be adequately resolved.

The ability boundary psychology has to effectively analyze conflictual realities in international politics is increasingly recognized. The increasing importance of information technology (IT) undeniably has a significant influence on numerous variables that affect international stability. Transformations from IT continue at a dazzling rate, and each innovation penetrates quickly throughout society. Those people most profoundly affected by IT are as aware as ever that only a few years are required to see substantial change happening in technologies and among those who are devoted to technological reasons. While innovation may do pleasing things for productivity, social, and even economic reasons, IT's influence on international politics is less certain.

Introducing new and sometimes difficult reasons to the international equation across boundaries has an effect that cannot always be reliably predicted. While IT is often described as encouraging better government as a result of e-government initiatives, whether influential persons affecting border conflict always react with progressively better ideas is uncertain. Even whether those with most profound influence in conflict are uniformly reached with IT is uncertain. Attempting to estimate accurately the extent to which IT modifies international realities is difficult and fraught with uncertainty.

Boundary psychology has ideas that improve how this developing conflictual reality can be better understood. Ordinary techniques for understanding events are being replaced by new ideas. The conflict between long established methods of analyzing problems and new formula for explaining happening can be significant. People are being continually encouraged to accept innovation. The psychological tensions that can result from being asked to change once evaluative schemata are difficult to calculate. Boundaries between the former standards and new ideas yield, in some instances. Personalities are no longer the same as formerly rigid boundaries become soft accepting innovation.

Boundaries exist within personality as borders exist between nations. When boundary psychology concepts are borrowed to improve understanding of international politics, various dimensions of emerging conflicts are included in the analytic model. Different developmental processes on two sides of the border are included in the equation. The conflicts that occur among different personalities confronting IT influence similarly is more successfully modeled. The dynamic picture of different people across borders reacting in unexpected ways to IT influence can be well understood as potentially a significant source of international conflict.

The transformative influence of IT is usually analyzed as constructive promoting better government. Whether this assumption is true lacks substantial proof, however. A purpose of this paper is to present how boundary psychology concepts allows some useful criticism of this assumption. Tensions between nations and within personalities may become strained as rapid innovation calls center question existing evaluative schema. This potential problem that exists within any society, is magnified by differences across international boundaries. Analysis contained in this paper likes to speculate about how much disorder the international system could experience from boundary psychology dislocations caused by technological innovation.

People who appear to be pursuing their ordinary lifestyle reasons can be deceived as personality tensions build from accepting innovation. Whether IT innovations have an equivalent effect on every person is uncertain. Those people who are most influenced by IT likewise is impossible to discern. The result, theoretically, is an unpredictable change in values and evaluation techniques among the people. While everyone agrees that innovation is improving political conditions, many anomalies are possibly happening. In some situations, those with the ability to determine events may be left out altogether as technological transformation occurs.

This paper discusses personality and boundaries and presents useful examples of improved analysis of international politics with this technique. Boundaries psychology is well adapted for analyzing conditions resulting after substantial IT transformation. When these concepts are utilized to discuss people and how it influences them, perceptiveness is gained about whether they react with some flexibility to what is happening. Conflict probably is more

likely when people react in rigid ways to new realities they now confront. Boundaries is a concept employed to explain how inflexibly people react to situations. When less drastic boundaries are the reality in cognitive processes, more agility is perceived to exist in managing happenings. Sadly, as cognitive boundaries are more extreme, resolution of conflict is allowed fewer options.

### **Models of Personality that Feature Boundaries**

One model of personality that is commonly used is the Big Five personality traits model. Often associated with the acronym OCEAN, this model's traits include openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

**Figure One  
The Five Factor Model**

Openness to experience	includes appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, curiosity, and variety of experience.
Conscientiousness	shows self discipline, acts dutifully, aims for achievement, and prefers planned to spontaneous behavior.
Extroversion	energy, positive emotions, surgency, assertiveness, sociability and the tendency to seek stimulation the company of others, and talkativeness.
Agreeableness	a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others.
Neuroticism	the tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, and vulnerability.

(Source: Atkinson et al., 2000, p. 43)

Boundaries, in the Five Factors Model, are implicit in all five constituent traits. This model of personality emphasizes adjustment from one condition to another. Emphasis is placed on how well the personality can move from one experience to another successfully. In terms of boundaries, the Five Factors Model values personality that is low and rigidity and capable of effortlessly accommodating many realities.

Personality trouble more likely occurs in the Five Factors Model when a person has unusually sturdy and inflexible boundaries in their cognitive habits. Without flexibility and agility, people tend to be limited in behavioral repertoire, something that can prove troublesome. This model of personality substantially values ability to accept only pragmatic cognitive boundaries.

Each of these five personality factors are elaborated by many psychologist. A series of index questions are included in Appendix One that are useful in evaluating a person as to the five personality factors. The questions that comprise this index often are premised on identifying cognitive behavior that separates closely related ideas. These boundary properties of cognitive behavior thoroughly permeate the Five Factors Model.

### **The Identity Negotiation Model**

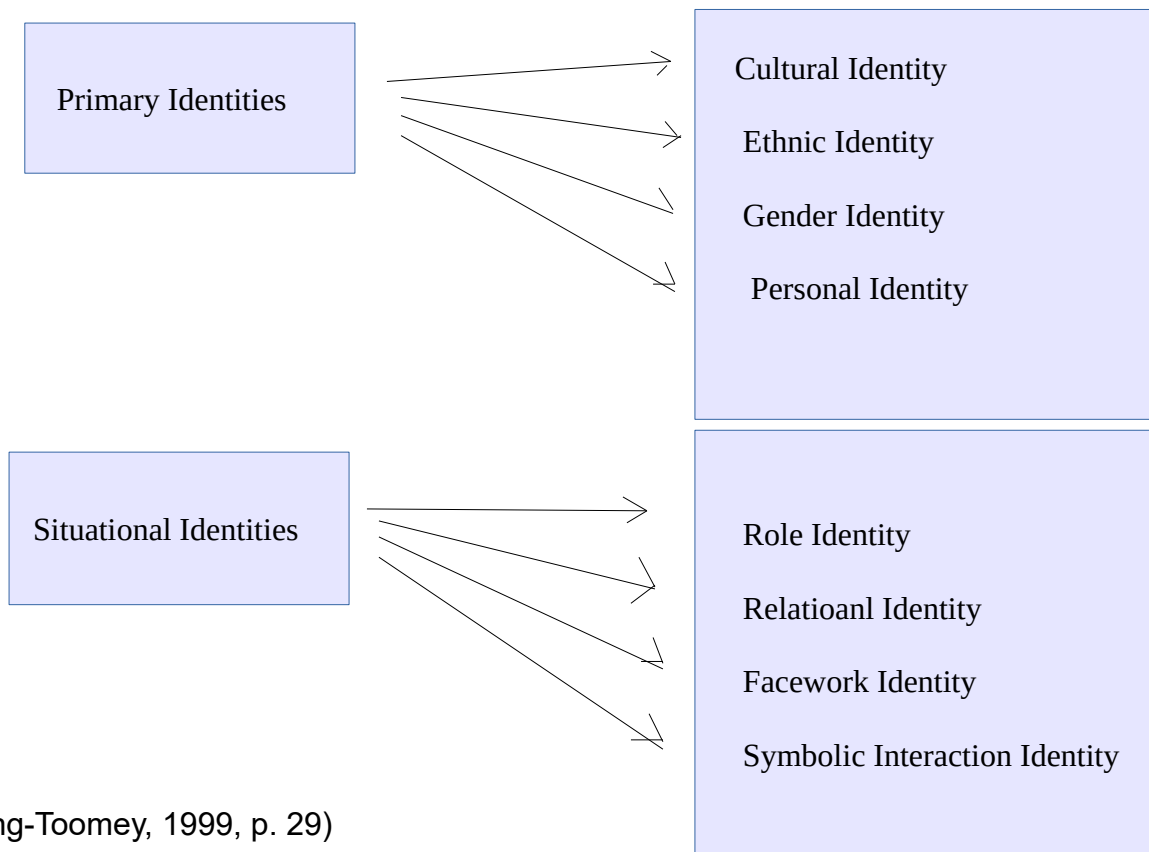
In the identity negotiation model, substantial linkages are identified between cultural values and soft conception. This model of personality is all about how people draw their intergroup boundaries. Identity negotiation is an integrative theory concerned with how people put together several identity factors. (Ting-Toomey, 1999, pp. 26-27) Individual difference in the Identity Negotiation Model occurs as people differ in their cognitive strengths and abilities at integrating several identity influences. The adeptness with which people resolve boundaries between different identity ideas determines their personality from this perspective.

Identity in this personality model is explained to be comprised of primary identities and situational identities. Ting-Toomey explains the term identity "is used in the identity

negotiation perspective as reflective self-conception or self image that we each derive from our cultural, ethnic, and gender socialization processes." Identity is acquired "via our interaction with other in particular situations." Identities can be divided into primary and situational identities.

As Figure Two explains, primary identity includes four personal identity domains including cultural identity, ethnic identity, gender identity, and personal identity. These identity domains can be contrasted to situational identities' four domains: role identity, relational identity, face work identity, and symbolic interaction identity. These eight identity domains are thought to give a composite self image of a person in any cultural setting. (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 28-30)

**Figure Two**  
**Identity Negotiation Perspective and Eight Identity Domains**



(source: Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 29)



## **International Relations after Internet Has Much Conflict from Boundary Issues**

When the term “boundaries” is used to discuss international politics, the meaning is different than when the same expression is used by psychologists. The conflict in the Ukraine is an example of a border conflict that is prominent in present day international politics. The political reality between North and South Korea is another example of the influence of border conflict, at the present time.

Often the issue of how protagonists across a border perceive the strengths of their opponents is the a determinant factor in explaining whether a peaceful situation changes into one that has open hostilities. Errors in perception across boundaries are often blamed when misunderstandings escalate into war.

Figure Three presents the start pages from four social media websites. These start pages are narrative data to the qualitative methodologist. Hypotheses can be tested on the basis of this data about the extent the increased amount of global communications on Internet is a destabilizing influence. The hypothesis that is of interest is whether Internet content reaches those with power and decision making authority in different countries in a predictable manner.

Internet could be faulted as providing a deceptive perspective on how much social cooperation is likely to occur from using the Internet. Even for those familiar with educated U.S. norms about the illusion and glitter of possible social interaction, social networking can be demanding. Abraham Maslow explains that social needs are basic to human beings.

Many people in the U.S. react to social networking as if possibly they are being offered something that could assist them in fulfilling their basic social needs.

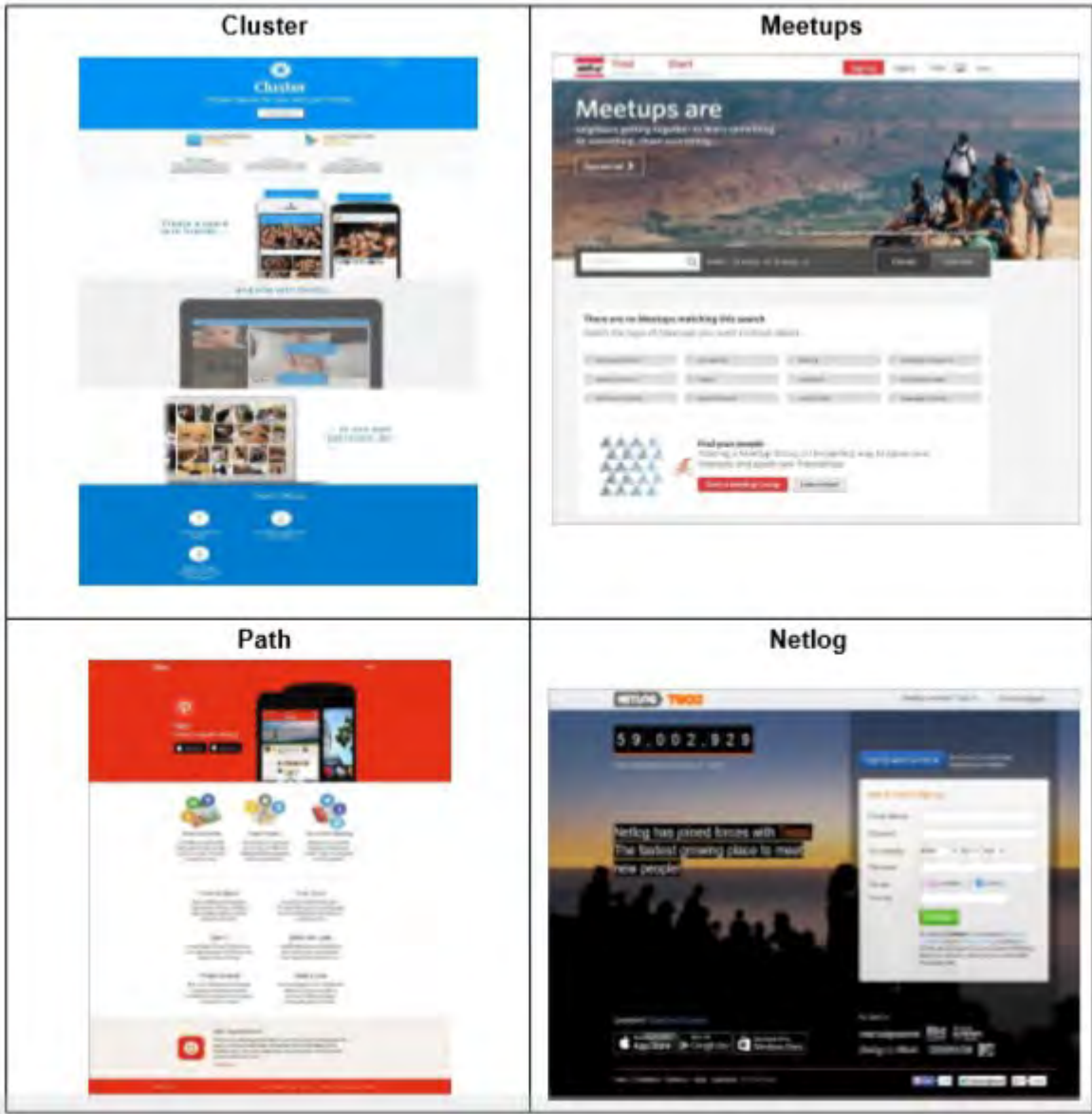
The problem for those abroad is much more difficult. Unfamiliar with how ordinary exaggeration is in our culture, people globally could take what social network websites present as much more literal guarantees of possible social attainment. Hostilities across boundaries can result.

The qualitative data found in Figure Three can be interpreted to explain how deceptive social networking is across boundaries. This data is typical of how the resourceful social scientist using qualitative methods can make some meaningful progress working from narrative data to research that produces more useful concepts for analyzing internet phenomenon.

The process of moving from qualitative data to conclusions about international politics is a complex one. Interpretativism is possible with narrative data derived from Internet. The potential to proceed from narrative data to conclusions about hypotheses about causes of international conflict is a distinct possibility. Besides possibly developing models of conflictual realities that may have authentic validity, this approach has great potential for successfully sensitizing concepts about the research question being studied. While validity in social science research is prized, validity is not an end all and be all of social science. Devising better concepts for analyzing a problem is a second acceptable gain that can be realized.

Figure Three

Social Media Start Pages



The process by which qualitative data becomes research results is a profound issue in qualitative methods.. While some social scientists believe the process of developing conclusions from qualitative data is solely accomplished with the intuitive strengths of the researcher for interpretivism, this belief is not uniformly held. There are many efforts to devise coding techniques that can increase everyone's confidence that research findings reasonable derive from qualitative data. Some of the sophisticated ideas about qualitative data closely resemble content analysis and favor creating numerical data about how frequently interesting phenomenon occur in the data.

The two models of personality presented in this paper exemplify an effort to improve interpretivism in going from qualitative data such as in Table Three to research results that are useful knowledge. The models of personality help the social science research better perceive the problems that could occur as Internet messages interact with personalities in different cultures.

The models of personality emphasize the issue of individual difference is adeptly accepting Internet messages is authentic. Different people have different cognitive capabilities for accepting Internet content. If qualitative methods is going to successfully analyze Internet generated narrative, the interpretivism is going to need to accommodate how Internet content reaches across boundaries reaching people differently because everyone receiving these messages does not have the same cognitive capabilities.

## Appendix One

### Index questions for the Five Factors Model

1. Openness to experience	<p>I have a rich vocabulary.          I have a vivid imagination          I have excellent ideas.          I am quick to understand things.          I am full of ideas.          I am NOT interested in abstractions. (reversed)          I do NOT have a good imagination. (reversed)          I have difficulty understanding abstract ideas. (reversed)</p>
2. Conscientiousness	<p>I am always prepared.          I pay attention to details.          I get chores done right away.          I like order.          I follow a schedule.          I am exacting in my work.          I leave my belongings around. (reversed)          I make a mess of things. (reversed)          I often forget to put things back in their proper place. (reversed)          I shirk my duties. (reversed)</p>
3. Extraversion	<p>I am the life of the party.          I don't mind being the center of attention.          I feel comfortable around people.          I start conversations.          I talk to a lot of different people at parties.          I don't talk a lot. (reversed)          I think a lot before I speak or act. (reversed)          I don't like to draw attention to myself. (reversed)          I am quiet around strangers. (reversed)          I have no intention of talking in large crowds. (reversed)</p>
4. Agreeableness	<p>I am interested in people.          I sympathize with others' feelings.          I have a soft heart.          I take time out for others.          I make people feel at ease.          I am not really interested in others. (reversed)          I insult people. (reversed)          I am not interested in other people's problems. (reversed)          I feel little concern for others. (reversed)</p>

5. Neuroticism

I am easily disturbed.  
I change my mood a lot.  
I get irritated easily.  
I get stressed out easily.  
I have frequent mood swings.  
I worry about things.  
I am much more anxious than most people.  
I am relaxed most of the time. (reversed)  
I seldom feel blue. (reversed)

(Source: "Big Five Personality Traits," Wikipedia, accessed March 28, 2015.)

## Bibliography

- Rita L. Atkinson, Richard C. Atkinson, Edward E. Smith, Daryl J. Bern, and Susan Nolen-Hoeksema. *Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology* (13 ed.). Orlando, Florida: Harcourt College Publishers. 2015. p. 437.
- J.M. Digman. "Personality Structure: Emergence of the Five-Factor Model. *Annual Review of Psychology*. (1990) 41: 417-440.
- Michael W. Eysenck & Mark T. Keane. *Cognitive Psychology, A Student's Handbook*. London: Psychology Press: New York, 2015.
- Teppo Felin and Nicolai J. Foss. Social Reality, the Boundaries of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, and Economics (June 25, 2008). *SMG Working Paper No. 19/2008*.
- Christopher G. Hudson. *Complex Systems and Human Behavior*. Chicago: Lyceum Books Inc., 2010.
- Anne Katherine. *Boundaries - Where You End And I Begin: How To Recognize And Set Healthy Boundaries*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.
- Michèle Lamont, and Virag Molnár. The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences (2002). *Annual Review of Sociology*. Vol. 28 (2002), pp. 167-195.
- R.R McCrae and O.P. John. (1992). "An introduction to the five-factor model and its applications." *Journal of Personality* 60 (2): 175–215.
- Eric J. Mitnick. "Law, Cognition, and Identity" (September 23, 2007). *Louisiana Law Review*, Vol. 67, No. 3, p. 823, 2007; TJSLS Legal Studies Research Paper No. 1016217.
- Sameer B. Srivastava and Mahzarin R. Banaji. "Culture, Cognition, and Collaborative Networks in Organization." *American Sociological Review*. 2011, 76(2), 207-233.
- Stella Ting-Tommey. *Communicating Across Cultures*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1999.
- Jan A. G. M. van Dijk. *The Deepening Divide, Inequality in the Information Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005.