

THE CONCEPT OF SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES – CHARACTERISTICS AND SCOPE *

UDC 316.2 Lamont M.

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Abstract. *Although it is one of the building blocks of sociological analyses, the concept of symbolic boundaries has been undergoing a second revival over the last twenty-odd years. Following in the footsteps of theoretical and empirical work by Michèle Lamont, researchers have been rethinking the potential of symbolic boundaries for additional fleshing out and elaborating in areas that have proven to be most productive. In general, its development moves in both significant scientific directions, toward enabling the transformation of basic premises into a sequence of research questions and linking them to appropriate methods, so as to include a significant portion of social reality empirically. Additionally, there are also theoretical aspirations to expand it from within, developing different aspects of it on an abstract level so as to establish a base categorical schema that would either serve to synthesize existing literature or, even more importantly, to focus further research. Of equal importance is also the attempt to compensate for the limitations of the concept of symbolic boundaries (Lamont 1992) by combining it with another, believed by its advocates to be complementary to the former, that of social relationships (“double objectivity” – Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013), in order to simultaneously examine both the social and mental structures of social differences and social stratification.*

Key words: *symbolic boundaries, lifestyles, social relationships, group dynamics, theoretical integration*

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1. THE BACKGROUND OF CONCEPT USE

The development of the concept of symbolic boundaries has undergone three major phases. The first phase can be said to be characterized by its implicit usage, and it can be roughly demarcated as the period between the publication of Durkheim's and Weber's seminal works and through to the sixties. The second phase includes those works where the topics of symbolic systems and indirect forms of power converge, and where some authors make explicit the concept of symbolic boundaries, applying it in studies of specific phenomena – tastes, division of social space, manners, deviance, knowledge, science and so on – whereas others analyze boundaries without utilizing the language of symbolic boundaries (Lamont 2001a). The first group includes the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas, Norbert Elias, Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault and Thomas Gieryn. The third phase of the usage of the term symbolic boundaries begins unequivocally with the work of Michèle Lamont and the comprehensive efforts at its precise definition, elaboration of research procedures and techniques, as well as the recent efforts to carry out a theoretical integration of the literature on boundaries and to set the foundation for further development of this concept.

Seeing as how the objective of this paper is not a historical overview of literature on symbolic boundaries but an examination of its heuristic value and principal limitations, we shall briefly present the most influential works from the first two phases. The only exception will be Bourdieu, whose work will feature in other sections of the paper as well, partly for the sake of clear demarcation of the new wave in the development of the concept, and partly for the possibilities his theory affords in terms of advancing the concept.

Arguably the most significant use of symbolic boundaries to date is the one defined by Durkheim in the book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (*Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* 1912). While studying religious phenomena, he found the distinctive trait of religious thought to be a division of the world into two domains, the sacred and the profane. The boundary between these two domains is absolute, and crossing it is only possible if rules prescribed by religious rites are observed (Durkheim 1995, 33–39). However, this system of classification is not confined to the domain of religious life but is instead characterized by extensibility, which in effect renders it a principle for regulating people's behavior, their relationships, as well as the status of things, i.e., a cosmology of sorts. In other words, the structuring of relationships within a community is based on observing and reinforcing symbolic boundaries.

Weber paints an even more differentiated picture of symbolic boundaries when he examines the processes of group formation with regard to their tendency toward monopolistic closure in relation to their surroundings. In order to maintain their status and emphasize their own standing, groups of individuals draw sharp boundaries between areas of different life habits. The differentiation process in fact stems from small differences that are then intentionally cultivated and broadened. Defined inversely, the equality and opposition between habitus and life habits possess an identical community-creating ability. In other words, any type of similarity or contrast between habitus and "habits can induce the belief that affinity or disaffinity exists between groups that attract or repel each other" (Weber 1978, 388). Weber goes on to emphasize that this belief need not have any objective foundation, but that it will have significant consequences on the formation of the community regardless. The mechanism of group differentiation also involves judging the cultural characteristics of one's own group as excellent compared to those of others, where, in addition to pronounced

differences in the economic way of life, there are also noticeable differences in manner of dress, style of housing, diet, gender-based division of labor, hairdo, style of beard – in brief, in lifestyle. All these characteristics can, under certain circumstances, occasion disdain and antipathy for the people who look different, i.e., the drawing of boundaries and closure of groups.

In line with Weber's conception of lifestyles, Veblen (2007 [1899]) also discusses the symbolic significance of refined manners, tastes and habits. Through conspicuous spending, groups symbolize their material position, thus producing boundaries between themselves and other groups lacking such material resources. The process of differentiation itself is therefore not situated in the field of the material, but is instead structured around spending practices which symbolize one's standing and indirectly classify people as superior and inferior. Veblen proposes that wealth in and of itself is not enough, and that it must be publicly demonstrated, which is achieved by one group differentiating itself from another by rejecting the lifestyle of the latter as vulgar. One way to underscore differences and draw boundaries is to emphasize some aspect of life that has historically been valued as noble, beautiful, or immaculate. Upper classes do this by disparaging productive occupations and productive labor, and by promoting leisure as personal privilege.

Pierre Bourdieu (1970, 1984) situates the symbolic battleground within the domain of culture, which in fact represents a medium for attaining domination, and which is perceived as legitimate due to the very structure of the field. Owing to its position within the social space, the dominant class is able to define its own culture as superior, and to then use this position to designate other cultures as pragmatic, impure, vulgar and/or low. A practical consequence of this relation is the naturalization of practices and the monopolization of privileges. It is from the position of a legitimate culture that boundaries in relation to others are drawn, that criteria are set for admitting new members into high-status positions, and that individuals lacking adequate habitus are discriminated against or placed at a distance. The power realized in the domain of culture, that is, by imposing meanings and interpretations of things and the world, is termed symbolic violence by Bourdieu. Physical space can also be subject to symbolic organization (Bourdieu, 1977), where understandings of gender identity translate into the division of space at home, in the yard, or in the broader physical environment.

Also in the domain of symbolic differentiation is Goffman's analysis of the dynamic of the relationship between the stigmatized and the "normal" (Goffman 1963). There are conceptual boundaries between these groups, socially-constructed representations of the characteristics of the normal and the deviants. Social identities are standardized configurations which require of their social bearers validation in all situations. Even "mixing" is only allowed if there is a defined outsider position, protecting the group's coherent idea of itself from being potentially undermined. Social interactions include a constant exchange of prestige symbols and stigma symbols, whereby it depends on specific characteristics, i.e., their noticeability, how the individuals will be able to manage them and thus secure a broader range of free movement in the social space. On the other hand, the more obvious the stigma, the smaller the possibility of boundary crossing.

In a manner of speaking, the very impetus for the elaboration of the theory of symbolic boundaries arose from the concept of boundary-work by Thomas Gieryn (1983). It refers to a process of the demarcation of science from other intellectual activities, whereby scientists create a public image of themselves by attributing selected characteristics to their ideas and methods. As in the other authors considered, here, too, the ultimate purpose of drawing boundaries is the achievement of specific group goals and interests. Simultaneously with drawing boundaries around science, scientists are denying access to those same resources to "pseudo-scientists,

acquiring intellectual authority, expanding their career opportunities, and finally protecting the autonomy of the scientific community” (Gieryn 1983, 781). The author also notes that boundaries are not uniform but flexible, contextually sensitive, even ambiguous, since they represent the scientist’s strategic repertoire for efficient justification of their authority and ensuring access to relevant resources.

2. CONCEPT DEFINITION

Michèle Lamont and her associates have made the most substantial contribution toward the explication and theoretical systematization, as well as empirical application, of the concept of symbolic boundaries (Lamont 1992, 2000; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lamont and Molnar 2002). Taking a combination of Durkheimian and Weberian traditions as their point of departure, and criticizing Bourdieu’s idea of a direct link between lifestyles and social hierarchization and group formation, they have developed an approach that emphasizes the conceptual boundaries people use in order to categorize other people, tastes, positions, practices and manners. At the same time, special attention is paid to empirical research into the repertoires of evaluation that are in the service of symbolic differentiation in everyday life.

More specifically, the first problem that arises has to do with the criteria on which people rely in order to distinguish between more and less valuable individuals; in other words, how people decide which types of people they will socialize with and like, and which types of people they avoid and do not like (Lamont 1992). On a more general level, this is about standards of evaluation for a division into Us and Them, standards used to underscore the superior status of one’s own group. When people do this, they are in fact using high-status symbols, that is, drawing lines to demarcate themselves from others in a way that positions one group as lower than the group defining the boundaries. The boundary dimension that is of significance here is the extent of their rigidity, i.e., how much distance one needs to maintain in relation to members of other groups in order to signal the importance of status clearly and consistently in every context. This dimension is closely connected with the criterion of purity, which people use to emphasize important elements of their identity, as well as to indicate important differences and unacceptable content. Certainly, elements of identity are value-laden, which is why there is discourse about those who are better and those who are worse, and they contain clear codes that use discourse structure to distribute qualifications and further formulate and legitimize high positions (Alexander 1992). Together, these two dimensions of symbolic boundaries contribute to the development of a complex view of status, imposing a constant producing and reproducing of boundaries and a sensitization of members for using them in various social contexts. Thus, are obtained, so to speak, for the fast classification of data exchanged in interactions.

The concept of symbolic boundaries can partly explain how people separate into groups, and, equally importantly, how these help generate a sense of community and group affiliation (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Symbolic boundaries play an important role in the generation of a group, and serve to establish the scope of its identity, its sovereign space, discourse, rituals, and so on (Wolfe 1992). In order for groups to function, they need to keep others outside their boundaries, and in order to do that they must define the exclusive characteristics, specifically in relation to those others. As noted earlier, this can be done through the criterion of purity/impurity, but there are other criteria as well, such as attractiveness/unattractiveness,

desirability/undesirability, or sophistication/vulgarity, to mention but a few. In addition to exclusionary criteria, it is important to emphasize that differences can be expressed through different media, for example, through normative interdictions, cultural practices, or patterns of likes and dislikes (Lamont 2000). However, the relationship dynamic is not exhausted with these relations; it should be noted that symbolic boundaries also include indifference, or, more precisely, a group of elements which do not provoke any clearly defined reactions and which can be tolerated as they pose neither a significant contrast, nor a jeopardizing factor (such as laying claim to the same things or interests), nor a target for stigmatization.

The concept of symbolic boundaries thus emphasizes group dynamics through an examination of beliefs held in common. Participation in group boundary-work reinforces a certain definition of reality, and lends it intersubjective relevance. Boundary-work starts from beliefs in common, shared definitions, perspectives, but in order to be complete it needs to include differences, i.e., to establish those elements of the other group or groups in relation to which it significantly differs. This requires the concept to encompass the dynamic dimension of social relations, where groups compete against each other and come into conflict on the symbolic plane. The purpose of such conflict is certainly to trivialize the perspective of others and impose one's own, thus acquiring a position from which one can occupy a field of prestige. There is a wide range of groups where individuals participate in production and reproduction; they can be national, ethnic, class-based, race-based, professional, gender-based, sexual or cultural.

Group interactions are an inevitable subject of examination within the concept of symbolic boundaries as they play a vital part in the spread of various cultural codes. The process of spreading is in fact realized by contrasting one's own meanings against those held by other groups, thus not only establishing a relationship but also establishing a particular interpretation as authentic and significant for group identity. The differentiation of identity at the group level does not only have a symbolic dimension, however; it is actually from such relationships that conditions for the production of inequality are often generated. In order to capture all these elements of group dynamics, the concept includes several aspects: meaning and identities are understood to be plural, decentered and relational: the boundaries being drawn between the different identities are ambiguous – they can acquire different characteristics depending on the relationship and context within which the differentiation takes place (Lamont 1992, 8–9); and the conditions under which the inner potential of boundaries for the production of inequalities transforms into objective forms of social differences.

The final dimension is a very important aspect of the concept of symbolic boundaries. The distinction between symbolic and social boundaries introduces two levels into the analysis, one on which what is being examined are the conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space, i.e., the intersubjective level, and the other, where examination is into the objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) – as well as inequality - and social opportunities, i.e., the group level (Lamont and Molnar 2002, 168). Essentially, symbolic boundaries can become a limiting factor once they meet two conditions: when they become widely accepted, and when they translate into visible patterns of social exclusion, i.e., when they have become social boundaries. In other words, symbolic boundaries are abstract tools used by individuals and groups in vying over the interpretation and imposition of a particular definition of

reality, and are a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for creating stable patterns of social exclusion, or, more precisely, social boundaries (Ibid, 169).

Hypothetically, even though symbolic boundaries can be constructed based on any characteristic selected on the basis of an oppositional relation, the social conditions within which the interactions take place will still crucially define which boundaries will be actualized and in what ways. We should first mention cultural, economic and social capitals, which determine access to cultural resources, the repertoires of cultural codes and practices, as well as the circle of possible social contacts. Researching the criteria for evaluating the lifestyles of others, Lamont arrived at three types of symbolic boundaries, namely: (1) moral boundaries, drawn based on moral character and centered around characteristics such as honesty, work ethic, personal integrity, and care for others; (2) socio-economic boundaries, drawn based on judgments concerning people's social position defined in relation to their wealth, power or professional success; and (3) cultural boundaries, drawn on the basis of education, intelligence, manners, tastes, and standards of high culture (Lamont 1992, 4). This typology provides an analytical framework for studying a wide array of diverse social identities and sensitizes the researcher to the context within which they are actualized. The latter holds a two-fold importance: in the first sense, context can be treated as the area within which symbolic boundaries are drawn, whether it concerns public morals or the symbolization of material wealth; in the second, broader, sense, this pertains to which type of boundaries, in which societies and what historical periods, is the more relevant, what the relationship is between the different types of boundaries and what their relative strengths are.

3. THE ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE CONCEPT

The primary strength of the concept of symbolic boundaries is that it can serve to capture a fundamental social process, namely the relationality at the foundation of social phenomena. Whether one is researching the problem of generating collective identity or gender inequality, ethnic conflicts or the domains of science and knowledge, this concept underscores their relationality, that is, the fact that they actually emerge in relation to the perceived identity of others. Group positioning is important for any of the afore-mentioned topics; for example, if we were to examine class differences in motherhood, we would find that middle-class mothers define their practices in relation to mothers from other classes, just as the practices of working-class mothers exhibit elements that conflict with the criteria perceived as characteristic of middle-class mothers (Tyler 2008; Brubaker and Dallaway 2009). The process of group genesis has its own course, from the formation of a mental construct which is then used as a pattern for perceiving, drawing and contesting social boundaries, to a social expansion achieved over time, through to becoming a historical reality (Wacquant 2013).

This provides a link to the second advantage of the concept, and relates to an emphasis on a frequently neglected, subjective, aspect of differences in lifestyles. In other words, subjective assessment plays a very important role in considering social standing and the prestige of certain elements of lifestyle. Lifestyle differences and classifications are relevant when there are subjects capable of perceiving them and evaluating them as significant and interesting (Bourdieu 1985).

The third advantage of the concept is that it enables us to empirically link the process of social closure with lifestyle differences (Jarness 2018). Starting from lifestyle differences, by

awarding the status of exclusivity to their own practices, groups hinder or deny access to those members who do not possess either institutionally recognized qualifications or practically relevant and highly-regarded skills and knowledge. Furthermore, through stigmatization of certain lifestyle traits, positions are ossified and boundaries reinforced, becoming impermeable, rigid and symbolically aggressively defended.

A final advantage of the concept is its very generality, or more precisely, the possibility it leaves to also include socio-economic and especially moral dimensions, in addition to the more narrowly defined cultural lifestyle dimensions. Since the concept was largely used within studies of cultural stratification, and since an interest in the distribution of limited sets of cultural preferences and practices dominated such studies, the inclusion of moral judgments extends the idea of lifestyle, bringing it, as noted by Jarness, closer to Weber's understanding of lifestyle as a reflection of the totality of a group's existence (Jarness 2015, 360). Certainly, the benefits of such an extension are not limited to the domain of culture studies.

When considering the main limitations of the concept, the one that stands out is the analytical priority of discursive consciousness over practical consciousness (Jarness and Flemmen 2019). Focusing on the subjective perspective of social stratification, the concept of symbolic boundaries neglects the fact that practical consciousness can influence the creation and preservation of boundaries. The mechanism at the foundation of the second causal chain is the fact that, through adopted criteria of the culture they belong to, social actors develop a "feeling" for the field, where they reproduce the social propositions of their position without conscious intention. Furthermore, their behavior appears to them to be natural, or, more broadly defined, their lifestyle is legitimized by categories of spontaneity, naturalness, and appropriateness, whereas they perceive the practices of other groups as artificial, unnatural and adulterated. Consequently, by emphasizing actors' subjective perception, intention, consciousness and knowledge, the concept of symbolic boundaries unjustifiably excludes from the analytical corpus structural and institutional aspects that may have a key significance in uncovering social devaluation or limiting the possibility for achieving socially desirable goals. On a more abstract, theoretical level, this means that the hypothesis of the necessity (if not sufficiency) of symbolic boundaries for the emergence of social ones is questionable, since social boundaries can be reproduced without the mediation of symbolic boundary networks, i.e., they can self-reproduce.

A second problem concerns the empirical operationalization of types of symbolic boundaries. Actually, the error lies in the generalization of the finding that moral boundaries stand in contradiction to the effects of cultural boundaries (Lamont 1992). When one uses this to define a hypothesis on the contradictory relation between different types of symbolic boundaries, this immediately precludes the possibility of them acting jointly and reinforcing each other (Jarness 2013). The originally significant empirical contribution, namely the refutation of Bourdieu's stand on the predominance of cultural factors in group genesis and hierarchization, adopted the identical error by translating the empirical result into an analytical premise. It would not be difficult to imagine a homologous relationship (homologous structure) emerging in practice, instead of the primacy of one of the types of symbolic boundaries.

A third problem is the fact that, although the concept has a significant history of usage and although there have been significant studies that have contributed to its definition and empirical operationalization, we are still witnessing a large number of studies which touch on the problem of social boundaries yet without any in-depth synthesis of the varied achievements or a further development of the concept that could potentially help generate a theory of broader scope. Developing the concept further would involve a study of the characteristics of boundaries in different contexts and on different levels.

4. OVERCOMING THE LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Weaknesses of the concept of symbolic boundaries can be overcome by means of a specific extension, be it the addition of certain elements from other theories that are complementary with its basic premise or a further analytical deepening of the existing premises. First, the focus on the mental structures of social actors in generating social boundaries can be expanded so that it also encompasses another aspect of social reality, which could in short be termed social structure. In line with Bourdieu's understanding of social life as a network of material and symbolic relationships (Bourdieu 2013), sociological research should include a correspondence between first-order objectivity – a set of objective positions occupied by individuals, emerging as structural limitations of their actions and perceptions, and second-order objectivity – mental schemas of perception and classification systems through which the world is experienced and construed (Wacquant 2013). In other words, it is necessary to combine a system of relationships defined by capital volume and composition with the symbolic patterns of social actors' practical activities. The combining of structurally and symbolically defined differences is possible because, as Bourdieu claims, there is a certain kind of correspondence between them. Namely, the system of class relationships, defined through capital distribution, bears structural resemblance with the system of status relationships, which includes lifestyle characteristics.

Practically, when explicating the relationality of social reality, in addition to symbolic space one should also consider social space as well as habitus. Since symbolic space covers questions regarding the embodied conceptual differences of social practices, social space adds a system of objective relationships between the social positions, i.e., capital distribution, and their respective strength. In this expanded model, habitus, as a system of permanent dispositions inscribed into the body and mind, and the source of logic of social practices, is a factor of mediation between the social and symbolic spaces (Jarness 2018, 505). The premise that there is homology between these two systems, as well as the premise that social conflicts are rarely of an open kind, both lead to the argument that conflict in the social space is symbolically reworked through differences in the lifestyles of opposing groups (Bourdieu 1984). An integrated approach would thus involve starting from social positions, then moving on to mechanisms of group formation, and ending with a restructuring of the principles used to realize domination – the monopolizing of advantages and restricting access to others. For domination is realized by imposing one's own worldview onto others; however, there is an advantage here, since this worldview is a reflection of collective interests based on relevant social resources. Accordingly, there is unequal opportunity for realizing them between different groups – while some may be endowed with a preponderance of capital, others are characterized by scarcity. In this amended model, the symbolic representations of collectivity are still an element necessary for the realization of a group's existence, while the conflicts between opposing groups represent the classification struggles of the categories of perception and definition of the social world.

Further development of the concept, towards a sort of general theory of boundaries, would include a synthetic approach to the research of boundary characteristics themselves. This entails researching the similarities and differences between boundaries in different areas – cultural, class, gender, national, ethnic, regional, linguistic, etc., as well as in different types of groups and on different levels – socio-psychological, cultural and structural (Lamont 2001). Boundary characteristics include, among others, permeability, rigidity, fluidity and visibility. While studies to date have mostly researched processes of closure and therefore boundary aspects such

as impermeability, permanence and prominence, recent studies have included the opposite processes as well, for example, fluidity, permeability, and even hybridization of boundaries. However, both the former and the latter require further research, with an emphasis on the sociological dimension which requires that boundary characteristics and the processes of their re/production be linked to the conditions which encourage either the dissolving or the deepening of dividing lines. Comparative boundary pairs, such as positive and negative boundaries, explicit and implicit ones, fixed and moveable, should also be added to this group of characteristics (Lamont and Thevenot 2000).

A second strategy for the systematization of literature and establishing of a theoretical approach would take the direction of researching the mechanisms of boundary production (Lamont and Molnar 2002). These mechanisms are certainly versatile, or, more precisely, their consequences are not identical, and there are thus mechanisms that activate and sustain boundaries, mechanisms that contest or erase boundaries, as well as mechanisms through which boundaries are primarily overcome. The existing literature takes all these mechanisms into consideration, but does so only partially and in a theoretically disconnected manner. The addition of mechanisms as an aspect of symbolic boundaries would shift the focus away from specific cases and towards the abstract level of examining the phenomenon of boundary drawing – orientation, consequences, and process, providing a worked-out theoretical conception of boundaries, which would in turn direct the now diversified research field towards systematic research.

Another way for developing a theoretical approach is directing attention towards intragroup and intergroup dynamics. More precisely, the questions occupying researchers' attention would be those that concern the phenomena of inclusion and exclusion, i.e., how a group is formed in the first place, who comprises it, next how members are accepted, how their status within the group is determined, and how loyalty is promoted. Fully intertwined with these processes are also those that concern the attitude towards other groups, since none of them happen in a group vacuum, but conversely in a dynamic and continuous relationship with other groups. With such a premise, research would logically move towards considering the phenomenology of group classification (Lamont 2001), i.e., what terms and characteristics are used by individuals as part of group identification. In other words, how they define themselves as identical to or similar with some, and different from others. Regarding membership itself, it is necessary to take into account the dimensions of group universalization of certain characteristics – whether there are some characteristics that are necessary for anyone with member aspirations, as well as levels of intragroup tolerance – to what extent can differences between members be tolerated, and when do they become a threat. Consequently, the extent to which members of a certain group will tolerate differences is also the extent to which members of the group will take care of the individual member, as well as defining what type of boundary crossing is considered unacceptable. Intergroup dynamics presents sociologically relevant questions of inequality and therefore of individual and group strategies for acting directed towards differentiation, identification, stigma avoidance, or stigmatization. Groups of a certain status may develop a strategy with which they wish to differentiate themselves from other groups close to them in status, if these groups are generally perceived as poor, marginal, criminal, etc. Considered in conjunction with research into boundary types, as well as mechanisms for drawing boundaries, what group dynamics affords is a concretization of key social processes of the production of differences, and, with them, the reproduction of inequality.

Research into the interaction between symbolic and social boundaries is yet another point where it would be possible to conduct a synthezation of an enormous number of studies and to further develop a concept with which further studies could be directed in a more theoretically precise manner. In addition to a loosening of the causal relationship between these types of boundaries discussed above, it is necessary to go further when it comes to identifying the typical configurations of their relationship in different social contexts. Some of the possible directions include the identification of cases where symbolic boundaries rationalize, normalize, reinforce, or reflect social boundaries, or those circumstances where symbolic boundaries feature as a factor of contesting or redefining the meaning of social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002, 186). The same authors also discuss the different pairings of the same boundaries depending on the cultural context, as well as the new spaces comprised of imaginary communities based on virtual relationships, where symbolic boundaries completely supplant social ones.

4. DISCUSSION

Having evolved on substantial sociological material covering the period from Durkheim's study of the division into the sacred and the profane all the way to the more recent work on the topic of the mechanisms of attributing gender norms to the genetic reproductive material in donor centers and sperm banks (Almeling 2007), the concept of symbolic boundaries is currently in a phase of reinterpretation, as part of an attempt at clearer theoretical explication and empirical testing. Some of the directions available include synthezating the theory based on existing studies on the topic of symbolic boundaries, or reaffirming the existing theoretical position (which places the question of symbolic boundaries at the center, yet neglects it in research) by using new, more balanced research strategies to test it.

Both approaches have provided the concept of symbolic boundaries with what it was missing, so it seems that it is precisely a synthesis of the two that can bring about the best results. Namely, the first strategy for further development of the concept has developed its analytical aspects. We now have before us a boundaries concept which includes a differentiated image of the types of boundaries, their characteristics, as well as the mechanisms through which the different types of boundaries connect both mutually and with social contexts, but also the mechanisms through which certain characteristics of boundaries are used in intragroup or intergroup differentiation. Thus, the concept of symbolic boundaries has evolved into a clear analytical instrument for approaching social phenomena, as it identifies with precision those aspects within the phenomena that ought to be examined.

On the other hand, the second approach offers breadth, and includes the social reality that was missing from the concept. Instead of an exclusive focus on the mental schemata of the perception and classification of others, it is suggested that such mental schemata be linked with the propositions of social structure. Such a synthesis would in fact create an opportunity to simultaneously research both objective positions and subjective perceptions of social actors, in their dialectical connection.

Merging these two directions for the development of the concept would work to both concretize and generalize the concept. Seemingly contradictory, this is possible since the latter is achieved through an integration of the concept of symbolic boundaries and the

viewpoint on the two levels of objectivity, which examines material relationships in addition to symbolic ones.

It also bears emphasizing that it seems worthwhile to retain relationality, both when studying the distribution of capital and when researching the classification system, just as it seems necessary to reject the static premise on the relationship between different types of boundaries. Finally, it is our position that research into symbolic boundaries has to lead toward the uncovering of mechanisms of re/production of social inequalities, and that it must retain a high level of theoretical sensitivity for the cultural contexts in which the process of symbolic differentiation takes place.

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KONCEPT SIMBOLIČKIH GRANICA – KARAKTERISTIKE I DOMETI

Iako jedan od temeljnih elemenata socioloških analiza, koncept simboličkih granica prolazi kroz drugo oživljavanje u posljednjih dvadesetak godina. Na tragu teorijskog i empirijskog rada Mišel Lamon, istraživači ponovo razmatraju potencijal da se dodatno upotpuni i razradi u delovima koji su se pokazali najproduktivnijim. Generalno, njegov razvoj se kreće u oba značajna naučna smera, ka razradi mogućnosti da se osnovne postavke prevedu u niz istraživačkih pitanja i povežu sa adekvatnim metodama kako bi se empirijski obuhvatio značajan deo društvene stvarnosti. Takođe, pojavljuju se i teorijske tendencije da se iznutra proširi, razvijajući različite njegove aspekta na apstraktnom nivou, kako bi se odredila bazična kategorička shema koja bi poslužila bilo sintetizaciji postojeće literature, ili još važnije, fokusirala dalja istraživanja. Ne manje važan je i pokušaj da se nedostaci koncepta simboličkih granica kompenzuju (Lamont, 1992) njegovim kombinovanjem sa drugim, prema mišljenju zagovornika, komplementarim konceptom društvenih relacija („dvostruke objektivnosti“ - Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013) kako bi se ujedno istražile i socijalne i mentalne strukture društvenih razlika i društvenog raslojavanja.

Ključne reči: simboličke granice, životni stilovi, društveni odnosi, grupna dinamika, teorijska integracija