



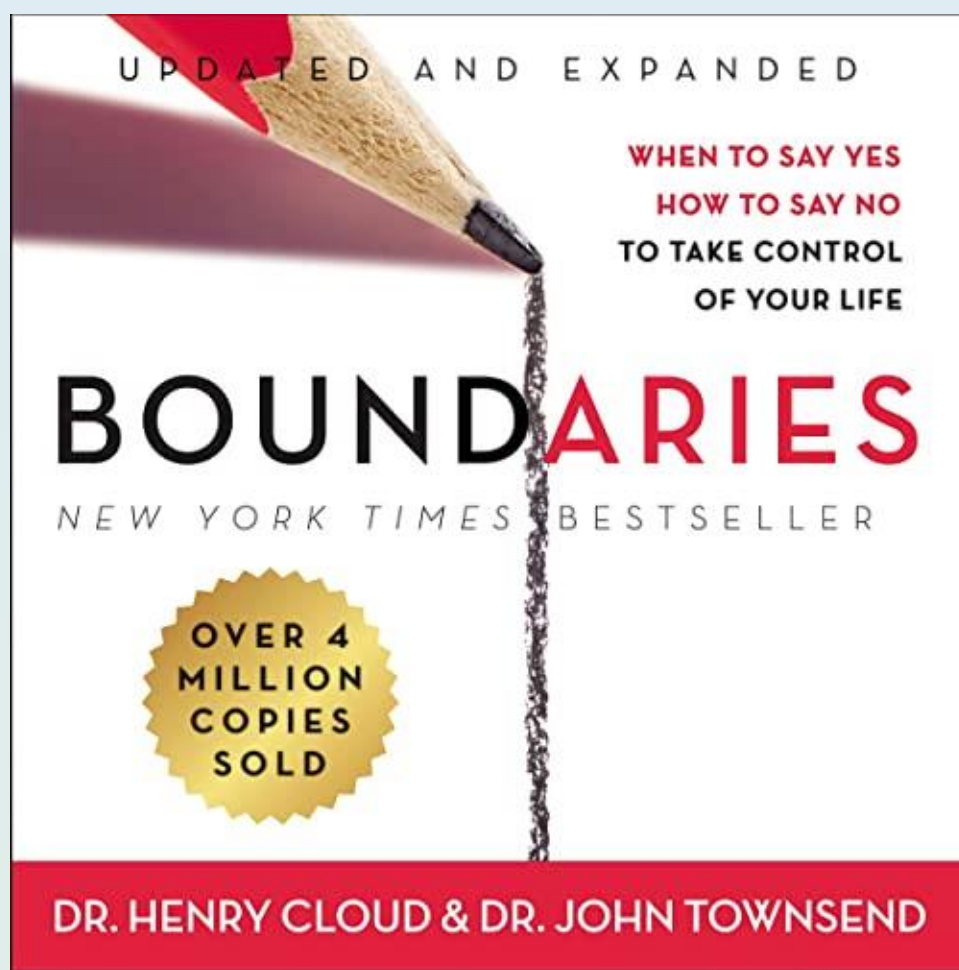
Exploring Boundary Terminology in Psychology and Popular Culture



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Introduction

- Boundaries as limits which prevent or protect from harm
 - “Healthy boundaries are flexible enough that we can choose what to let in and what to keep out.”(Katherine 1991).
- Despite scarce critique or scientific studies, “boundaries” are the subject of popular psychology books and pervade popular culture. The first book on boundaries is psychotherapist Anne Katherine’s *Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin* (1991).



Methods

N-grams

- Identified words of interest in popular books on boundaries and compared these words usage trends on the Google Books N-gram Viewer with the English (2019) corpus.

Psychology Today

- Over 8,000 articles published in *Psychology Today* mention “boundaries.” I used the rvest package to webscrape the content of these articles published between 1992 and 2018 and compile them into a dataset
- From these articles, 800 were randomly selected and compiled into a corpus that was used for topic modeling with a Latent Dirichlet Allocation.

Research Questions

- Where and when do “boundaries” and related terminology appear in English texts?
- What can *Psychology Today* demonstrate about the popularization of boundaries and their usage in popular psychology texts?

Results

N-grams

- There is a substantial increase in boundary and boundary-related terms from the 1980s onward.

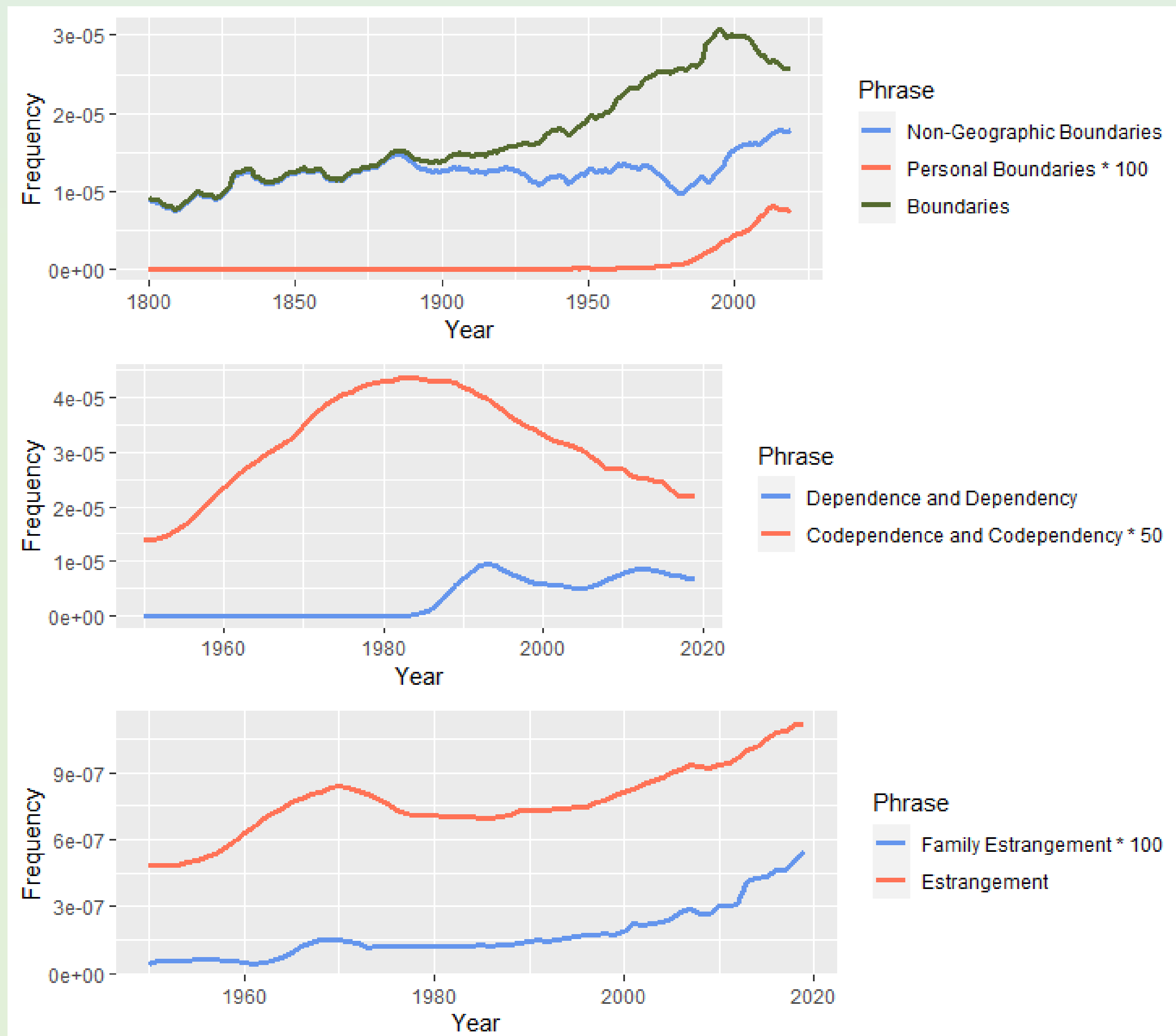


Figure 1 - Google N-grams

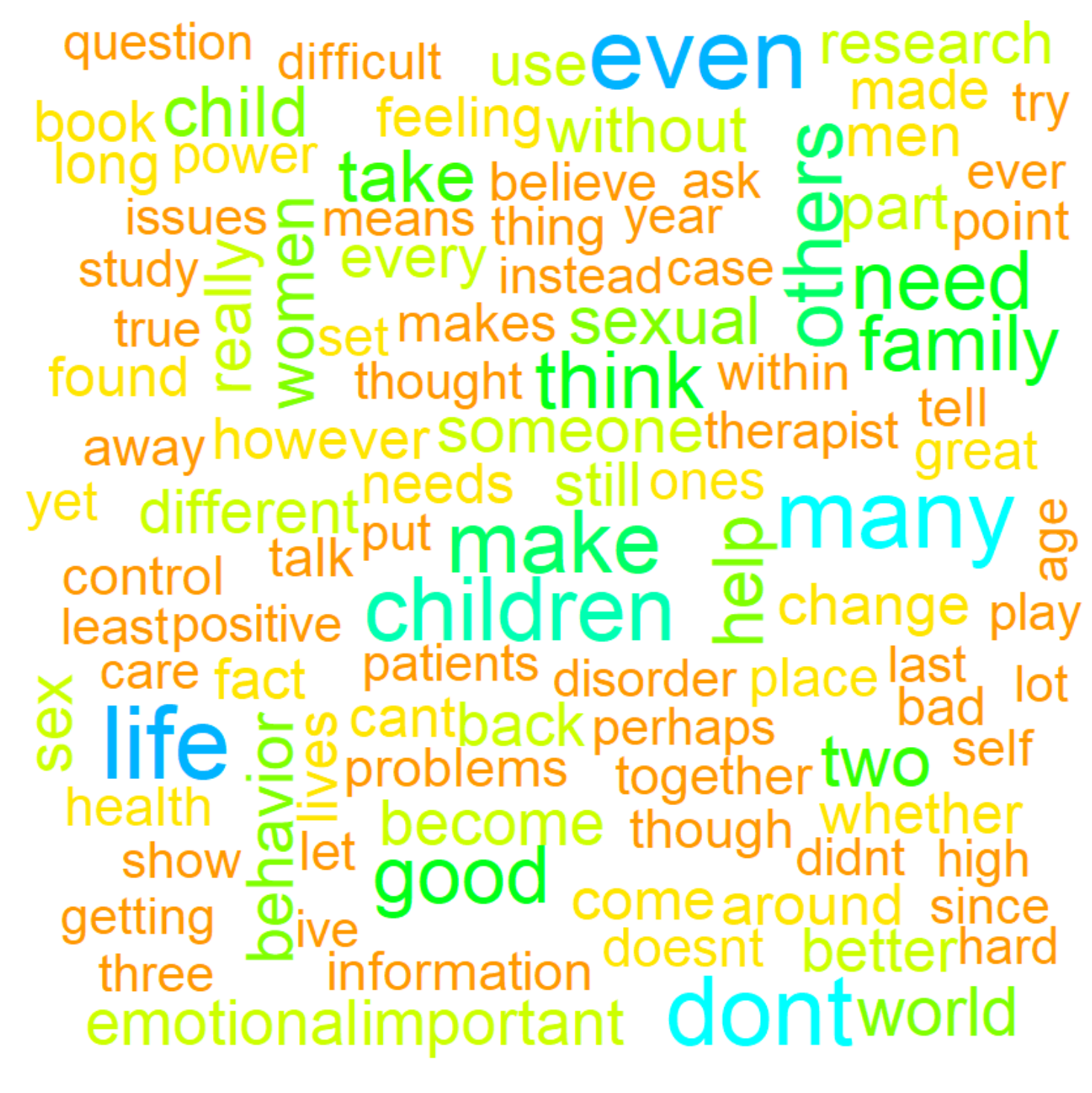


Figure 2- Psychology Today Word Cloud

Psychology Today

- Increase in articles mentioning boundaries in 2008 (Fig. 3).
- Variety of topics covered from family to DSM disorders (Fig. 2, Fig. 4)

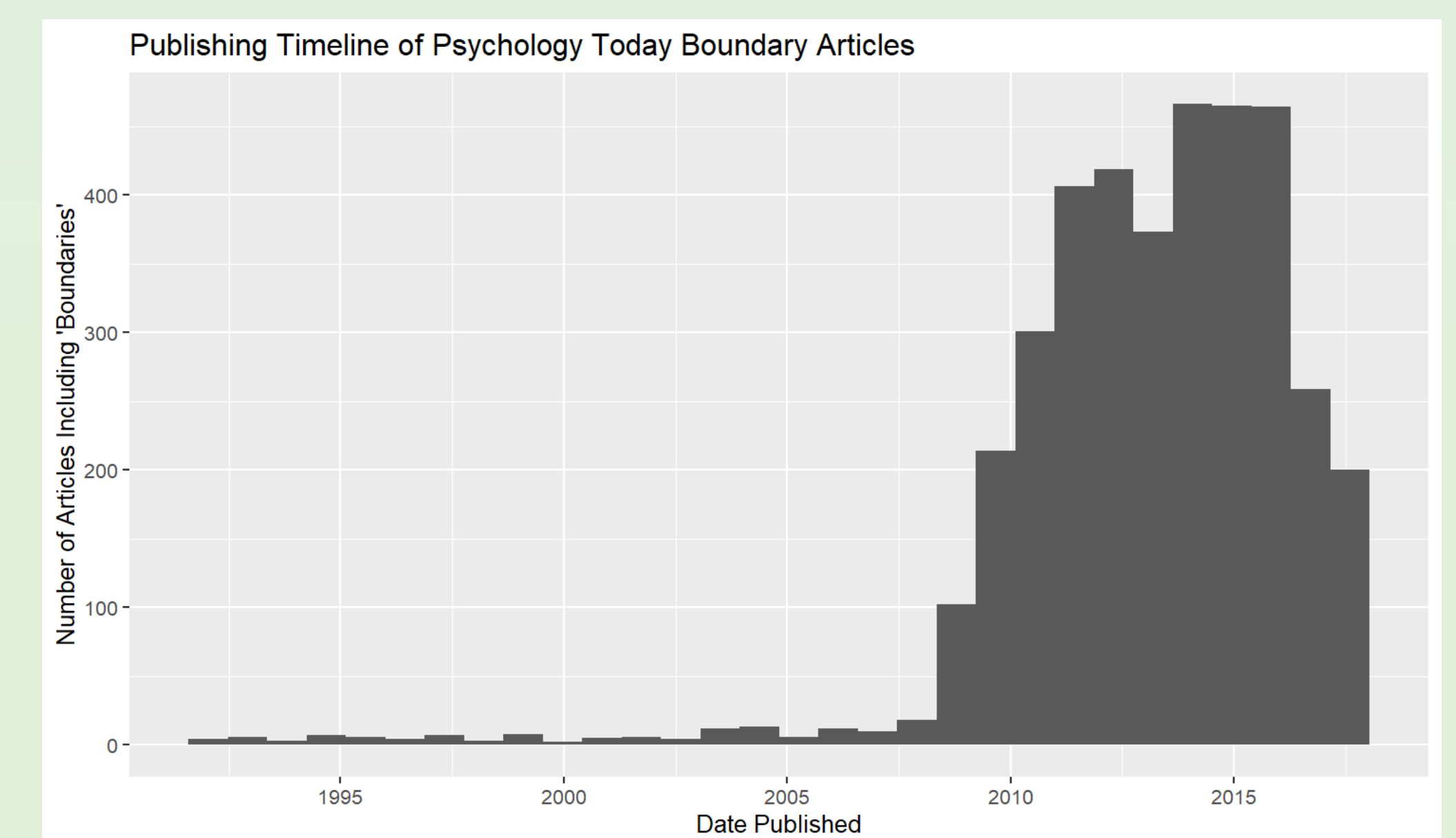


Figure 3

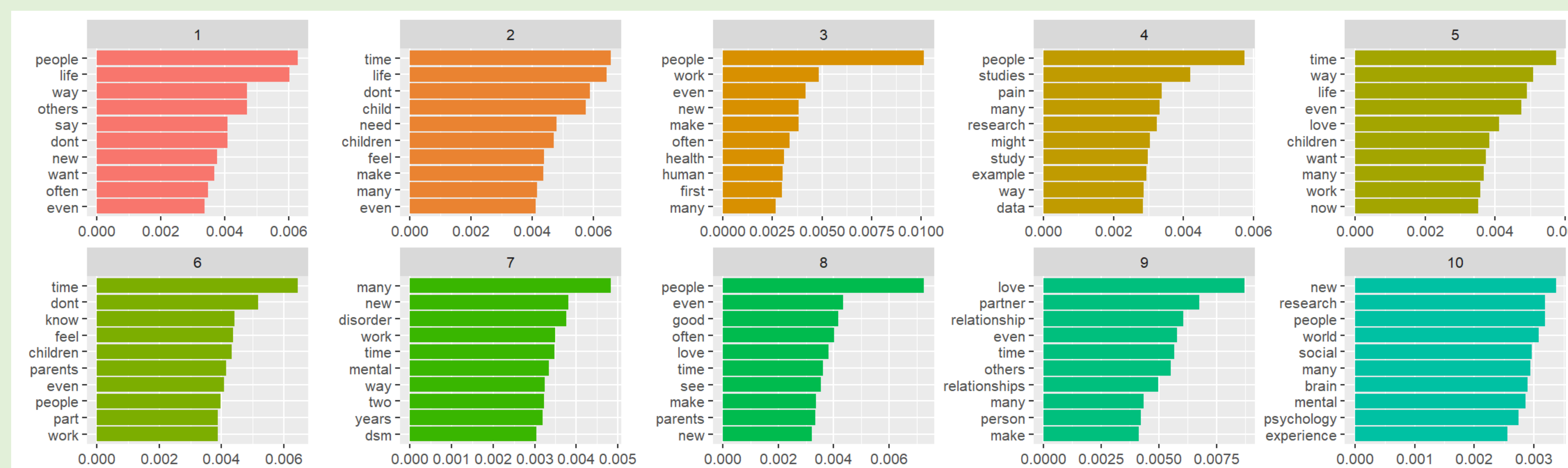


Figure 4- 10 of 20 topic models for Psychology Today articles which referenced “boundaries”

Discussion

- Away from geography:** boundaries are exclusively used in geographic descriptions until 1880 when the N-grams for non-geographic boundaries and boundaries diverge, indicating uses of “boundaries” in other contexts (Fig. 1).
- In 1980 there is a significant increase in the use “boundaries” which parallels the phrase “personal boundaries,” as well as other terms like “dependency” and “estrangement” (Fig 1).
- Family Systems:** The N-grams of “family estrangement” and “estrangement” rise starting in the 1970s and increasing to the present. In Fig. 2, words related to family are some of the most common.
- Therapist/Client:** Psychologists are concerned with the line between therapist and client in the 1980s (Scharness, 1981). In Fig. 2, the words, “patients” and “therapist” could indicate how this interest continues in *Psychology Today*.
- Psychological Science:** Fig. 4 shows the presence of other words like “DSM”, “research”, “study”, and “disorder.” These are of interest given the lack of scientific research on boundaries.

Thank you to Professor Pavel Oleinikov

Anne Katherine. *Boundaries: Where You End And I Begin*. 1991.
 Gerald Schames. Boundary issues in countertransference: A developmental perspective. *Clin Soc Work* 9, 244–257 (1981).
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 Jean-Baptiste Michel et. al. *Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books*. *Science* (Published online ahead of print: 12/16/2010)