

## Chapter 9

# Human personality in the globalized culture of choice and change

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### Introduction

Globalization is clearly “the sign of the times.” Its effects are patent in the field of culture, where the once precise boundaries between “high” and “low” culture have largely been effaced by the almost universal availability of mass media, as well as the virtual disappearance of traditional aristocracies and the ideologies that upheld them. Moreover, the increasingly sophisticated technology of modern communication makes it possible to open even very local cultures to the entire world, and vice versa. Institutional, disciplinary, and national boundaries are now so easily crossed that their very existence seems to some an annoying anachronism. Rousseau’s anguished cry, “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains!”, seems out of date. Those few remaining states and societies where strict regimentation still applies thus seem all the more shocking, for they are not only oppressive, but they also seem to be utterly out of touch with the times. The fall of Communism, the information revolution, the globalization of the economy, the mingling and homogenization of races, cultures, languages – all these trends, unfolding at the same time, seem to be part of the same ineluctable historical process, leading to our ultimate liberation from virtually all external constraints on the freedom to realize our potential. Rousseau’s chains, it seems, have finally been broken, though it took rather more than the French Revolution to bring this about.

All this may seem unduly optimistic – as indeed it is. Freedom from constraints, it turns out, is not the road to happiness for one and all, or even for many. Pluralism makes so many choices available, while creating the illusion that there are no costs involved, that many people seem to have lost, rather than found, their souls. Unbridled freedom of choice does not facilitate the process of developing self-regulatory skills, when the choice of moral and political values is made in much the same way as the choice of toothpaste. The result

of often completely random individual choices among different products of human thought and tradition is often creolization, that is, the creation of bizarre hybrids that are neither fish nor fowl, cold nor hot. The new qualia that are thus created by the individual are not always happy inventions. Those who combine various meanings without attempting to reconcile them to each other or refer them to a standard can be compared to the cook who makes a dish by throwing into the pot whatever comes to hand: the result may be serendipity, a delicious ragout, or (more likely) an unpalatable pot of garbage.

This point is well made by Richard H. Brown (2003: 33), who describes an event he witnessed. Observing preparations for the traditional dance of the Yawar fiesta in South America, he saw one of the dancers make just such a “hash” of the symbolism of the ancient ritual mingled with the iconography of the Pepsi generation:

He was to be the condor and his attendants were dressing him in hand-woven cloth and adornments, and about to crown him with an actual condor preserved and formed into a headdress. What struck me most was that beneath his costume of the dance, the young man was dressed in a Batman tee-shirt and Nike sneakers. I’m still not sure of the meaning of what I saw.

Although Brown does not attempt to delve into the hermeneutics of what he saw, his phenomenological analysis of the heedless incongruence of condor headdress and Nike sneakers is unerringly direct. The diversity and changeability of the cultural environment has led to the formation of new qualia of personality, created by the once unthinkable, but now largely unthinking combination of elements derived from divergent sources. Not all of the results are coherent, or even palatable, especially when they do not result from conscious choices. The strength of a tradition-bound society (or a rigidly ideological or fundamentalist one) is that little or nothing is left to the whims and fancies of individuals; in any situation foreseen by the tradition (or the ideology or religion) there is a predefined right and wrong way to react, which is known to everyone in the society. The weakness is, that when these same individuals act in a particular way only because there is no viable or even thinkable alternative, they have not internalized the values represented by the traditional behavior. They do not know why *this* action is always done in *this* way, so that when the social structure is seriously challenged or breaks down, the traditional ways are swept away without much resistance. “We will do the condor dance,” the young man might well explain,

“because tourists come to watch it and pay us for it, and I will wear my Nike sneakers under the costume because I like them. What’s the problem?”

The transition to a modern, globalized society means that a number of alternatives to traditional ways become available, and the growth of consumerism means that the choice between values on many different psychological levels becomes at once trivial and idiosyncratic. The individual who does not wish to drift through life must find ways to replace within the psyche the framework of regulatory constraints that has disappeared with the collapse of an authoritarian tradition or regime (Wrosch & Freund 2001). By the same token, the lines between private and public, social and psychological, become blurred, both for the individual striving to live a decent life in this environment of change and choice, and for the scientists studying human behavior, whether they are by training sociologists, like Richard H. Brown (1987, 2003), or psychologists, like Kazimierz Obuchowski (2002). Coming from the perspective of two different disciplines, both of these authors have called attention to the emergence of something called “self-authoring” as an alternative to chaos in the context of global change. From the sociological perspective, this means the replacement of institutions with communities, often formed across the traditional boundaries of nations, cultures, and languages, where the individual, rather than being a member of one nation or one culture, which determines her choices in an entire range of situations, becomes simultaneously a member of many different, often loose and transient communities (or markets). One is born into a nation or culture, but becomes a member of such communities largely as a matter of choice.

From the psychological perspective, on the other hand, self-authoring takes a more inward direction. When the larger society (and often even the family) has largely ceased to dictate the direction of life, the only possible strategy for effective functioning in life is to choose one’s own way. The collapse of institutions forces the individual to become much more self-dependent. Rather than accepting a role ascribed by institutions, authorities, or traditions, the individual consciously and deliberately chooses the norms that provide the basis for choices. This is especially evident in social interactions. Instead of looking to particular institutions for help and guidance, the individual seeks out personal contacts (“networking”) and assumes individual responsibility. Those who can manage this become by the same token more and more creative. Based on individual experiences, they can reorganize their own identity. When the whole world is perceived



as a dynamic entity in constant flux, the individual ceases to grasp for illusory stability and is ready to change at a moment's notice. Then, in the absence of a transpersonal value system dictated by tradition and authority, or a personal value system constructed according to self-consistent and consciously chosen principles, it is commercial values that most often become paramount. The market that organizes socio-economic life is also the indicator of the worth of individual transitions and achievements, determining what is good, what is desired, what can or should be acquired to achieve profit or advantage here and now. That is why Brown (2003: 32) concludes that the social identity of a person who is not a self-author

...appears not only fragile and diffuse, but also rearrangeable almost as one wishes, or until the next breeze blows through. Social rules and positions, careers, nationalities, even one's body shape or sex can change very rapidly, particularly in those so-called advanced societies where there is a high division of labor, high social mobility, and sufficient discretionary income to support jogging, dieting, make-overs, plastic surgery, and other ways of modifying the body/self.

This accounts for the lack of depth in the so-called "yuppie" personality, oriented to consumption, not as a means to pleasure, but as an end in itself, the pre-eminent value.

This rather dim view of modern society is not fully shared by Obuchowski, whose theory of the self-authoring personality (2002) is based on the claim that the present instability of Euroatlantic civilization need not lead to the complete leveling of all values. There is one condition: culture is to be interpreted in terms of the individual's purpose and intentions, and not as an end in itself, to which the fulfillment of individual goals and aspirations is to be subordinated. Analyzing the transitions that have already occurred in European culture, Obuchowski points out an ordered sequence of changes in personality that has finally led to the formation of the self-author, through at least two prior stages in the formation of personality:

- the "role-player." This personality is flat and featureless, because it is fully determined by the outward demands of the situation, and specifically of the existing power structure. Under the "surface meaning" of behavior there is no depth, since the behavior of the individual reflects back to society what the society wants and expects, rather than reflecting some inner reality (Pachalska 2003; MacQueen et al. 2004). The roles that define the individual's identity and personality were defined before her birth and cannot be changed, it is the person who must be

made to fit the role. The individual is predictable, willfully ignorant, and passive in respect to established authority, regardless of its legitimacy. In the Communist period, this was *homo sovieticus*, but other ideologies and systems also expected a high level of conformism, feudalism and capitalism not excepted. In the more fluid situation of modern urban culture and mass media, these persons seek out and adopt a "pre-packaged" self, such as "yuppie," which contains within itself a built-in code of dress and conduct, thus freeing the individual from the burden of making choices. In extreme cases they may join sects or subscribe to fundamentalist systems for the same reason.

- the "learner." Here there is a certain flexibility of personal traits due to the effects of the learning process, as the individual carefully studies the environment and other people to see what works and what does not work in the changed circumstances. However, this individual still lacks psychological distance or interiorized values. She is still an object in the environment, inherently unable to either direct or understand the changes taking place. Thus the individual's process of personal development is mostly unintentional and highly context-dependent, focused on understanding "how things work," and not on understanding oneself. Like the role-player, the learner is apt to be unaware of the underlying principles of the system she is learning to manipulate.

According to Obuchowski (2000a, b, c) a new kind of personality began to appear in the late sixties, when the upheavals and changes that took place in many parts of the world, primarily among the restless youth of those periods (suffice it to mention "1968" to a French adult, or "March 1968" to a Pole of the same age group) led to what Obuchowski calls the "subject revolution" and the formation of a new kind of personality. Unlike the two former types of personality, the self-authoring personality allows the person to regulate her own development. Self-authors, although constantly in a state of becoming, experience world and self in a fully conscious, reflective way, rather than in the stimulus-response loop of behaviorist psychology. This transition to a new quality is well described by Brown (1987: 129):

The revolution has served as a rite of passage, and those who have undergone it experience a new gestalt. They and their world are no longer the same. The new vision is not convincing because it describes the world more precisely. The vision is compelling because it creates a world that is more existentially adequate.

The main premise of Obuchowski's theory is that the concept of self-authoring personality is composed of three basic dimensions – becoming a subject, becoming a person, and developing subjective standards of evaluation – each of which includes several subcategories (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** The structure of the self-authoring personality (Obuchowski 2000a).

becoming a subject	developing self-knowledge
	initiating actions based on self-knowledge
	applying appropriate means to strive for desired goals
	acting intelligently
	developing intentional autonomy
	creative interpretation of individual desires
	creation of an individual model of the world
	self-creation
becoming a person	psychological distance
	on-going development of personality
	defined purpose in life
developing subjective standards of evaluation	self as a source of regulation of the direction of life
	individual selection of goals that are to be achieved
	world as a place for self-realization

These traits allow the individual to play a more active role in organizing her own functioning. Based on the abstract code, she shifts from an institutionally conditioned way of life, ignoring normative regulations, and structuring life on the mechanism of creative adaptation. This means that all action decisions – individual choice between multiple possible paths of development, selection of appropriate aspirations and goals, development of the most effective strategies and the ways and means to attain these goals and so on – are determined by a vision of a desired future, which can and should be fulfilled. A person creates her own model of the future self and the possible patterns of her relationship with the external environment at various social and cultural levels. This desired future state becomes the most stable factor in the individual psyche, directing her individual development in the highly fluid civilization of progressing globalization.

In this theory, the human being is not subject to any restrictions in developing a self-authoring personality. There are no sex or age limitations. The whole process is very dynamic and resembles an ongoing dialogue between the individual and the surrounding world. Step by step, the individual learns how to use the external world for her own purposes, avoiding passive adaptation to unstable conditions.



In this way the person begins to win the adaptive competition with the environment, and becomes more and more autonomous.

Of course, there are some factors that guide the direction of self-realization. Obuchowski indicates education as an aid in both organizing abstract representations of the basic frames of personal identity<sup>1</sup> and structuring temporal frameworks of life.<sup>2</sup> However, some persons may develop mature cognition based on individual experiences even without formal education. This may possibly be a more suitable choice for older persons.

Several empirical studies have been conducted to collect data describing the stage of personality development of persons in Polish society in the light of Obuchowski's theory, especially in terms of the level of self-authoring in the personality and the nature of the respondents' functioning in time (Blachnio 2003). Some of this data is briefly described below.

## Material and methods

The present study is a part of a larger research project on the temporal perspective of persons with a self-authoring personality. The sample consisted of 773 people in different age groups (adolescents, young adults, and older adults). All three age subgroups were evenly balanced in terms of gender. The respondents presented different levels of education (primary school, vocational school, secondary school, and university). This made it possible to assess different sources of variation.

Both of the operative constructs – the self-authoring personality and a psychological future orientation – were measured with questionnaires:

- the 100-item Authorial Personality Questionnaire (POA) by Ożarowski et al.;

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<sup>1</sup> According to Obuchowski (2000a,b,c) an individual has to answer three basic questions – *who am I? what is the world?; who am I in the world?* – in order to successfully manage decisions dealing with the shape and direction of her own life.

<sup>2</sup> Especially, anticipation of distant future states requires the mental maturity and capacity to arrange abstract representations into a meaningful before-and-after order. Evidence for the importance of the individual's cognitive development has been provided by the neuropsychological and neurolinguistic studies of Maria Pačalska and Bruce Duncan MacQueen (2002), who argue that we experience time based on three distinguishable but inter-related faculties – perception, memory, and imagination – which provide images of the present, the past, and the future respectively.

- the Temporal Orientation Questionnaire by Nosal & Bajcar;
- the Future Anxiety Scale by Zaleski.

The experiment sought to measure the progress of developing a self-authoring personality in a sample of Polish society. A quantitative methodology was also used to examine if and how a strongly authorial personality is related to future orientation. All the participants were informed of the aim of study.

### The authorial personality – empirical evidence

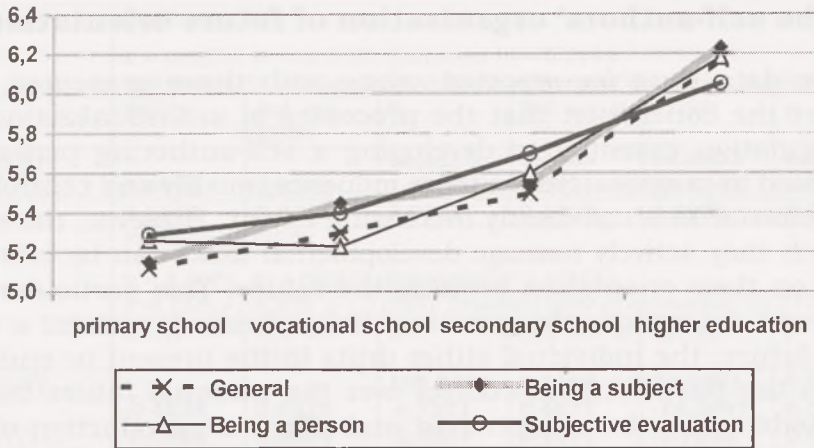
Among 773 respondents there were 122 respondents (15.8%) who placed in the highest score bracket on the POA, which allows them to be categorized as self-authors. In order to test the hypothesis that age has no impact on personality factors, the HSD Tukey test was conducted. The results showed some differences (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** The significance of differences in self-authoring personality among the respective age groups.

Tukey Test for groups with differing numbers of participants												
	General score Err: MS = 744.18 df = 770			Being a subject Err: MS = 237.59 df = 770			Being a person Err: MS = 79.11 df = 770			Subjective evaluation Err: MS = 26.55 df = 770		
	{1}	{2}	{3}	{1}	{2}	{3}	{1}	{2}	{3}	{1}	{2}	{3}
{1} Adolescence	186.95	193.28	190.78	106.55	109.66	109.51	47.06	49.26	47.90	33.32	34.36	33.38
{2} Young Adulthood	<b>0.013</b>		0.682	<b>0.039</b>		0.996	<b>0.008</b>		0.346	<b>0.037</b>		0.190
{3} Late Adulthood	0.406	0.682		0.189	0.996		0.676	0.346		0.994	0.190	

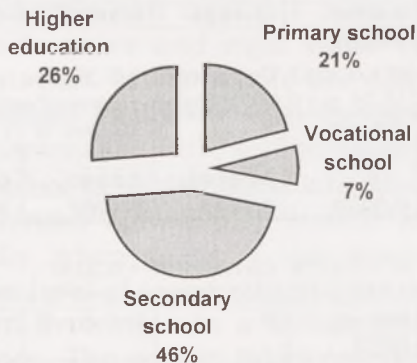
Additional and more detailed analysis showed that the observed differences were not caused by the age variable, but rather were associated with the level of education attained by the respondents. These results are very important, because they indicate that even the oldest generation of respondents (Poles age 60 and over) can become more self-authoring. If their previous life experience in the Communist system did not unduly restrict or thwart their personality development, strong self-regulatory tendencies can and should be developed. Further analysis showed no significant gender impact on the personality factor, while again it was education that seemed to be the most important source of variation (see Figure 1).





**Fig. 1.** Average results (in %) for self-authoring in groups with different levels of formal education.

These results suggest that those people who had received the best education, i.e. those who had the chance to study at a university, presented a higher level of self-authoring in the personality. However, it should be emphasized that the lack of formal education does not restrict the individual's chances to become a self-author. The individual can always develop her self-knowledge based on her own experience, though in that case some additional personality factors are probably needed, such as openness, expressiveness, a low level of dogmatism, and low neuroticism. The data already available seem to support this assumption (see Figure 2), but the results still need to be verified in further research.



**Fig. 2.** The percentage of self-authors with particular levels of education.

## The self-authors' organization of future orientation

The data thus far reported, along with those presented here, support the conclusion that the processes of individualization and self-regulation essential to developing a self-authoring personality are indeed in progress. Self-authors influence, modify and control their own behavior to a constantly increasing extent. However, the extent to which they actively manage developmental tasks can be estimated based on their orientation towards the future. This particular time dimension determines the growth of the individual; without a sense of the future, the individual either drifts in the present or endlessly repeats the past. Without control over the personal future there is no possibility for the independent and effective introduction of new and positive changes in the life course over time. That is why the present study attempted to determine if and how the authorial personality is related to future orientation.

The data collected suggest that persons with a more self-authoring personality do indeed show a stronger future orientation than those with a less self-authoring personality. To examine the relative importance of personality differences and the future dimension, multiple regression analysis was performed (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Results of multiple regression analysis

FUTURE						
R = 0.4878 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.2380 Corrected R <sup>2</sup> = 0.2340 F (4,768) = 59.966 p < 0.0000 Standard error of estimation: 7.7713						
	BETA	Std. err. BETA	B	Std. err. B	t (768)	p
W. WOLNY			<b>52.3932</b>	<b>0.9580</b>	<b>54.6894</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
POA	<b>0.3700</b>	<b>0.0320</b>	<b>1.6649</b>	<b>0.1438</b>	<b>11.5800</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
EDUCATION	<b>0.1793</b>	<b>0.0328</b>	<b>1.6753</b>	<b>0.3066</b>	<b>5.4647</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
AGE	<b>-0.2940</b>	<b>0.0325</b>	<b>-3.4621</b>	<b>0.3825</b>	<b>-9.0512</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
GOAL ATTAINMENT						
R = 0.6126 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.3753 Corrected R <sup>2</sup> = 0.3720 F (4,768) = 115.34 p < 0.0000 Standard error of estimation: 6.5221						
	BETA	Std. err. BETA	B	Std. err. B	t (768)	p
W. WOLNY			<b>48.5146</b>	<b>0.8040</b>	<b>60.3404</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
POA	<b>0.6052</b>	<b>0.0290</b>	<b>2.5237</b>	<b>0.1207</b>	<b>20.9141</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
PLANNING						
R = 0.4667 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.2178 Corrected R <sup>2</sup> = 0.2137 F (4,768) = 53.462 p < 0.0000 Standard error of estimation: 7.9806						
	BETA	Std. err. BETA	B	Std. err. B	t (768)	p
W. WOLNY			<b>38.3213</b>	<b>0.9838</b>	<b>38.9515</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
POA	<b>0.4162</b>	<b>0.0324</b>	<b>1.8982</b>	<b>0.1477</b>	<b>12.8553</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
EDUCATION	<b>0.1337</b>	<b>0.0332</b>	<b>1.2663</b>	<b>0.3148</b>	<b>4.0223</b>	<b>0.000063</b>

TIME USAGE						
R = 0.5274 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.2781 Corrected R <sup>2</sup> = 0.2744 F (4,768) = 73.975 p < 0.0000 Standard error of estimation: 3.8960						
	BETA	Std. err. BETA	B	Std. err. B	t (768)	p
W. WOLNY			<b>28.3515</b>	<b>0.4803</b>	<b>59.0303</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
POA	<b>0.4876</b>	<b>0.0311</b>	<b>1.1299</b>	<b>0.0721</b>	<b>15.6745</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
AGE	<b>0.1548</b>	<b>0.0316</b>	<b>0.9388</b>	<b>0.1918</b>	<b>4.8958</b>	<b>0.000001</b>
FUTURE ANXIETY						
R = 0.5073 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.2574 Corrected R <sup>2</sup> = 0.2535 F (4,768) = 66.535 p < 0.0000 Standard error of estimation: 25.277						
	BETA	Std. err. BETA	B	Std. err. B	t (768)	p
W. WOLNY			<b>105.9411</b>	<b>3.1160</b>	<b>33.9991</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
POA	<b>-0.4538</b>	<b>0.0315</b>	<b>-6.7271</b>	<b>0.4677</b>	<b>-14.3847</b>	<b>0.000000</b>
EDUCATION	<b>-0.0968</b>	<b>0.0324</b>	<b>-2.9804</b>	<b>0.9971</b>	<b>-2.9890</b>	<b>0.002888</b>
AGE	<b>0.1151</b>	<b>0.0321</b>	<b>4.4682</b>	<b>1.2441</b>	<b>3.5915</b>	<b>0.000350</b>
SEX	<b>0.1815</b>	<b>0.0312</b>	<b>10.6120</b>	<b>1.8216</b>	<b>5.8257</b>	<b>0.000000</b>

An analysis of the data presented in Table 3 indicates that in this population the self-authoring personality was a major contributor especially to those dimensions that allow the individual to better organize and use time. It seems clear that personality has a stronger influence on the development of time perspective than demographic variables (age, gender, and education).

## Conclusions

The present article suggests that self-regulatory skills are becoming a characteristic trait of many persons in modern society. Globalization is contributing to a situation in which externally imposed norms have ceased to define the possible directions of development. This is caused by the dynamic and unstable nature of the present world, where adherence to rules and rigid value systems seems to lead rather to disadaptation. Many people are displaying new individual predispositions, which Kazimierz Obuchowski (2002) categorizes as a new quality of personality – the self-authoring personality. However, becoming a self-author is by definition a highly individualized process, not related to calendar age. In the present study this was demonstrated empirically when none of the examined cohorts differed significantly in the level of acquired self-authoring features.

The process of evolving into a self-author leads to measurable changes in behavior. The person takes responsibility for her lifelong development (Pachalska 2003a). To control the life course she shifts the emphasis from “here and now” to an intentionally organized personal



vision of a better future. This time dimension absorbs most of the person's attention on a daily basis. The data showed some valuable insights into this phenomenon. Of course some further investigation is necessary, but so far the predictions of Kazimierz Obuchowski and Richard Harvey Brown seem to be accurate. It cannot be denied that "they and their world are no longer the same" (Brown 1987: 129).

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