Personal Projects and Free Traits: Personality and Motivation Reconsidered

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Abstract

I review a social ecological model of human development that stimulates reconsideration of some traditional views in personality and motivational psychology. I propose that the quality of lives is contingent upon the sustainable pursuit of core personal projects. Project pursuit may occasionally require the suspension of biogenic fixed traits and the adoption of 'free traits', and I review some preliminary research on this recent topic. Free traits are culturally scripted patterns of conduct that are strategically crafted to advance projects about which a person cares deeply. Biogenic introverts, for example, may act as extraverts in order to advance projects requiring expressions of enthusiastic assertiveness. This may not only enhance well-being by promoting successful project pursuit but may also compromise well-being because of challenges to the autonomic nervous system. The costs of free-traited behavior can be mitigated by the provision and use of restorative resources. When viewed through this perspective seeming inconsistencies and paradoxes of daily life become less puzzling as well as more intriguing. By tracing these themes through the lives of a hypothetical couple, George and Elizabeth, I hope to provide a stimulant to theory, research, and applications that can both explain and enhance the quality of lives.

Elizabeth seems to be an agreeable extravert. Recently, she has been partying heartily, entertaining with gusto, and generally acting as an outgoing, even ebullient, creature. As her friends say, Liz is amazing. But today, she is in the hospital emergency room seeking help for something she can't quite understand. She is also text messaging George, her romantic and business partner, but finds it hard to compress her concerns into a pithy e-pistle. Her problems and perplexity on this Thursday morning are one focus of this article.

George is an exceptionally creative software entrepreneur, and his small firm, Traq, is his 'baby'. In only 2 years, three highly original products have already gone to market and four more are ready to launch. Most nights, he is up very late in hot pursuit of cool projects. As his colleagues say, George is awesome. Today, he has dropped everything and is speeding up town to see Elizabeth at the hospital. For the last few weeks, she has

not been the typical Liz he knows and loves. George's creative success at Traq and his puzzlement over Elizabeth will also be focal concerns of this article.

I will examine these hypothetical characters from the perspective of a social ecological model of human development (Little, 1987, 1996, 1999a; Little & Joseph, 2007; Little & Ryan, 1979). The model arose, in part, as a way of resolving the person–situation debate in psychology by focusing on transactional units of analysis in which persons and situations were organically linked (Little, 2007). Two conceptual units central to the model will be highlighted (i.e., personal projects and free traits) with a focus on how these are related to the quality of lives.

Personal projects are extended sets of personally relevant action that range from daily chores (e.g., 'Order more USB keys, again') to defining life commitments (e.g., 'Be sensitive to my partner's needs, always'). They may be self-focused or dedicated to others, submitted to begrudgingly or pursued with zealous intensity. Research has confirmed that the quality of lives is enhanced when people are engaged in personal projects that they regard as meaningful, manageable, not unduly stressful, and supported by others (Little, 1989). Feeling a sense of efficacy in the pursuit of one's projects is consistently associated with well-being (Little, 1989) but particularly so if these pursuits are self-concordant (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Projects that involve active approach are more salutary than those that are motivated by avoidance (Elliot & Church, 1997). Some projects serve to anchor an individual's project system as a whole and are deeply infused with a sense of self-identity (Little, 1993). These foundational, self-defining projects we call *core* projects.

A key proposition of our approach is that human flourishing is contingent upon the *sustainable* pursuit of core projects (Little, 1999b, 2000a). Our concern with the multiple sources influencing the shape of human lives over time represents a continuation of the personological tradition started at the Harvard Psychological Clinic (Little, 2007; Murray, 1938; White, 1959, 1975). Methodologically, it comprises a suite of assessment methods, with modules for the elicitation and appraisal of personal projects, assessing their hierarchical structure and measuring their impact on self and others (Little, 1983; Little & Gee, 2007a,b).

Free traits are strategic enactments designed to advance core projects. They arise out of the interplay of what we have termed biogenic, sociogenic, and idiogenic sources of human action (Little, 2007; Little & Joseph, 2007). Biogenic sources include genetic and evolutionary based influences and may operate without awareness (Little, 2005). Sociogenic sources comprise norms, rules, and scripts, and they, too, may elicit action without conscious activity. Idiogenic sources are the valued concerns that people pursue in their lives and comprise their personal constructions, commit-ments, and core projects. They are typically the product of self-reflection and therefore require some degree of conscious deliberation.

Free traits emerge when individuals enact sociogenic scripts to advance idiogenic aims, irrespective of the person's biogenic dispositions. A biogenic introvert acting in an extraverted manner so as to advance a core project of 'keeping our clients happy' is engaging in free-traited behavior. Another key proposition of our approach is that free traits may enhance life quality by promoting core projects, but protracted free-traited behavior may compromise emotional and physical health.

Personal projects and free traits, particularly the subtleties of their negotiation and sustainability, raise some new questions about health, happiness, and the course of human lives. In so doing, they stimulate a reconsideration of conventional approaches to motivational and personality psychology.

Personal Projects and Free Traits: A Social Ecological Perspective

A simplified and schematic representation of the social ecological model is displayed in Figure 1. As depicted graphically, we conceptualize life quality as a function of both stable and dynamic features of persons and contexts and of personal action constructs (PAC units) – the concerns, projects, and tasks that animate human lives (Little, 1999a, 1999b; Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992).

After introducing each component of the model, I will highlight the distinctive impact of personal projects and free traits. Elizabeth and George will be invoked as plausible exemplars to make this body of theory, method, and research more vivid and to stimulate conceptual and applied explorations.

Quality of lives: The varieties of well beings

It will be helpful to start at the bottom of Figure 1 – the block of variables that assess our fundamental concern with the quality of human lives. Health, happiness, and a broad spectrum of competencies, including impacts of individuals on their environments, are among the features we explore in Block F. Both subjective evaluations of well-being are assessed and hard indicators such as biological markers of healthy pregnancy, profit margins in entrepreneurial ventures, and academic and work performance (Little & Grant, 2007).

Different measures of life quality are not necessarily positively correlated. Happiness and a sense of meaning in one's life may be independent aspects of well-being (McGregor & Little, 1998; Ryff, 1989). A sense of meaning may sometimes be achieved only through compromising physical health. Elizabeth's sudden illness will illustrate how engaging in free traits can exact such a cost. George's entrepreneurial success will also illustrate the complexity of life quality. In his work projects at Traq, he is brilliant; in his interpersonal projects at home, he just doesn't get it. His quality of
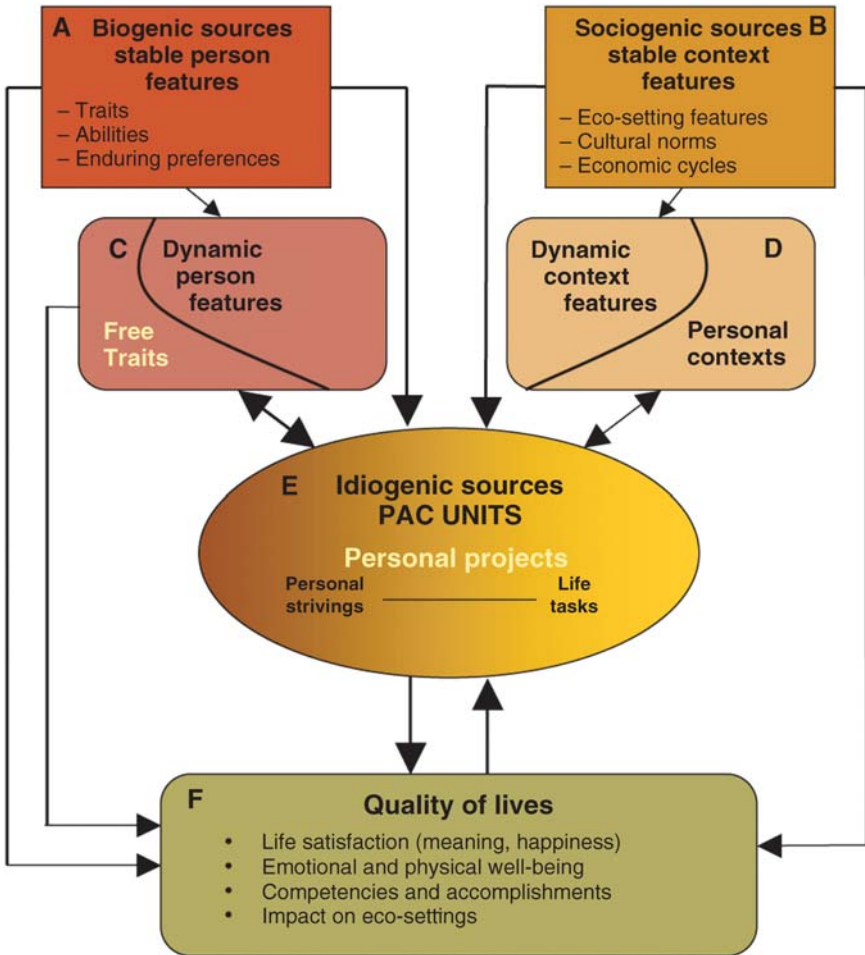
Figure 1 Social ecological model of the quality of lives. The saturation of color in this figure represents the relative degree of fixedness, or difficulty in changing the source, with greater saturation representing greater resistance to change. The blend of colors in the box of Personal Projects represents its fusion of both person features in red and contextual features (in orange).

life is going to be compromised because soon, his *core* projects will be stopped dead in their tracks.

Personal features: Fixed and free traits

Box A of Figure 1 represents stable features of human personality and individual differences such as temperament, traits, and abilities. Such features are robust predictors of well-being (e.g., the links between extra-version and stability with happiness; e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1980).

Free traits are highlighted in Box C. A truly neurotic individual who, for the whole month of May, is surprisingly stable, a biogenic introvert who acts as a 'pseudo-extravert', an utterly delightful person who has been acting like a complete jerk – each might be engaging in free-traited behavior. Free traits can have both direct effects on well-being and indirectly through their influence on personal projects.

The concept of free traits is explicitly meant to augment, not replace, notions of fixed traits – indeed, biogenic influences, such as sensitivity to neocortical arousal or low thresholds for activation of autonomic responses, are a constitutive part of the theory of free traits (Little, 1999a). Conventional trait theory postulates a general *concordance* between geno-typic dispositions and phenotypic behavior. Person-oriented individuals, for example, engage in a high frequency of sociable pursuits and they both generate and attend to expressive cues that stimulate further interaction (Little, 1972, 1976; McGregor, McAdams, & Little, 2006). Individuals tend to experience more positive affect in trait congruent situations, even when the trait itself might not be expected to create positive affect (Moskowitz & Côté, 1995; Swann, 1990). Disagreeable people, for example, enjoy being in situations where they are being disagreeable (see Côté and Moskowitz, 1998).

Free traits, in contrast, are constructs for explaining *disjunctions* between genotypic propensities and phenotypic appearances. Elizabeth, it will be recalled *seems* to be an agreeable extravert. Are these truly fixed features of Liz or enactments that promote her core projects of keeping Traq and George buoyant and solvent?

Contextual Features: Eco-Settings and Personal Contexts

Box B depicts relatively stable contextual features, or eco-settings that influence the course of human lives. They range from micro-level situations, through meso-level behavior settings to macro-level economic and political conditions (Little, 1987, 2000b; Little & Ryan, 1979). Like fixed traits, we see these eco-setting forces, particularly at the macro level as relatively resistant to change by the individual. Collective action, of course, may well influence these factors, but our model is primarily focused upon the forces acting upon individual lives.

Individuals do have the capacity to withstand or subvert the claims of behavior settings and to change micro-level situational pressures. Avoiding such settings is one effective strategy, but not always possible. Once one falls under their influence, however, the claim of contextual force fields is exceptionally powerful. Such contextual influences may promote a flour-ishing life or make it utterly miserable.

Box D represents idiosyncratic and flexible representations of the contexts within which individuals express their traits and enact their projects (Little, 1996). Personal contexts augment notions of fixed contexts.

The hard realities of eco-systems provide *actual* affordances and constraints on action; personal contexts comprise the *perceived* affordances, constraints, and general emotional tone of daily contexts.

PAC units and personal projects: Action in context

Box E comprises units of analysis that focus upon daily activities and pursuits. These are PAC units (Little, 1989, 1996) and have been growing in prominence as explanatory constructs in a diversity of fields (Hooker, 2002; Hooker & McAdams, 2003; Little, 1989; Little, Salmela-Aro, & Phillips, 2007). As depicted by the shading in Figure 1, PAC units can be arranged on a continuum reflecting their origin from primarily personal or primarily contextual sources. Among those arising from inner, personal sources are current concerns (Klinger, 1977) and personal strivings (Emmons, 1986). Among those arising from external, contextual generated sources are normative life tasks (Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston, & Brower, 1987). Personal goals (e.g. Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Karoly, 1999) can be seen as primarily cognitive, internal constructs, but when they are examined in terms of their pursuit, they are more conative constructs, similar but not identical to personal projects (Little, 1999b).

Personal projects occupy a central position on this particular continuum. When asked to generate personal projects, individuals list pursuits that span the full PAC spectrum, from inchoate wishes to precisely defined social expectations. Personal projects and other PAC units, since their inception, have been effective predictors of human well-being and flourishing (Little, 1989; Palys & Little, 1983).

Personal projects form a central nexus of the model, with linkages between both fixed and more fluid features of persons and contexts. They also have bi-directional links with the block of life quality measures. Personal projects can both change and be changed by the quality of life experienced by a person and have themselves been used as measures of quality of life (McGregor & Little, 1998; Omodei & Wearing, 1990). In some senses, the answer to the question 'how's life?' derives from an appraisal of how one's projects are coming along. In the case of Elizabeth and George, things have been going very well indeed: they are flourishing. But our two major propositions – having sustainable core projects and managing free traits without burning out – will help explain why everything is on hold at Traq this Thursday afternoon.

Personal Projects and Free Traits: Sustainability and Restoration

Using the social ecological model as a guide, I will examine in more detail the distinctive influence of personal projects and free traits on the quality of lives. Personal projects research now comprises a substantial literature,

much of it summarized in Little, Salmela-Aro, and Phillips (2007). Free traits are a more recent unit of analysis, and although the empirical yield is still small, it is encouraging (Bono & Vey, 2007; Little, 1996; Little & Joseph, 2007). To provide concrete instances of these constructs in action, we will focus on George's personal projects and on Elizabeth's free traits.

Personal projects and the quality of lives: Sustainable pursuit

That George is a successful entrepreneur, there can be little doubt. Hard indicators on financial success, his reputation in the software architecture community, and his total devotion to his work all confirm he is a bona fide superstar. And in those rare moments when he actually reflects on such matters, he would say life is wonderful, at least on this particular Wednesday. Figure 2 selectively summarizes a subset of the personal and contextual factors influencing project pursuit and the impact of project system characteristics on life quality.
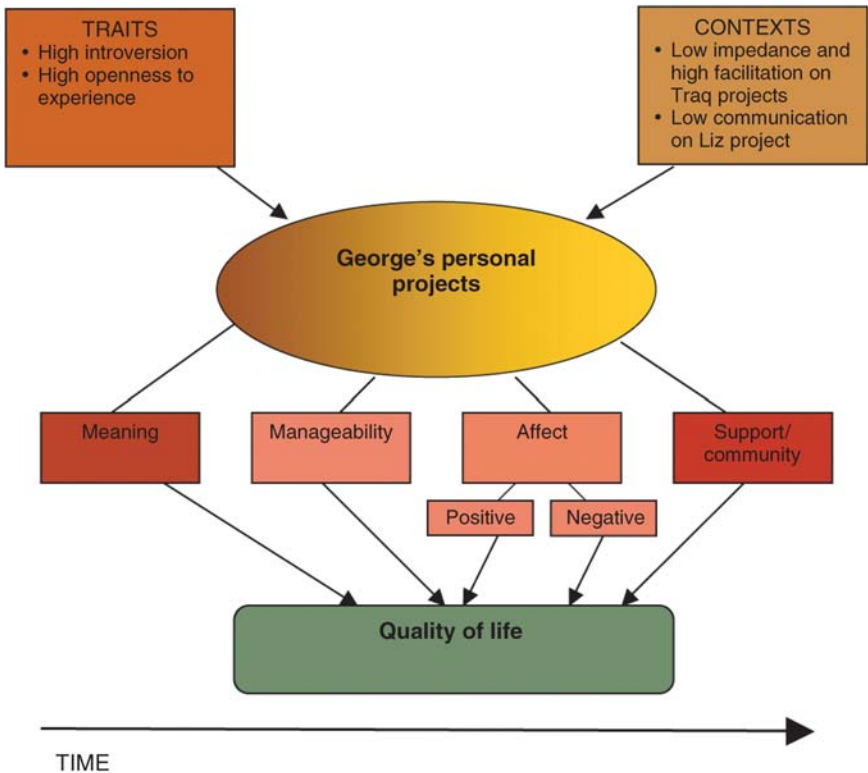

Figure 2 Traits, contexts and personal projects: The case of George.

Impact of traits and contexts on project pursuit. Research has established clear and robust links between traditional trait measures of personality, such as the Big Five and the content and appraisal of personal projects (e.g., Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992). For example, openness to experience predicts being engaged in creative projects (Melia-Gordon, 1994) and optimism predicts efficacious project pursuit (Jackson, Weiss, Lundquist, & Sonderlind, 2002). The impact of some traits is moderated by the content of projects. For example, extraverts appraise their interpersonal projects as both meaningful and manageable but not their academic projects (Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992). Neuroticism predicts a general tendency to see projects as demanding irrespective of domain, but parti-cularly projects that are intrapersonal in nature (e.g., 'be more outgoing'; Little, 1989; Salmela-Aro, 1992), and clinical appraisals of bipolar disorder are linked with personal project appraisals (Meyer, Beevers, & Johnson, 2004).

What about George's personality and projects? On a Big Five trait inventory, assume George has an exceptionally high score on openness to experience, somewhat elevated scores on neuroticism, middle level scores on conscientiousness and agreeableness, and an extremely low score on extraversion. His openness is consistent with his capacity to generate creative projects. His introversion leads us to wonder about how he handles the interpersonal projects of his professional life.

George's personality traits represent the highly creative professionals studied in the classic Berkeley studies (MacKinnon, 1962). The criterion for rated creativity in these studies set a very high standard – successful completion of projects that were novel, influential, and redefined the standards of a field. By these criteria, George is certifiably creative, and his relatively fixed traits contribute in part to his success.

The relationship between contexts and personal projects has been studied at several levels. Cultural, economic, and political climates can both prescribe and proscribe the kinds of projects we pursue (Little, 2006). At the level of work climates, there are important gender differences, with women reporting pervasive links of climate and project appraisals. For women, a work place facilitating social connection had a particularly salutary effect; for men, there was very little linkage at all, with one exception: the ideal work climate was one that facilitated the unimpeded pursuit of projects (Phillips, Little, & Goodine, 1997).

What about George's environmental contexts? He is typical of those at the bleeding edge of a creative technical field. He lives in an upper middle class area of a thriving city in an apartment that he shares with Elizabeth. The Traq office is a short walk down the street – an airy, leafy loft where his eight colleagues create a daily work climate that is both friendly and frenetic. Traq regards itself a team, a matter of major consequence to their success as a firm (Hackman, 2002). Part of the shared game plan is to respect George's need to be alone, and they are open-minded about his closed door. George has all the affordances necessary to become totally

absorbed in his creative projects. His perception of these affordances, his personal context, is generally veridical. There seem to be no major distortions in how he perceives the eco-settings of his life and their objective reality. There is one exception, however, to which we will return – his perception of Elizabeth.

Personal projects and quality of life.   As shown in Figure 2, research on the link between personal projects and quality of life has consistently shown that having meaningful, manageable projects that are supported by others and are not too stressful is conducive to human well-being (Little, 1989). Ad hoc dimensions, specially designed to reflect the relevant features of the eco-setting under study, consistently provide strong levels of predictability of measures of quality of life (Little & Chambers, 2004).

In recent years, our research has included a larger number of affective dimensions in personal projects methodology (Chambers, 2007; Little & Gee, 2007a). Affect appraisals for projects form two orthogonal (positive and negative affect) factors, and these are strong independent predictors of well-being (Little, Pedrosa-Lima, & Whelan, 2006). When George's projects are in full flight, he is irrepressibly joyful; when they are impeded, the team, including Elizabeth, keeps out of his way.

Sustainable project pursuit.   The sustainable pursuit of core projects is central to our conception of human flourishing. This requires the joint competencies of self-regulation and eco-setting management. The skills become particularly important when one is engaged in passionate project pursuit (Goodine, 2000; Little, 1998; McGregor, 2007; Vallerand, et al., 2003, 2007).

This requires attention to the internal dynamics of the positive emotions that are sparked by passionate pursuit as well as to the inevitable negative emotions created by frustrations met along the way. McGregor (2007) makes an interesting case that passionate project pursuit may be compensatory in nature, a reaction to the terror of uncertainty and under specifiable conditions can transform the project into an excessively myopic enterprise. Hot projects, transformed from zestful excitement to zealous excess, can extract a major toll, both on the project pursuer and the surrounding ecology. Similarly, Vallerand et al. (2003, 2007) have strong evidence for two kinds of passionate pursuit: one that is harmonious and one that is obsessive. To the extent that George's pursuits are having a negative impact on his own and others' projects, things are far from harmonious and obsessive zeal seems imminent. Under such conditions, sustainability becomes untenable.

Managing one's social ecology requires skills such as conveying why one's projects are worth supporting and ensuring that key supporters are themselves supported in the venture. We have also proposed that *sustainable* pursuit of core projects should be based on an *accurate* reading of one's

eco–setting resources and constraints (Little, 1999b). Note that this does not specify it is *restricted* to an accurate reading; it is possible to strategically focus on the positive side of the project in order to motivate pursuit. But unless there is an initial realistic appraisal of affordances and constraints, including knowledge of one's own internal resources, the person runs the risk of being blindsided by the vicissitudes of life. Both George and Elizabeth are starting to learn this.

When we look at George's personal projects, how has he been doing on the day before Black Thursday? He has many projects on the go, perhaps too many. He rates them high on meaning, moderate on manageability, and like most creative people, he experiences above average levels of both positive *and* negative affect in his project pursuits. Most important, in terms of recent research (Little & Grant, 2007), he feels that his project pursuits are emotionally supported by those around him, particularly Elizabeth. In this respect, he is right; she supports him utterly. But a subtle aspect of his project management skills has begun to create problems.

Like most highly creative individuals and as his team at Traq have already figured out, George is most Georgian when he is alone with his projects. He relies on Elizabeth to do two things: to handle some of the technical aspects of his software development and to handle the social networking side of the firm. At first, this was fine. Liz could crank out code faster and more accurately than George and she had the social skills to entertain clients, attend civic events on behalf of the firm, and generally be the highly visible partner on the team, leaving George to be, quite literally, the silent partner.

Again, this is the classic picture of the firms of highly creative individuals in the Berkeley studies. The creative 'star' typically did not do routine detail work or handle the socially demanding requirements of the practice. The empirical evidence on creative individuals suggests a rare combination of introversion and social poise, and George is a prime exemplar (MacKinnon, 1962). On occasion, he could meet with clients and be witty, charming and socially adroit. But as soon as he had risen to the intrusion, he would literally run back to his large messy corner retreat and get back to crafting something creative. Sometimes, clients find George, well, curious.

Thus, on this Wednesday afternoon, taking stock of his projects and life in general, George regards himself as most fortunate. He is engaged in projects that matter to him, he is busy but not buried in work, and he is given emotional support in his pursuits. His personal traits are conducive to his working on creative projects and his Traq colleagues provide a con–genial context in which he can be somewhat odd and definitely audacious.

On Thursday, however, everything falls apart. Elizabeth has been hospitalized for serious tachycardia and an overwhelming sense of anxiety. All of her Traq projects are on hold, and given that some have strict and looming deadlines, they are very much at risk. George is concerned,

of course, about Elizabeth – she is a vital part of his life, and her well-being is a core project for him. He is also realizing that his other core project, growing Traq, is at risk. When one's core project pursuits are no longer sustainable, the quality of life becomes seriously compromised. On the way to the hospital, the superstar George is feeling decidedly less than awesome, and the amazing Elizabeth is just barely keeping it together. What has been happening to her? Or perhaps more tellingly, what has she been doing to herself?

Free traits and flourishing: Acting out of character

We can understand Elizabeth's problems by briefly noting her status on relevant variables in Figure 1 and then homing in on the distinctive features of her free traits as represented in Figure 3.

Until recently, Elizabeth, like George, has been doing well and feeling fine. On both objective and subjective indicators, she has been flourishing. Like George, she is a biogenic introvert, but whereas he is not notably conscientious and agreeable, these are two of her cardinal traits. She is not particularly neurotic, although her anxiety level has been slowly rising since starting Traq with George. She is high on openness to experience, but not off the chart as George is.

Partly as a result of these traits, she has willingly taken on those Traq projects that George can't handle: highly technical detail work and a growing number of projects involving social contact with clients and the community. As an analytically astute introvert, the technical projects are easy and enjoyable for her. But, despite her interpersonal skills, the social pursuits have become increasingly onerous.

In some respects, this seems anomalous. Elizabeth truly is a highly agreeable person, and, consistent with how she is seen by others, concern for others and willingness to pitch in are deeply rooted and completely natural. Contrary to appearances, however, she is not a natural extravert, and here is where some of the challenges originate. This is also the one critical piece of information about life with Liz that George was missing and that has precipitated the crisis. Free trait theory helps to explain why Elizabeth and Liz are not getting along and why George's core projects will not be sustainable until recognition and restoration processes have been implemented.

Using Elizabeth as a concrete example, Figure 3 graphs the sources, costs, benefits, and consequences of free traits. Figure 3 focuses only on extraversion, although with some modification the theory applies to other traits.

Sources of free trait enactment: Biogenic, sociogenic, and idiogenic selves.   Free traits can be understood as the negotiation of three different sources of human conduct, introduced earlier as biogenic, sociogenic, and idiogenic influences.
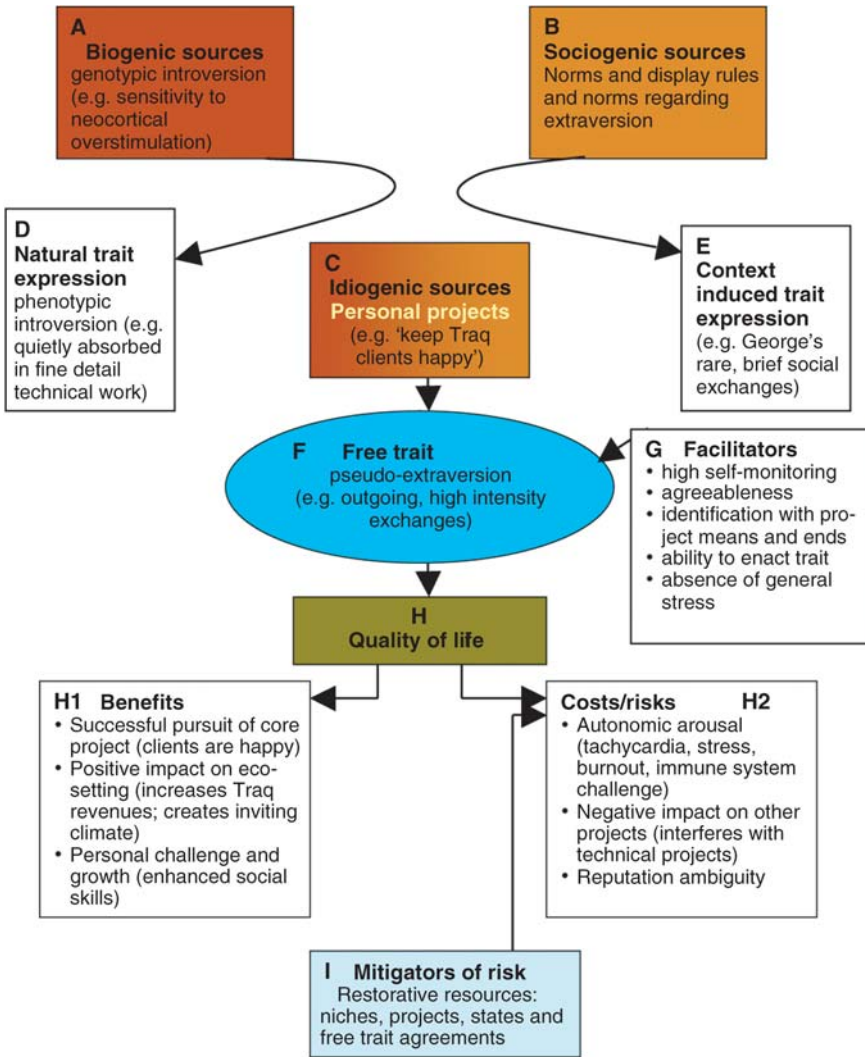
Figure 3   Free traits and the sources of action: Elizabeth's pseudo-extraversion.

Biogenic influences are shown in Box A and depict Elizabeth as a biogenic introvert, chronically hypersensitive to neo–cortical stimulation (e.g., Eysenck, 1990). Relative to those who are less introverted, her performance drops when stimulation is increased by noise level, increased pace of work, or too many cups of coffee. Were everyday conduct simply the phenotypic expression of such genotypic features, Elizabeth would engage in natural trait expression as shown in Box D. In fact, she *does*

engage in such expression when she is doing her technical projects. Similarly, her agreeable behavior is a direct expression of deeply rooted propensities. Everyday behavior may frequently take this direct route from genotypic trait features to phenotypic trait expression. However, free trait theory postulates that some of the most deeply human and consequential features of our lives involve the conflict of the biogenic with the two other foundational sources.

The sociogenic sources of human action, depicted in Box B, comprise the repository of scripts and normative guides about how we should interact in our particular eco-setting. Free trait theory proposes that one of the many ways that sociogenic sources influence behavior is through the form of trait prescriptions. There is substantial cross-cultural agreement about human traits, their content, structure, and consequences (e.g., Ashton & Lee, 2007; Goldberg, 2006; Hogan, 2005). When individuals are asked to act 'like an extravert' in experimental research, they are able to do so, albeit it with various degrees of 'leakage' of their biogenic traits (Lippa, 1976). As shown in Box E, under strong situational pressure, be it in an experiment or in daily life, there may a direct induction of the role appropriate behavior.

Idiogenic sources are different. Everyone at the office party acts 'party' for 2 hours as part of a sociogenic script, but this is not the *protracted* pattern of trait-like conduct that we are conceptualizing as free traits. Rather, Elizabeth's adopting of this script is far from automatic. She sits in her cubicle and gets ready to be 'on' as the outgoing and assertive Liz. When she emerges, it is the idiogenic source, the core project, which drives her behavior.

Predisposing and facilitating factors. We propose several factors that predispose individuals to engage in free-traited behavior. Self-monitoring (Bono & Vey, 2007) and agreeableness (Little & Joseph, 2007) should facilitate free trait adoption. To the extent that free trait behavior is intrinsically regulated rather than externally controlled this should facilitate adoption (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Competency at enacting the sociogenic script is clearly important, such as the capacity to generate the vocal range and expression required for pseudo-extraversion. Finally, our early empirical work on free traits shows that the absence of general stress facilitates free-trait behavior (Little & Joseph, 2007). On the assumption that Elizabeth has, with the exception of a growing stress level, all of the attributes that facilitate free trait adoption, we can turn to the impact of engaging in free traits on her quality of life.

Effects of free traits on life quality: Benefits and costs. The adoption of free traits to advance personal projects creates both benefits and costs to the quality of life. These are depicted in Boxes G-1 and G-2 with Elizabeth as a concrete exemplar.

There are several benefits to free trait enactment. First, it advances core projects. Thus, a major benefit of her pseudo-extraversion is that it advances a core project that matters to both her and to George. Second, this has a positive impact on Traq – the team is a clear beneficiary when Liz is 'on'. Third, she has become increasingly good at acting out of character over the past 2 years; she has learned how to 'work a room' and keep people's attention on Traq. In this respect, her free traits have fostered new competencies that may not otherwise have been explored. Elizabeth has developed a reputation for her seemingly boundless energy and enthusiasm. What people don't realize is that her energy and enthusiasm are *not* boundless.

One critical boundary that Elizabeth crosses too often is the sheer cost of having to suppress her biogenic introversion. In many respects, her introversion is a well-kept secret, and the psychophysiological costs of such suppression can be severe (Pennebaker, 1990; Wegner, 1994). Elizabeth overloads easily, but unlike George, she can't simply bolt from social functions. Consequently, her daily social activities at Traq are taxing, and the costs are compounded as her performance on the more technical projects drops. With respect to her specific symptoms, an inexplicably fast racing heart, there is recent evidence, albeit very provisional, that acting even for a short period in ways that go against one's natural orientation can increase tachycardia (Bono & Vey, 2007).

Another more subtle cost of free-traited behavior is reputational confusion (Craik, 1993). Elizabeth's reputation as a devoted Traq team player is deserved and unproblematic. Her reputation as gregarious, over-the-top, effervescent Liz is more complex. Those who only see her when she is 'on' will be skeptical of those who talk about her quieter, more introverted nature. Indeed, Elizabeth herself may be deeply confused as to whether she is Traq's Queen Elizabeth or the Court Jester. She is, after all, a founding partner of the firm, not simply one of the team, something that George, in his myopic zeal for his creative projects has ignored.

Mitigators: restorative resources and free trait agreements.   What can be done for those whose free traits are getting the better of them? Box I exhibits some restorative resources that might mitigate the ongoing costs of free traits. In the original set of proposals about free traits, I talked about the importance of individuals having a *restorative niche* in which their biogenic natures might be nurtured (Little, 1996). Thus, for a biogenic introvert who has been protractedly acting out of character as a 'pseudo-extravert' the best restorative niche would be one of solitude and reduced stimulation (Little, 2005). But such an environment would hardly be restorative for a biogenic extravert, who has been engaging in introverted free trait behavior. A more restorative niche for this person would the pulsing delights of a packed nightclub. We envisage a diversity of restorative niches each corresponding to distinctive biogenic dispositions. A pseudo-agreeable

person, for example, might find a wonderful restorative niche volunteering for a collection agency in which norms of niceness are checked at the door (Sutton, 1991).

Recently, we have moved beyond restorative niches, suggesting that a diversity of restorative resources can be used, including restorative states such as meditation for overloaded introverts and restorative projects such as exotic travel for someone who has suppressed her natural openness to experience (Little & Joseph, 2007).

A final source of mitigation seeks to take a more synoptic view of the issue of acting out character, and this is the need for greater awareness and sharing of information between individuals about the extent to which they are engaging in free trait action. There is a need in groups to invoke a free trait agreement, in which members, to the extent that they are high in free trait risk, are afforded access to the types of restorative resources discussed above. In the case of Traq, had George and the rest of the team known that Elizabeth needed solitary time as much as George did, they might have arranged for someone more naturally extraverted to take on some of the interpersonal projects for the team. If George had looked and listened before leaping into creative projects, and had Elizabeth talked about the toll charges that free traits were imposing, they would have had a greater chance for the sustainable pursuit of their singular and shared core projects.

Conclusions: What Needs Reconsidering?

The social ecological framework and the constructs of personal projects and free traits provide a perspective on aspects of personality and motivation that are somewhat different from conventional views. I'll restrict myself to three points.

First, by explicitly concerning itself with the biogenic, sociogenic, and idiogenic sources of human action, the social ecological framework is both more comprehensive but also more challenging that those perspectives that are primarily focused on one source of action alone. With increased recognition of the intricate interplay of biogenic and contextual variables in development, the inclusion of both in a comprehensive model of human action is scarcely novel. What is distinctive, I believe, is its emphasis on idiogenic, personally construed action as having the capacity to confront biogenic and sociogenic forces (Little, 2005, 2006, 2007). This topic takes us into the thicket of current philosophical debates about the nature of human responsibility. It also has very practical implications. The pursuit of a core project can damage one's health and alienate one's community, and I suspect that it is in precisely the most creative and generative groups that we see these costs accruing. If so, this calls for a reconsideration of the nature of audacious human accomplishment. Our perspective proposes that the creative heroes of our world, the Georgian

giants, need to share the accolades with the mute, inglorious team members without whom the norm shattering creative projects would never get accomplished.

Second, personal projects challenge traditional units of analysis in the study of both personality and motivation. They are frequently regarded as 'goal units', but I have argued that they are better regarded, as discussed previously, as PAC units (Little, 2007). The difference is best explained by invoking George Kelly's (1955) concepts of the range and focus of convenience of explanatory constructs. The focus of goal constructs is primarily on internal, cognitive, and representational issues. The range of convenience of goal constructs extends to action as well as to the enveloping context, particularly when one talks about goal pursuit or goal action. But its *focus* is internal.

The focus of personal projects is at the juncture of goal and action, of internal aspirations and external contexts. Its range of convenience is more expansive than goal units, ranging from the purely ideational and cognitive to the ecological and political conditions that allow projects to be pursued. This is not just of theoretical significance; it has important implications for the initial stages of empirical explorations. Personal projects may subsume several goals; thus, by eliciting only goals, one risks missing superordinate projects. This means that using personal projects analysis allows the investigator to examine cognitive, affective, behavioural, and contextual features of everyday action with the same assessment instrument. In this respect, it contrasts most strongly with conventional trait psychology. Instead of having separate measures of stress and locus of control, for example, project analysts will examine the covariation between control and stress within the individual's personal project system. Both normative and individual level measurement is afforded by the methodology, and there is strong evidence that patterns of relationship measured at the individual level are highly similar to those measured at the normative level (Little, 2005; Little & Gee, 2007a). This brings us back to George and Elizabeth. Although used to make more evocative the social ecological framework, there is at least some warrant for using such individual level exemplars to address issues more often examined at a normative level.

Third, and finally, free trait theory is still in its early stages and may well be wrong. But evidence to date suggests that it offers a viable extension to and in some senses alternative to orthodox trait theory. Free traits can explain inconsistencies or seemingly paradoxical aspects of a person's everyday behavior. It also casts such behavior in a rather different light than conventional views. We do not see those who act out of character as stand up chameleons, as superficial role players or as annoying error variance. Individuals engaged in free-traited behavior may well be advancing core project of ultimate significance to them. To understand such core projects and free traits, we need to reconsider some of the tacit assumptions underlying the study of personality and motivation and adopt new

constructs that pose different questions. What drives the choice of core projects? Are some traits, such as those having higher biogenic strength, less easy to adopt as free traits? Can protractedly acting out of character lead to actual biogenic changes? How do we negotiate our fidelity to three compelling and potentially conflicting sources of the self? Exploring such questions could help to both explain and enhance the quality of human lives.

Short Biography

Brian R. Little is Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Carleton University and is currently Adjunct Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology at McGill University. He received his PhD in Personality Psychology from the University of California at Berkeley and has taught at Oxford, Carleton, Harvard and McGill Universities.

The recipient of numerous awards for both research and teaching, he was in the inaugural group of Fellows at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University in 2000 and stayed on to teach personality psychology and advanced research methods in the Department of Psychology at Harvard from 2001 to 2004.

He is a Member at Large of the Association for Research in Personality and on the Executive Board of the Society for the Study of Human Development. Together with colleagues and students, he continues an active research program on the themes covered in this article, particularly on life quality in different cultural contexts. Among his non–academic passions are creating musical compositions on keyboard and mountain biking on flat surfaces. He continues to pursue two interlinked projects of playing professional basketball and growing a foot and a half.

Endnote

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