A CASE STUDY OF KURT DONALD COBAIN

By

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DECLARATION BY THE STUDENT

I, Candice Belinda Pieterse, Student Number 204009308, for the qualification Magister Artium in Counselling Psychology, hereby declares that:

In accordance with the Rule G4.6.3, the above-mentioned treatise is my own work and has not previously been submitted for assessment to another University or for another qualification.

Signature:  …………………………………

Date:  …………………………………
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SUMMARY

Case study research allows for an in depth study of an individual and yields relevant insight and results while examining an individual in their entirety. This approach allows the researcher to capture the uniqueness of a subject and thus provide an interesting understanding of that individual. The study is a case study of Kurt Donald Cobain. Cobain (1967-1994) was an American musician who served as songwriter, lead singer and guitarist for the band, Nirvana. He struggled with drug addiction during the last years of his life, and died on 8 April 1994 from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to his head (Sandford, 1995). The study is a single case research design, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. It aimed to explore and describe Kurt Cobain’s personality according to the Five Factor Model of Personality. He was chosen as the research subject by means of purposive sampling on the basis of the researcher’s interest and on his uniqueness and inspirational influences on the general public. Collected data was analyzed in accordance with Huberman and Miles’s (1994) general approach which consists of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Descriptive tables from the NEO-PI-R personality measure were further interpreted to provide quantitative information regarding the personality traits of the subject. The findings of this study suggest that Kurt Cobain portrayed a complex personality profile as an individual, and it appears that he experienced much distress and emotional instability within his life. However, he was able to provide the youth a means of expressing themselves through his music.

Key concepts: Kurt Donald Cobain, case study research, Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R), the Five Factor Model of Personality
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

This chapter provides a general orientation to the present study. The rationale for this study is outlined and the problem statement is presented. Thereafter an introduction to Kurt Cobain’s life is provided. The broad aims of the study will then be described and the chapter concludes with a delineation of the chapters that follow.

General Orientation to the Research Study

In this study, the researcher attempts to explore and describe the personality of Kurt Cobain, an individual recognized as being the front-man of the band, Nirvana, which gained popularity, and as a result, alternative rock became a dominant genre on radio and music television in the United States during the early-to-mid-1990s. Nirvana also brought along with it the subgenre of alternative rock to a new form of subgenre, grunge. Kurt Cobain found himself referred to in the media as being the spokesman of a generation (Absolute Astronomy.com, 2009).

In this study, Kurt Cobain’s personality has been conceptualized and interpreted within the conceptual framework of the Five Factor Model of Personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The researcher is aware that it is not possible to completely explain any individual’s personality. However, an effort has been made to provide a description of the subject’s personality as thoroughly as possible within the constraints that utilizing one theory may impose.

The research conducted for this study can be classified as a case study with a psychobiographical focus. This involved the systemic use of a specific psychological theory to discern, transform and reconstruct the personality of Kurt Cobain into a logical, informative narrative that is an accurate representation of who he was, and has been throughout his life. The
life history material that has been collected is predominantly qualitative in nature, with the exception of the psychological inventory, namely the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PP-R), and is quantitative in nature. The research participants of the study completed the inventory regarding their perceptions of Kurt Cobain (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

**Problem Statement**

Research in the area of personality, has up until recently, been given relatively little explicit attention, although when it has, the focus of reference is on the arguments and controversies of past research findings as opposed to new developments in the area (Nys, Rzewnicki, Van den Auweele & Van Mele, 2001). Personality is a meaningful concept and its measurement can contribute to insightful findings about musicians and their behaviour. Being a musician represents a combination of personality, genetic and biological endowment with social and emotional reinforcers received in life experiences (Woody, 1999).

Research supports and contradicts numerous possible personality characteristics for musicians, but has yielded little, if any, sound empirical support for believing that there are personality characteristics unique to musicians (Woody, 1999). Research appears to have neglected the possible relation between the musician’s personality and factors such as the venue or context in which the music is performed, the particular musical genre, the presence or absence of career success, and culture (Woody, 1999). In addition to addressing personality and contextual factors, future research will be more likely to give emphasis to genetic or biological endowments (Woody, 1999).

Therefore, the present research study aimed to add to the body of knowledge of psychology by determining the relationship of the musician, Cobain, and his personality in a holistic manner. In the present study the information gained from the personality assessment measure, namely the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and biographical information of Cobain
A Brief Overview of the Five Factor Model of Personality

The Five Factor Model of Personality is a framework for understanding which personality traits go together (Srivastava, 2008). Personality researchers have proposed that there are five basic dimensions of personality. Evidence of this theory has been increasing over the past 50 years, beginning with the research of D. W. Fiske, and later expanded upon by other researchers including Norman, Smith, Goldberg, and Costa and McCrae (Van Wagner, 2009).

While there is a large amount of literature supporting this Five Factor Model of Personality, researchers may not always agree with the exact labels of each dimension. However, these five categories are usually described as Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, and represent broad areas of personality.

Neuroticism identifies individuals who are prone to psychological distress, as they may be more likely to experience anxiety, anger, depression, shyness or social discomfort, impulsiveness, and have a general vulnerability to stress (Costa & McCrae, 1995). Extraversion involves the amount and intensity of energy directed outwards into the social world. For example, individuals who are described as extroverts may enjoy the company of others, seek environmental stimulation, and have a tendency to experience positive emotions (Costa & McCrae, 1995).

Openness to Experience involves the active seeking and appreciation of experience for the individual’s own sake. They may be receptive to the inner world of their imagination, appreciate art and beauty, and experience openness to inner feelings and emotions, as well as to new experiences on a practical level (Costa & McCrae, 1995). Agreeableness involves the kinds of interactions an individual prefers from compassion to tough mindedness, such as their belief in
the sincerity of others, their frankness in expression, and their active concern for the welfare of others (Costa & McCrae, 1995).

Conscientiousness refers to the degree of organization, persistence, control and motivation in goal directed behaviour. This may include the individual’s belief in their own self-efficacy, personal achievement, self-discipline and deliberation (Costa & McCrae, 1995).

Research has established that these groupings of characteristics tend to occur together in many individuals, for example, individuals who are sociable tend to be talkative. These traits do not always occur together, however, as personality is complex and varied, and each individual may display behaviours across several of these dimensions (Van Wagner, 2009).

A Brief Introduction to Kurt Cobain

Kurt Donald Cobain was born in Hoquaim, a small town 140 kilometres from Seattle on the 20th of February 1967 (Sandford, 1995). His mother was a cocktail waitress and his father was an auto mechanic (Ronson, 1996). They soon moved to nearby Aberdeen, a depressed and dying logging town. In 1970, his sister, Kimberly was born, and that night, Cobain went missing from home, and was found by a neighbour crying under a bridge. Cobain also used to write poetry when younger, and dedicated all his poems to his mother, and none to his father, which Cobain later described as a sense of betrayal (Ronson, 1996).

Cobain was for most of his childhood a sickly bronchitic child and began his lifelong dependency on drugs in 1974, when he was prescribed first Ritalin, and then sedatives to help him sleep. This medication did not help Cobain and it only caused him to swing from mania to despair (Sandford, 1995). His parents got divorced in 1975 when he was seven years old, and by his own account, he said that he never felt loved or secure again. In a 1993 interview, Cobain stated that he remembers feeling ashamed of his parents’, and that he could not face some of his friends at school anymore, as he desperately wanted to have the typical family, with a mother and
father. He wanted that security, therefore he resented his parents’ for quite a few years because of their divorce. In 1978, Cobain’s father re-married and inherited two stepchildren, which Cobain experienced as a shock similar to that of his parents’ divorce. His mother remarried in 1984, to a man who was opposed to accepting Cobain as his new stepson (Sandford, 1995).

He became increasingly difficult, anti-social and withdrawn after his parent's divorce. His mother noted that his personality changed dramatically (Ronson, 1996). He was also known as a bully and loner, and then at other times, he was described as weak and clingy (Sandford, 1995). After living with his mother for a year after the divorce, he moved to Montesano, Washington, to live with his father, but after a few years his youthful rebellion became too overwhelming and he found himself being shuffled between friends and relatives, and at one stage, homeless (Sandford, 1995).

From the early age of two years old, Cobain began to develop an interest in music. For his fourteenth birthday, his uncle gave him the option of a guitar or a bicycle as a gift and he chose the guitar. He started learning a few cover songs, and soon began working on his own songs (Sandford, 1995).

In high school, Cobain was more interested in art and music than in sports, and he did not have many friends (Sandford, 1995). However, his father insisted that he play sports, therefore he joined the junior high wrestling team, where he was good at it, but despised it. His father also signed him up for a local baseball league, where Cobain would strike out intentionally to avoid having to play. Cobain preferred to focus on his art courses, and he often drew during classes, including objects associated with human anatomy (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain became friends with a gay student at his school, which resulted in him being bullied at the hands of homophobic students. That friendship led some to believe that he himself was gay. In one of his personal journals, Cobain wrote that he was not gay although he wished he
was, just to upset homophobes (Sandford, 1995). In a 1993 interview, Cobain claimed that he used to spray paint ‘God is Gay’ on a church, and he was given a monetary fine, as well as a thirty-day suspended sentence (Sandford, 1995).

In the middle of tenth grade, 1983, Cobain moved back to live with his mother in Aberdeen. Two weeks before his graduation, he dropped out of high school however, after realizing that he did not have enough credits to graduate. His mother then gave him the option of either getting a job or leaving home, and after a week or so, Cobain found his clothes and other belongings packed away in boxes. Cobain was forced out of his mother's home, and therefore often stayed at friends' houses and sneaked into his mother's basement occasionally (Sandford, 1995). Cobain later claimed that when he could not find anywhere else to stay, he lived under a bridge over the Wishkah River, an experience that inspired the Nevermind (1991) track, "Something in the Way".

In 1986, Cobain moved into his first house where he lived alone and paid his rent by working at a coastal resort twenty miles from Aberdeen. As a teenager, Cobain eventually found escape through the thriving Pacific Northwest punk scene, attending punk rock shows in Seattle. He then met Krist Novoselic, a fellow devotee of punk rock, and they would occasionally play their instruments together. In 1986, Cobain, the lead singer, and Novoselic, on guitar, formed the band Nirvana (Ronson, 1996). They had many rotating drummers, however, they eventually settled with Dave Grohl, with whom the band found their greatest success in 1991 (Sandford, 1995). Nirvana then went on to become a multi-platinum grunge band that redefined the sound of the nineties (Ronson, 1996).

Cobain had a number of relationships before committing to Courtney Love in 1992. They were introduced at a concert in Los Angeles in 1991, and began to pursue an on-again, off-again relationship. However, the two found themselves together on a regular basis, often bonding
through drug use (Sandford, 1995). In 1992, Love discovered that she was pregnant with Cobain’s child, and the two got married on the 24 February 1992 in Hawaii (Ronson, 1996). Their daughter, Frances Bean, was born on the 18 August 1992 (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain had his first drug experience with marijuana at the age of thirteen in 1979. He also experimented with LSD, and his first experience with heroin occurred in 1986. By 1990, Cobain had developed an addiction to heroin. His addiction eventually began to affect the band negatively. The substance abuse deteriorated over the years, and he made his first attempt at rehab in 1992. However, when returning home after a tour in 1992, his heroin use resumed (Sandford, 1995).

The period of 1992 to 1994 is marked with Cobain suffering heroin overdoses and attempting suicide several times. One attempt involved him drinking an estimate of fifty prescription painkillers (Rohypnol) with champagne, and another suggestion of an attempt involved him locking himself up in a room with a gun and a bottle of pills. In 1994, Cobain agreed to undergo a detoxifying programme, but subsequently escaped from the facility (Ronson, 1996).

On the 8 of April 1994, Cobain’s body was found in his home. Cobain had pumped his veins with heroin and had a self-inflicting gunshot wound to the head (Sandford, 1995). All he left was a suicide note written in red ink addressed to Courtney Love and their 19 month old daughter (Ronson, 1996).

Two days after Cobain's body was found, 6000 people gathered in Seattle for a candlelight vigil. The distraught crowd filled the air with profane chants, burnt their flannel shirts and fought with police. They also listened to a tape made by Love, in which she read from his suicide note. Several distressed teenagers in the United States of America and Australia killed
themselves when they heard about Cobain’s death, and the mainstream media was lambasted for its lack of respect and understanding of youth culture (Ronson, 1996).

**Aims of the Study**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher aims to explore and describe the personality of Kurt Cobain in a holistic manner by means of the Five Factor Model of Personality, biographical information, and the use of the personality assessment measure based on the Five Factor Model, namely the NEO-PI-R. Form-R of the NEO-PI-R was utilized by a sample of participants that have been inspired by Cobain and who are followers of his life.

**Overview of the Study**

The study consists of six chapters, the first being the introduction and problem statement. Chapters 2 and 3 are literature review chapters. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical overview of the case study and psychobiographical approaches. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the theoretical framework, namely the Five Factor Model of Personality.

Preliminary methodological considerations are explored in Chapter 4, which also includes the design and methodology of the study. The findings and discussion of the study regarding the life of Kurt Cobain constitute Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 concludes the study by discussing both its value and limitations in conjunction with recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDY RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW

This chapter provides an understanding of the case study approach to research. This is done by first examining the relationship between biography and psychology. A further understanding is obtained through a description of factors and concepts that are closely related to case studies with a psychobiographical focus. Case study research is then described, followed by the benefits of utilizing a psychobiographical approach to a case study.

Psychobiographies and Related Concepts

The life stories and histories of famous and enigmatic individuals have captivated and intrigued scholars in the various disciplines of biography and scientific psychology (Howe, 1997). The increasing awareness that both literary biography and psychology make essential contributions to the understanding and disentanglement of individual lives is indicated by the fact that psychologists interested in individual development have drawn on biographical sources of information. This has therefore resulted in a symbiotic association between psychology and biography, and psychobiography reflects this synthesis (Fouche' & Van Niekerk, 2005).

Personology is conceptualized as an encompassing description of ‘personality psychology’. Personology is a commitment to the study of single, complex, lived lives over time and from a variety of different angles. Personologists begin and end with the whole person. Personology responds to various critiques, restoring the biographical subject to its legitimate place in psychology (Schultz, 2004).

It is important to note that psychology makes use of reliable evidence and utilizes the conceptual frameworks of theory and personality psychology in order to explain the distinctive patterns of human behaviour or development. As a result, psychologists may avoid conducting
detailed studies of individual lives, perhaps having the perception that such studies do not contribute to findings that could be generalized (Fouche', 1999).

Alternatively, biography tends to give more weight to what is apparent and unique in an individual. It makes use of history, arts and literature to outline the course of an individual’s progress through their life. Biographers do not aim to do psychology primarily, as they want to set the record of the life (Runyan, 1984). Biographers, therefore, are predominantly descriptive, whereas psychobiographies are more explanatory, more interpretive. Biography is about the “what” questions and psychobiographies are about the “why”, the question of motives (Schultz, 2004).

The focus of both these fields has been upon determining how differences in the development of individuals come about, and the following questions have been asked: How do children develop into unusually capable, exceptionally innovative, and productive individuals? How can we begin to understand the life course of these individuals? Both fields have therefore also attempted to find out how to study a single life, as it develops, to achieve valuable insight into that individual’s entire life (McAdams, 2006).

Personality theorists, such as Erik Erikson, Henry Murray and Alfred Adler, have suggested that psychologically informed biography may be the best way of capturing an individual life situated in time (McAdams, 2006). Apart from the interest in life stories and the interesting argument that individuals may be best understood in their biographical contexts, biographical approaches to the individual have occupied a contentious and ambiguous standing in personality psychology (Anderson, 1981). Critics have emphasized that biographical methods of investigation are generally too subjective, suggesting that biographical examinations of the single individual lacks reliability and external validity (McAdams, 2006). Runyan (1984) adds that biographical methodology is also lacking in structure to be classified as a scientific study.
In defense of biographical research, it is possible that the critics of the single case study method have too narrow a view of science. They may be ignoring the fact that good biographical studies are informative and that psychologists may be neglecting their intellectual responsibility when they do not take cognizance of biographical information (McAdams, 1994). Personality psychologists have however, shown an interest in, and acceptance of biographical and autobiographical approaches over the past two decades and since then psychological biographical studies have received more recognition and appraisal (McAdams, 1988).

Psychobiography is the combination of both psychology and biography. However, psychobiography is primarily a way of doing psychology by focusing on single lives which have already been lived and therefore, tends to provide explanations for aspects of the life history which are not easily derived through the use of simple psychological principles (Alexander, 1988). It is the study of an entire life, from birth to death that aims to distinguish, discover, or formulate the central story of the entire life according to psychological theory (McAdams, 1994).

Three aspects in defining psychobiography should be noted (Runyan, 1988a). Firstly, the field is defined by the use of psychology, which may or may not be analytic, due to psychobiographers being theoretically diverse. Secondly, the use must be visible in order to determine psychobiographies from all those biographies that may make implicit use of common sense psychology. Elms (1994) therefore stated that a psychobiography is not only a way of doing biography, but it is also a way of doing psychology. Thirdly, the definition refers not only to the application of personality theory, but also to the use of psychology, which is intended to include within psychobiography those works drawing on the entire range of resources in the field of psychology. This includes psychological concepts, data and methods, as well as theoretical knowledge from developmental, abnormal, social and personality psychology (Runyan, 1984).
Schultz (2004) declared that when he was first introduced to psychobiography, he grasped its antidotal temperament, as it was a partial cure for psychology’s illness of reductionism, scientivism, irrelevance and trivialness. He also commented that it includes one seeking mind, equipped with a theory and research, directed at the details of another, which is psychobiography.

There are many concepts which are closely related to, and may overlap, with psychobiography. Therefore an explanation of these will follow to provide the reader with clarification regarding the differences in these concepts.

**Life Narratives**

People are naturally inclined to be story tellers, therefore they are able to reflect upon their life events and the social contexts in which they occur. They are then able to create a narrative of their own life by which they can make sense of their past, present and future (Elms, 1994). Narrative can be described as a series of events, which takes the form of a story, with the emphasis on description rather than explanation. It is a form of study that allows psychologists to gain a holistic understanding of the reality which the individual perceives for themselves (Bromley, 1986). McAdams (1988) refers to life narratives as storied autobiographical accounts told in the person’s own words. The focus of narrative research is therefore on the individual and the fact that life may be understood through description and reconstruction of the life story (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

It has been argued by a number of scholars that narrative analysis is an alternative to the traditional scientific understanding of the individual as removed from their context, rather than as a part of it (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). In contrast with the positivist scientific paradigm which emphasizes quantification, generalizability, hypothesis testing, validity and reliability, it has been stated by Muller (1999) that the idea of narrative is firmly grounded in qualitative backgrounds. Muller also stressed the lived experience of the individual, the significance of multiple
perspectives, the existence of context-bound constructed social realities, and the impact of the researcher on the research process. Narrative has thus been constructed to refer to both ‘story’ and a means of inquiry (Roberts, 2002).

Life Histories and Life Stories

Life stories are what the individual chooses to tell about the life that they have lived. It is a fairly complete narrative of the individual’s life as a whole, highlighting the most significant aspects (Roberts, 2002). Therefore, life stories may be limited to the material provided by the narrator (Bujold, 1990). The most important feature of life stories is its subjectivity (Fouche' & Van Niekerk, 2005).

Life histories usually refer to the collection, interpretation and report writing of the life in the context of the story told of their past life experiences of the individual to relate to the story (Roberts, 2002). This is based on both subjective (i.e., life story evidence) and objective (i.e., observations, factual records) data (Rosenwald, 1988). The rendering of a lived experience into a life story is considered one interpretive layer, however, the move to life history adds another layer through further interpretation. Therefore, moving from a life story to a life history involves a range of methodologies and ethical concerns while also accounting for the life’s historical context (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Autobiography

Autobiography is the documentation of an individual’s life or parts of it, authorized by the individuals themselves. The author may refer to objective sources of information or facts, however, the autobiography may be biased and selective as it is normally written from a subjective perspective (Bromley, 1986).
Personality Assessment

Personality assessment examines lives in progress, primarily focusing on what the person is like at present, as well as analyzing the influences that have contributed to shape and mould the individual. This is achieved by administering psychological tests or other instruments to evaluate behaviour and other personal characteristics (Aiken, 1997).

Personality assessment and psychobiography are similar in that they both require a comprehensive description of personality at some point, or designated points on a timeline, plus a set of connectors which relate the individual to the influences which led to that particular configuration. However, they differ in that a life already lived, as seen within a psychobiography, is void of predictive inferences and is instantly concerned with the problem of understanding (Alexander, 1990).

Psychohistories, Historical Psychology and Historiographies

Psychohistory makes use of psychological theory, normally psychoanalytic, in the historical interpretation of a political, social or cultural event. It is thus primarily a historical exercise (Berg, 1995). Psychohistory can also be described as the application of psychological theory to historical events (Schultz, 2005). Historical psychology researches the history of psychological phenomena and the history of thought about psychological development and the life course (Runyan, 1988b).

Historiography or historical research is past-orientated research which seeks to reveal a question of current interest via a thorough study of existing material (Anderson, 1981). It includes a great deal more than the simple retelling of facts from the past or the confluence of information found in diaries, letters or other documents, such as public records, confidential reports, newspaper editorials, photographs, films and artefacts. It involves a systematic collection
and objective evaluation of data related to past occurrences in order to explore research questions and recreate a meaningful collection of historical explanations for past events (Berg, 1995).

**Case Study**

A case study deals with the documentation of specific events or emotional episodes within a certain period in an individual’s life. Evidence is therefore used to reconstruct and interpret the documentation (Louw & Edwards, 1993). It is usually used when a researcher wants to answer “why” or “how” questions concerning an individual.

The most relevant concept relating to a psychobiography is that of case study, and will therefore be discussed in more detail in the following section.

**Case Study Research**

Psychobiographies, single-case experiments and psychological case studies are all forms of individual case study research that are similar in character to wider case research (McLeod, 1994). Case study research has been used for many years across a variety of disciplines. Yin (1994) defines the case study research method as an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Soy, 2006). In the past it was considered somewhat unscientific. Critics of case study research believe that the study of a small number of cases can offer no basis for establishing reliability or generalization of findings, and the intense exposure to study of the case biases the findings. Recognition of its value was also increasingly lost as enthusiasm grew for the development of quantitative methodologies. Some dismiss case study research as useful only as an exploratory tool (Soy, 2006). However, the criticism that was leveled at the approach has become less common in recent years. The reason for this has been partly due to a greater emphasis on all types of research to be practically applicable (Foster, Gomm & Hammersley, 2000). Researchers began
to recognize the importance of the case study approach and single case investigations for the development of a knowledge base that is unobtainable through traditional group designs in research (Edwards, 1990).

A case study approach allows for an in depth study of an individual which can yield relevant insight and results while looking at the individual holistically. Runyan (1984) advocates scientific progress which allows for an increase in informative and interesting understanding of individuals. However, he believes that research approaches that are quantitative and experimental may by-pass the uniqueness of an individual’s life.

Case study research is usually non-experimental in that it lacks control and manipulation of the variables being studied, as it is the study of psychological phenomena within the natural context that utilizes qualitative tools and techniques for data collection and analysis. Triangulation, which is a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or an interpretation, enriches case study research as it enables the researcher to approach the case from a number of perspectives (Stake, 1994). This therefore facilitates an appreciation of the various dimensions of the case as well, as it involves various social, physical, symbolic and psychological contexts. Case study research further provides a contribution to knowledge by relating findings to generalizable theory (Fouche' & Van Niekerk, 2005). Therefore, this allows for the testing of an existing theory or the formulation of a new theory (Cavaye, 1996).

In contrast to psychobiography, a psychological case study deals with the documentation of specific events or emotional episodes within a certain period in an individual’s life as opposed to an extended period of time (Bromley, 1986). The case study method therefore forms the backbone of research in the development of new approaches to therapy (Louw & Edwards, 1993). Psychobiography does have a single-case research design, however. This aims to provide
a new description and an in depth study of an individual life to confirm or refute existing psychological theory (Cavaye, 1996).

According to Roberts (2002), the biographical method of case study has become a significant approach to social research. This can be attributed to a variety of factors including an increased interest in the life course and concern with a lived experience, and how best to reveal it. The major appeal of biographical research is that it can explore, in various methodological and interpretive ways, how individual perceptions of experiences within a life can be understood within a culturally diverse society (Roberts, 2002).

The single-case experiment, however, is a study of one or more aspects of behaviour under closely controlled conditions (Bromley, 1986). Therefore, these studies aim to record and measure specific changes that occur due to the application of specific interventions (Fouche' & Van Niekerk, 2005). As a result of the conditions being controlled, an advantage is created for the researchers as definite, accurate, and valid conclusions about causal relationships can be drawn. The main disadvantage is that the controlled situations remove any external influences which may influence the subject under normal situations (Gerdes, 1989).

**Nomothetic Versus Idiographic Approaches**

Case study research also has an idiographic approach. The idiographic perspective emphasizes that each individual has a unique psychological structure and that some traits are possessed by only one individual, and that there are times when it is impossible to compare one individual with others. This viewpoint also emphasizes that traits may differ in importance from individual to individual, such as cardinal, central and secondary traits. It tends to use case studies, bibliographical information, and diaries for information gathering (Cavaye, 1996).

The aim of a case study is to understand an individual case in its particularity, therefore, this can be contrasted with a nomothetic approach. The nomothetic view emphasizes
comparability among individuals but views people as unique in their combination of traits. This viewpoint sees traits as having the same psychological meaning in everyone. The belief is that individuals differ only in the amount of each trait, therefore, it is this which constitutes their uniqueness. This approach tends to use self-report personality questions, or factor analysis. Individuals differ in their positions along a continuum in the same set of traits. Many contemporary psychologists tend towards a nomothetic approach, and the trait approach is often viewed solely as a nomothetic approach, however, they are aware of how a trait may be slightly different from individual to individual in the way that it is expressed (Cavaye, 1996).

Reasons for Utilizing a Single Case Study Approach

The aim of a case study is to describe a single unit thoroughly during a specific period of time (De Vos & Fouche', 1998). The description of a unit involves an individual, and adequate knowledge of the individual unit is important in order to provide a sound perspective.

Yin (1994) suggests that there exists an underlying basis for utilizing a single case design in research. The first rationale is when the case is critical in testing a well formulated theory, and the theory has a clear set of propositions as well as circumstances under which the propositions are believed to be true. The single case can therefore determine if a theory’s propositions are correct, or if an alternative explanation may be more relevant (Yin, 1994).

The second rationale is when the case represents an extreme or unique case, and the third and final rationale is the revelatory case (Yin, 1994). This takes place when the researcher is presented with an opportunity to observe and analyze phenomena that may have previously been unreachable.

The Benefit of Utilizing a Case Study with Psychobiographical Focus

There are many factors to be taken into consideration when explaining the benefit of utilizing a case study approach. These factors will be described within this section.
The Uniqueness of the Individual Case within a Whole

The idiographic approach to research is based on the perception that each individual is different and unique. Therefore, the purpose of general laws for human behaviour is neither desirable nor possible, however, the nomothetic approach attempts to recognize characteristics which are common to all individuals, or to a particular group of individuals (Gerdes, 1989).

A more relevant term was created by replacing the ‘idiographic’ with ‘morphogenic’ which places importance on the individuality of the entire person rather than the individuality found in single elements only (Bareira, 2001).

A psychobiographical case study is neither idiographic or nomothetic, as it is rather morphogenic. By utilizing a case study with a psychobiographical focus, it allows the researcher to explore and describe the case holistically instead of placing emphasis on isolated elements associated with the subject.

The Socio-Historical Context

An advantage of studying the life history of an individual is that the researcher is able to consider the contextualized background within which it is possible to obtain an understanding of the subject’s socio-historical experience, cultural experience, family experience and process of socialization (Runyan, 1984). Therefore, the researcher is able to obtain a better understanding of the individual due to these external influences. The socio-historical context of an individual is an important part of that person, therefore to exclude taking it into consideration, the researcher would not be doing justice to the study.

Process and Pattern over Time

Another advantage of life history research, such as a case study with a psychobiographical focus, is that it allows for the study of personality over a period of time, as opposed to the study of an individual within a specific point in time. Therefore, this results in
the understanding of personality in action, as well as dynamic changes and reasons for these changes to be taken into consideration (Fiske, 1988).

**Subjective Reality**

By utilizing this type of research, the researcher is able to obtain a description and understanding of the thoughts, experiences and feelings of the subject. The researcher is therefore able to empathize with the subject by gaining an understanding of their subjective reality (Runyan, 1984). This therefore requires a hermeneutical and phenomenological perspective for understanding subjective reality (Fouche’ & Van Niekerk, 2005). It is the appreciation and understanding of this subjective reality that facilitates empathy and sympathy in order to obtain a clear image of the individual’s life story (Runyan 1984). A good case report should therefore be so compelling, vivid and interesting that the reader is certain to continue reading until the completion of the report (Yin, 1994).

**Theory Testing and Development**

Theory plays a vital role in both the collection of data and in generalization (Yin, 1994). During data collection, the researcher can utilize the theory as a guide to decide on objectives and design of the case. It also provides the basis on which the researcher can compare and analyze the collected data. Therefore, this assists in conceptualizing the case within the chosen theoretical domains.

Another additional role that theory plays is in generalizing from a case study to a specific theory. Analytical generalization is when a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study. This therefore allows a previously developed theory to serve as a basis against which to compare the results of the study. If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed (Jones, 2005).
Conclusion

This chapter provided an outline to facilitate the understanding of the case study approach. This was achieved by exploring the relationship between biography and psychology, and providing a description of factors and concepts that are closely related to the approach. Case study research was also described and finally, the benefits of utilizing this approach were discussed. In the following chapter, the theoretical framework of the Five Factor Model of Personality, which the present researcher is utilizing, will be discussed to provide a basic understanding of personality.
CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

THE FIVE FACTOR MODEL OF PERSONALITY

This chapter provides the reader with a basic understanding of personality so that insight into its use within psychology can be gained. The focus of this study is specifically on Kurt Cobain and his personality within the Five Factor Model of Personality. Therefore, numerous approaches to the study of personality will be discussed, an outline of the trait approach to personality theory is provided and the Five Factor Model of Personality will be explained in detail. In addition, the five domains and the individual facets comprising the Five Factor Model of Personality will be described. A discussion on research that has been conducted utilizing the theory will be furthermore explored, and criticisms of the model briefly outlined.

The Study of Personality and Personality Theory

From early in its history, the term personality has been closely linked to ideas of what it means to be a person. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the connotations were distinctly non-psychological, as personality referred to the distinction between people and things, and it was the theological and ethical dimensions of an individual that were dominant (Danziger, 1997). Individual differences in preferences were discussed largely in terms of temperaments, whereas personality referred rather to what was deemed to be essential and universal, the moral and rational nature of an individual. As the importance of religion within Western culture waned, the meaning of ‘personality’ shifted. In the wake of Romanticism's celebration of idiosyncratic individuality and the growing psychological and psychiatric interest in naturalistic investigations of mental abnormality, the term became reoriented decisively toward the individual and psychological (Danziger, 1997).
From a psychological perspective, personality is the patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion unique to an individual, and the ways they interact to help or delay the adjustment of a person to other people and situations (Wright, 1998). According to Meyer, Moore and Viljoen (1989) personality consists of psychological attributes. However, it also includes spiritual and physical characteristics, and the dynamic organization of all three which determine an individual’s behaviour when interacting in their environment.

There are many definitions of personality, and a number of theories have attempted to explain human personality (Danziger, 1997). Therefore, a definition of personality always implies at least a partial theory of personality (Bareira, 2001). A personality theory is an attempt to develop a way of describing, explaining and comparing individuals and their behaviour (Meyer et al., 1989). Each theory provides its own explanations and characteristics of personality, however, no theory is seen as correct or incorrect, and although they may differ, they appear to be complementary to one another. According to Dawda (1997) psychologists generally have the perception that a complete theory of personality should address the questions of what the characteristics of an individual is, and how they are organized within that individual to determine how the individual interacts with their environment. Much of personality also involves things that are only accessible to the individual, such as their inner thoughts and feelings, and some of it is thought not to be available even to the individual, such as their instincts and unconscious motivations (Boeree, 2006). Therefore, personality is still very much in a ‘pre-scientific’ or philosophical stage, and some aspects may well always remain that way (Boeree, 2006).

Fujita (2001) suggests that personality psychology, just like biology, needs a taxonomy of its subject matter. The explanation for this is that the taxonomy will focus research and allow a standard vocabulary by which the research results may be communicated and associated with
each other. This may therefore allow for personality psychology to become an integrated science (Fujita, 2001).

Allport (1942) described personality as the dynamic association within the individual of those psycho-physical systems that determine their unique adjustment to their environment. This description therefore supports the study of common traits with trait being defined as distinguishing qualities or characteristics of a person. Traits are a willingness to think or act in a similar manner in response to a variety of different stimuli or situations. Trait theory assumes that individuals differ on variables or dimensions that are continuous. However, people are seen to differ in the amounts of a characteristic rather than differ in the quality of their characteristics (Carver & Scheier, 2000).

A theory is defined as a model of reality that assists one to understand, explain, predict, and control that reality. In the study of personality, these models are usually verbal (Boeree, 2006). A theory is a guide to action, as one may figure that the future will be something like the past, and therefore certain sequences and patterns of events that have occurred frequently before are likely to occur again (Boeree, 2006).

Overview of Personality Theories

A number of theories have attempted to explain human personality. The most widely recognized psychological theories are presented below.

The Psychoanalytic Theory

In his psychoanalytic interpretation, Sigmund Freud believed that the human mind could be divided into three significant components, namely the id, the ego, and the superego, which either work together, or come into conflict, to shape personality. Psychoanalysis emphasizes unconscious motivations and the conflicts between primitive urges and learned social backgrounds, stressing the importance of early childhood experiences in determining mature
personality (Danziger, 1997). An individual’s thoughts, mistakes, dreams and other behaviours are therefore examined in order to determine their underlying meaning and importance (Meyer et al., 1997).

Other theorists that have been strongly influenced by Freud include Anna Freud and the ego psychologists, of whom Erik Erikson is the best known (Boeree, 2006). Erikson believed that personality developed through a series of stages, with certain conflicts arising at each stage. Success in any stage depended upon effectively overcoming these conflicts (Van Wagner, 2009).

Jung is another theorist with a more transpersonal perspective, which has a much more spiritual focus, and the social psychological view was explored by theorists such as Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and Erich Fromm (Boeree, 2006).

**The Behavioural Theory**

Exponents of behaviourism, such as B. F. Skinner, suggest that an individual's personality is developed through external stimuli, and in the behaviourist model, personality can change significantly with a change to a new environment. Social-learning theorists, such as Albert Bandura, also emphasized environmental influences but suggested that these work in conjunction with forces such as memory and feelings to determine personality (Danziger, 1997).

Behavioural theorists therefore also study observable and measurable behaviors (Van Wagner, 2009). According to Boeree (2006), behaviourists, as well as their modern descendants the cognitivists, also prefer quantitative and experimental methods. Therefore, the characteristics of the three main approaches to behavioural theory, which include radical-behaviourism, social learning and the cognitive-behavioural approach, are that their theories are relatively parsimonious, they minimize the use of theoretical constructs, and minimize inferences. They also differ from other strategies by the importance they place on learning and experience, and the situational specificity of behaviour (Liebert & Spiegler, 1994).
The Humanistic Theory

The Humanistic approach is often based on a reaction to psychoanalytic and behaviouristic theories, as the common belief is that the answers are to be found in consciousness or experience. Phenomenological methods are preferred by most humanists (Boeree, 2006). Humanistic theorists include Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Viktor Frankl.

Humanist theories highlight the importance of free will and individual experience in the development of personality. Humanist theorists emphasize the concept of self-actualization, which is an intrinsic need for personal growth that motivates behavior (Van Wagner, 2009). Therefore, humanists believe that each individual strives to develop their inherent, full potential, to improve themselves and their circumstances, whereas the existentialists believe that individuals direct their own life through the ideals they set for themselves, therefore, taking responsibility for themselves and finding meaning in their lives (Meyer et al., 1989).

Regardless of the system used to organize personality and personality theories, the study of trait and type theories remains one of the common elements across each of these systems. Costa and McCrae (1992) go as far as to propose the psychology of traits, which emphasizes individual differences, as a fourth school of psychology. They hold that each of the other schools incorporates the trait model to some extent as each school attempts to account for at least some individual differences. Following is a brief overview of the trait and type theories.

The Trait Approach

Most personality theorists are concerned with traits, as traits are what make individuals who they are. They are the relatively permanent aspects of each individual and are evidenced by the consistency in their interactions. Therefore, what makes the trait approach to understanding personality different from the other theories can be explored below (Heffner, 2002).
While most theories represent attempts at better understanding the development of personality, trait theorists are less concerned about development. Predicting an individual’s behaviour in a given situation is also not a concern of trait theorists. Unlike many other theoretical orientations, trait theorists are interested in the comparison of individuals based on not just aspects, but also degrees, and trait theory does not essentially provide a medium of personality change (Heffner, 2002). The trait approach to personality is also focused on differences between individuals, and how the combination and interaction of various traits combine to form a personality that is unique to each individual. Trait theory is therefore focused on identifying and measuring these individual personality characteristics (Van Wagner, 2009).

In 1936, Gordon Allport discovered that one English language dictionary alone contained more than 4,000 words describing different personality traits. He therefore categorized these traits into three levels, namely cardinal traits, central traits, and secondary traits, which will be further discussed below (Van Wagner, 2009).

**Cardinal Traits:** Traits that dictate an individual’s whole life, often leading to the situation where the individual becomes known specifically for these traits. Individuals with such personalities may become so identified for these traits that their names are often synonymous with these qualities. Allport suggested that cardinal traits are rare and tend to develop later in life.

**Central Traits:** The common characteristics that shape the basic foundations of personality. These central traits, while not as dominating as cardinal traits, are the main characteristics used to describe another individual. Terms such as intelligent, honest, shy and anxious are considered central traits.

**Secondary Traits:** Traits that may relate to attitudes or preferences and often emerge only in certain situations or under specific circumstances. Some examples would be getting anxious when having to write an exam, or impatient while waiting in traffic (Van Wagner, 2009).
Through this view, Costa and McCrae (1994) developed what they refer to as the Five Factor Model of Personality. However, before this trait theory can be further explored, it is necessary to broadly introduce different types of systems within the trait approach to psychology, namely the Sixteen Personality Factor Test (16PF), and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2). These different types of systems will therefore also be discussed, highlighting their links to the NEO-PI-R within a trait theory paradigm.

Cattell’s Taxonomy: The 16 Personality Factor System

The Sixteen Personality Factor Test (16PF) is a comprehensive measure of normal range personality that is widely used in settings in which an in-depth, integrated picture of the whole individual is needed (Cattell, Cattell, & Schuerger, 2003). Cattell identified 16 traits that he believed represent the structure of personality. Cattell’s taxonomy is one of the largest in terms of the number of factors identified as basic traits (Larsen & Buss, 2005). Although he has played an important role in developing a strong empirical strategy for identifying the basic personality dimensions and in shaping the trait approach to personality, his 16PF model has been criticized on various grounds (Larsen & Buss, 2005). Despite these criticisms, however, the 16PF Test remains a popular measure for personality assessment, and in addition, leading to the discovery of the 16PF, personality factors for which the test is named, the research identified the broad dimensions currently called the Big Five Factors of Personality, and the development of the Five Factor Model (Cattell et al., 2003).

The authors of the NEO-PI-R describe the 16PF’s development as beginning with cluster analyses of the 16PF scales. Comparison between the five 16PF global scales and the other big five scales, such as those of the NEO-PI-R, show a high level of alignment. Research has found that the average correlation between the NEO-PI-R five factors and the 16PF global scales is just
as the average correlation between the NEO five factors and Goldberg’s Big Five factors. This can be seen in the table below (Cattell et al., 2003).

**Table 1: Alignments Among the Three Main Five Factor Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>16PF (Cattell)</th>
<th>NEO-PI-R (Costa &amp; McCrae)</th>
<th>Big Five (Goldberg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion/Introversion</td>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>Surgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Anxiety/High Anxiety</td>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough-Mindedness/Receptivity</td>
<td>Openness to experience</td>
<td>Intellect or Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence/Accommodation</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control/Lack of Restraint</td>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Conscientiousness/Dependency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) and the NEO-PI-R**

In recent years there has been great interest in the relationship between normal personality functioning and psychopathology, especially in the context of the Five Factor Model of Personality. A great debate has emerged from this area concerning whether or not instruments assessing normal personality traits are useful for clinical assessment. Costa and McCrae (1995) have vehemently argued for the usefulness of measures of the ‘Big Five’ (i.e., Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness) in clinical contexts, especially with regard to their own NEO-PI-R. More specifically, Costa and McCrae (1995) offered three reasons why such measures would be of interest to clinicians. Firstly, they measure emotional, interpersonal, and motivational styles that are relevant to the diagnosis of a wide range of other disorders. Secondly, they offer a comprehensive picture of the individual that cannot be obtained with most clinically-oriented instruments, and thirdly they provide supplementary
information that may be useful in selecting treatment and anticipating the course of therapy (Sharpe & Desai, 2001).

Other psychologists have not been convinced that measures of normal personality traits such as the NEO-PI-R can add any relevant information to current methods of clinical assessment (Sharpe & Desai, 2001). In this context, establishment of incremental validity cannot be accomplished by the sole presentation of zero-order correlations between the NEO-PI-R and clinical measures. Rather, the use of multivariate techniques, such as hierarchical regression analyses with clinically relevant extra test data serving as dependent variables, is necessary (Sharpe & Desai, 2001). The use of measures, such as the NEO-PI-R, in clinical assessments should not only make an incremental contribution that is clinically significant, but must also be judged as worthy of the extra time to administer and interpret the test. One of the obvious benefits of using normal personality instruments such as the NEO-PI-R is that they are often based on dimensional models as opposed to the traditional categorical models commonly associated with clinical assessment (Sharpe & Desai, 2001). As the trait approach has been discussed, the type theory will continue in the following section.

Type Theory

Personality type theory aims to classify people into distinct categories. Personality types are synonymous with ‘personality styles’. Types refer to categories that are distinct and discontinuous, for example, you are one or the other. This is important to understand, because it helps to distinguish a personality type approach from a personality trait approach (Phares, 1991). The foundation of this theory is that much appropriate variation in behaviour is actually quite orderly and consistent, being due to basic differences in the ways individuals prefer to use their perception and judgment. The goal of knowing about personality type is to understand and appreciate differences between individuals, as all types are equal (Phares, 1991).
The exploration of type theory is relevant for this study in order to confirm that a trait-based approach was better suited in the present study to determine the holistic personality of the subject. The Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) is a type theory, and its correlation between the NEO-PI-R will be discussed in the following section.

**Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI)**

One of the earliest trait theories was introduced by a colleague of Sigmund Freud's by the name of Carl Jung. One aspect of the theory concerned traits that Jung felt were inborn. These inborn, genetically determined traits are usually called temperaments (Boeree, 2006). Two students of Jung's theory, named Myers and Briggs, developed a personality test based on Jung's temperaments called the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, or MBTI (Boeree, 2006).

The NEO-PI-R was not designed to measure Jungian types, however, four of its five scales show clear correlations with the four MBTI dichotomies. The NEO trait-based instrument has been suggested by its authors as an alternative to the MBTI assessment (Quenk, 2009).

By knowing and understanding the different types of trait theories, it enables an individual to use them in conjunction with the factor approaches to personality in order to understand an individual as holistically as possible. The NEO-PI-R was established to be the best suited approach for this study as the consistency with which the Five Factors of Personality have been recovered, have led many researchers to conclude that the Five Factor Model is an adequate representation of the basic dimensions of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1995). The NEO-PI-R, which is based on the Five Factor Model of Personality, was also best suited as it added knowledge to Cobain’s life, and it was the only measure that allowed for an observer report, which the participants of the study completed. The Five Factor Model of Personality will now be explained in detail within the next section of this chapter.
The Five Factor Model of Personality

The Five Factor Model of Personality will be discussed in some detail, starting with an explanation of how the model developed. The Five Factors will then be discussed, which will be followed by what research has revealed concerning the stability of the traits, as this has the most relevance to a study which takes place over the course of an individual’s life.

Development of the Five Factors of Personality

One of the goals of psychology has been to establish a model that can describe human personality, and disorders within, with the intention to use this model in the remedying of personality disorders and improving general understanding of personality (Popkins, 1998). One of the more well-known models in modern psychology is known as the Five Factor Model of Personality (Digman, 1990). This theory incorporates five different variables into a conceptual model for describing personality, and these five different factors are often referred to as the "Big Five" (Ewen, 1998, p. 140). The Five Factor model is among the most recent models developed for the description of personality, and this model may be among the most practical and valid models available in the field of personality psychology (Digman, 1990).

The Five Factor Model is also known as the taxonomy of personality traits, a framework for understanding which traits go together. In scientific usage, the word ‘model’ can refer either to a descriptive framework of what has been observed, or to a theoretical explanation of causes and consequences (Srivastava, 2008). The term ‘Big Five’ was developed by Lew Goldberg and was originally associated with studies of personality traits used in natural language. The term ‘Five Factor Model’ has been more commonly linked with studies of traits using personality questionnaires. The two research traditions yielded largely consonant models, and in current practice the terms are often used interchangeably (Srivastava, 2008).
The Five Factor Model is not the only theoretical account of the Big Five. Other personality psychologists have suggested that environmental influences, such as social roles, combine and interact with biological influences in shaping personality traits (Srivastava, 2008). It is important to note, however, that the Big Five is used in many areas of psychological research in ways that do not depend on the specific propositions of any one theory, and regardless of whether any particular theory of personality traits is supported, it is still possible to benefit from measuring and considering the Big Five in research (Srivastava, 2008).

As it became evident to many psychologists that the combinations of five factors were valuable in describing personality, there was a need to clearly define what these factors were. Psychologist H. J. Eysenck felt that due to overlaps in the five factors and their correlates, a three factor model was more appropriate and accurate. His theory is therefore called the PEN model, which stands for psychoticism, extroversion and neuroticism, or at times is shortened to the two factor E-IN model, which stands for extroversion-introversion, and neuroticism (Eysenck, 1991).

Many psychologists support Eysenck's PEN model, however, of the main factor-analytic models, the Big Five dominates the focus of current psychological research (Ewen, 1998). Through extensive experimenting, there is currently a general agreement in the realms of scholarly psychology as to the identity of the five factors, and their basic interpretations and values to analysis of personality (Ewen, 1998). The five factors will therefore be explored in the following section.

The Five Factors of Personality

Research has concluded that most of the personality-based consistencies in behaviour can be explained in terms of the Five Factor model. The domains of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness signify the highest level of a personality hierarchy in which narrower traits signify the lower levels of the personality
hierarchy, and they are also considered to be universal across many cultures (Ashton & Paunonen, 2001).

The NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) is a highly-regarded assessment of personality according to Costa and McCrae (1995). The five factors measured by the NEO PI-R provide a general description of personality, while the facet scales allow more detailed analysis. According to Costa and McCrae (1995), these five factors and their facet scales include:

- **Neuroticism** (Anxiety, Hostility, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, Vulnerability)
- **Extraversion** (Warmth, Gregariousness, Assertiveness, Activity, Excitement-Seeking, Positive Emotions)
- **Openness to Experience** (Fantasy, Aesthetics, Feelings, Actions, Ideas, Values)
- **Agreeableness** (Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty, Tender-Mindedness)
- **Conscientiousness** (Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement-Striving, Self-Discipline, Deliberation)

The present researcher believes that the Five Factor Model of Personality is the most appropriate to use in the present study for two reasons. Firstly, nearly all constructs of personality can be classified as one of the five factors. Secondly, the five factor model is compatible with other theories and is also argued to be the strongest taxonomy of personality in comparison to other taxonomies (Fujita, 2001). As a result of these strengths, the five factor model should assist in providing a comprehensive clarification of the subject in the present study’s personality traits and motivational styles. The five factors of personality will be discussed with an explanation of the domains below.
Neuroticism

Neuroticism is a measure of affect and emotional control. Low levels of neuroticism indicate emotional stability or calmness, even-temperedness and a relaxed manner, whereas high levels of neuroticism increase the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions. Individuals with high levels of neuroticism are reactive and more easily bothered by stimuli in their environment, and they therefore more regularly become unstable, worried, stressed, temperamental and sad (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Individuals who are more resistant, however, need strong stimuli to be provoked (Heinström, 2003). The term neuroticism does not necessarily refer to any psychiatric defect, therefore a more appropriate term could be negative affectivity or nervousness (Heinström, 2003).

Extraversion

According to Costa and McCrae (1992), extraversion refers to the trait that would most be associated with sociability, therefore, it is of importance to note that sociability is only one of the traits that involves the domain of extraversion. Individuals who portray extraversion have a tendency to like people and enjoy large gatherings, and they are often assertive, active and talkative. Their outgoing character also enjoys excitement and stimulation, and is cheerful in nature (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

The extraversion-introversion dimension, however, contrasts an outgoing character with a withdrawn nature. As discussed, extraverts tend to be more physically and verbally active whereas introverts are more likely to be independent, reserved, steady and prefer to be alone. The individual in the middle of the dimension enjoys a combination between social situations and solitude (Heinström, 2003).
Openness to Experience

Openness to experience is a measure of depth, breadth and variability in an individual's imagination and urge for experiences (Heinström, 2003). It also describes individuals who are interested in both inner and outer worlds, and their lives tend to be experientially richer (Digman, 1996). Therefore, this domain relates to intellect, openness to new ideas, cultural interests, educational aptitude and creativity, as well as an interest in varied sensory and cognitive experiences (Heinström, 2003).

Individuals with a high openness to experience also tend to experience positive and negative emotions more acutely than closed individuals (Digman, 1996), and they also have broad interests, are liberal and prefer novelty (Heinström, 2003). According to Digman, openness has been labeled in research as intellect, however, openness is not equivalent to intelligence, as it is rather associated to aspects of intelligence, such as divergent thinking that may result in creativity. According to Heinström (2003), individuals with low openness to experience are more conventional, conservative and prefer familiarity.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is focused on interpersonal tendencies and results in an individual being altruistic, nurturing, caring, kind, and emotionally supportive (Heinström, 2003). The agreeable individual is helpful and may believe that others will be helpful in return, and they also may be more popular or likable (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The opposite end of this domain would describe an individual as being more egocentric and aggressive, skeptical of others, competitive, and defensive (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Heinström (2003) described these individuals as more likely to be hostile, indifferent, self-centered, spiteful and jealous.
Conscientiousness

According to Costa and McCrae (1992), it is during development that individuals learn to control impulses and manage desires. However, self-control can also be associated with an active process of planning, organizing and following through with tasks. This is the foundation of conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is therefore a measure of goal-directed behaviour, and has been linked to educational achievement and particularly to the will to achieve (Heinström, 2003). The focused individual concentrates on a limited number of goals but strives hard to reach them, as they are strong-willed and determined, while the flexible individual is more impulsive and easier to persuade from one task to another (Heinström, 2003). Costa and McCrae (1992) also stated that few individuals become successful musicians or athletes without a high level of this trait, as the more conscientious an individual is, the more competent, dutiful, orderly, responsible and thorough they are.

Research Findings Relating to the Model

Many studies of personality development which have contributed to the much needed evidence, supports the premise that most personality-based consistencies in behaviour can be explained in terms of the Five Factor Model (Ashton & Paunonen, 2001). Therefore, the use of the Five Factor Model in the present research study will provide a comprehensive theoretical framework on which the study of the personality of a particular individual, namely Kurt Cobain. There are other factors, however, that also confirm the worthiness of the model to be a comprehensive framework. These factors will be discussed below.

Compatibility

To determine the Five Factor Model's compatibility with other models, it is important to examine other popular or long held psychological theories. It is evident that the Five Factor Model is consistent with other factor-analytical models. For example, Eysenck (1991) developed
the PEN model from Cattell's sixteen-factor model. However, it is now proposed that the
development of personality is best conceptualized as consisting of five major traits rather than
Eysenck's three factors (Popkins, 1998). Interestingly though, it appears natural that any factor
analytic model should not directly contradict other factor analytic models.

It has also been recognized in recent years that the Five Factor Model is compatible with
other popular psychological theories and not just those concerned with factor analysis (Popkins,
1998). There has therefore been a recent attempt by some psychologists to link the Five Factor
Model and Freud's theories of psychoanalysis, as recent experiments have shown a relationship
between Freud's concept of the ego, and the five variables in the Five Factor Model. As explored
in an experiment conducted by Huey and Weisz (1997), focusing on ego resiliency and ego
control in adolescent boys, it appears that ego resiliency seems to reflect, in part, the well
adjusted pole of each of the Five Factor Model’s dimensions, whereas Ego under control reflects
high extroversion, low agreeableness, and low conscientiousness. It can therefore be determined
that the relationship between elements of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, which is known for
its application, but lack of taxonomy, and elements of the Five Factor Model, which is among the
more scientific theories in psychology, helps demonstrate the compatibility of the Five Factor
Model (Popkins, 1998).

**Taxonomy**

With the five factors placed on sliding scales, it becomes only an exercise to associate
various human characteristics with one or more of the five factors. Strong associations quickly
become evident, and as trends develop, it becomes possible to allocate very accurate descriptions
about individuals via their placement on the sliding scales associated with the five factors
(Popkins, 1998). Therefore, it seems probable that these results can be used to extrapolate many
behavioral characteristics, and psychologists are currently working towards this end, attempting to empirically establish taxonomy of personality (Popkins, 1998).

Application

The Five Factor Model is known to be used effectively in application, therefore, it can be said that it is applicable, as most of the applications of the Five Factor Model as it now exists, seem to dominate the academic and experimental discussion (Popkins, 1998). With reference to the model's usefulness in academics, Digman (1990) states that research on the Five Factor Model has provided a useful set of very broad dimensions that characterize individual differences, and that these dimensions can be measured with high reliability and impressive validity. Therefore, the five dimensions that make up the Five Factor Model provide a valid and reliable response to the question of personality structure (Digman, 1990).

Originality

It is possible to argue that the Five Factor Model does not meet the criterion of originality, as when a model for predicting behavior that consisted of five factors was derived, Cattell's sixteen-factor system was already nearly five years old (Digman, 1990). However, despite this, the Five Factor Model could be considered distant enough from Cattell's model to justify the label of originality. It may also be more useful to think of the factor models together, as a single set of theories that, although very different individually, all fit together. This unity of models, including Cattell's sixteen-factor system, Eysenck's model, and the Five Factor Model, grew from a study of language initiated by German psychologists Allport and Odbert, who were inspired for their studies by two other German psychologists, Baumgarten and Klages (Digman, 1990). Through this unity of the factor models, it is therefore apparent to see that they came to exist more or less independently of any other major psychological theories.
Universality

The fulfillment for a comprehensive theory in personality is that the theory should be almost universally true. In a non-physical science, such as psychology, it is logically too much to ask that a theory always hold true. The basic principle, however, is that the theory should exceed culture and situation, therefore, as the principle is in two parts, so should be the response (Popkins, 1998).

It appears that the Five Factor Model holds very well across cultural and linguistic lines. Digman (1990) provides three examples of the Five Factor Model’s validity across different languages and cultures. His three studies took place in Japan, the Philippines, and Germany, and in all three cases, a five-factor solution was evident at the end of the assessment. On the question of the ability of the Five Factor Model to cross cultural and linguistic barriers, Digman explained that something rather fundamental was involved there, as this it appeared that individuals everywhere seem to construe personality similarly, regardless of language or culture.

Criticisms of the Model

According to McAdams (1992), the Big Five factors are fairly general, and therefore, specific behavioural events cannot be predicted, and that the five descriptors do not provide enough information to give a holistic description of personality. McAdams (1992) stated that the Big Five are more accurately viewed as five basic trait categories, as opposed to five basic traits. According to Fujita (2001), the theory lacks specificity, as different researchers have developed different Big Five domains, therefore, reducing the focus of having five domains as there are others which may also be of importance.

A current weakness of the Five Factor Model appears to be that it fails to anticipate behavior in many situations, therefore, the same feature that allows the Five Factor Model to hold true across cultural boundaries is also a weakness in specific situations. It would appear that the
five variables are too broad (McAdams, 1992). McAdams sums up this concern by explaining that due to the Big Five operating at such a broad level of analysis, trait scores may not be especially useful in the prediction of specific behavior in particular situations.

McAdams (1992) also explained that personality theories do more than specify traits, and as a result, the Five Factor Model, although it provides an outstanding basis for the description of much of what, in psychology, falls into the domain of personality study, falls short of attaining or ever having a chance to achieve the title of a unified psychological theory. McAdams (1992) also claims that the Five Factor Model should not really be considered a theory, but more appropriately just a list of five variables that are useful when attempting to identify and classify personality traits.

Taxonomy has long been the goal of personality psychologists, however, it appears that there may be a fault in trying to extrapolate beyond the very broadest of personality traits, such as the Big Five (Popkins, 1998). This concern with the Five Factor Model is that, although often very categorical and taxonomic, it does not explore deeply into the causation of certain associations, as some relationships are fairly counterintuitive, making extrapolation by common sense difficult. For example, a study established that type A behavior, which is characterized by general optimism and ambitiousness had a low relationship to conscientiousness (Popkins, 1998).

Without ignoring these criticisms, the researcher believes that the research in support of the Five Factor Model greatly outweigh the criticisms that have been leveled at the model. While one cannot expect to completely understand the personality of another individual, psychological theories of personality serve to provide guidelines towards a better understanding of individuals.

**Conclusion**

While the basic outline of personality and the trait theory of personality were presented previously in this chapter, the researcher has selected the Five Factor Model of Personality as a
basis for the description of the personality of the subject in the present study. The focus of this study is specifically on Kurt Cobain, therefore the Five Factor Model of Personality will add to the knowledge of understanding his personality as holistically as possible. This theory will be utilized in Chapter 5 to facilitate a better understanding of Kurt Cobain as an individual. In the following chapter, the preliminary methodological considerations in psychobiographical case study research will be discussed and related to the study.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Before undertaking a case study, the researcher must take into consideration the possible limitations or shortcomings of the approach. These shortcomings, as well as possible suggestions for reducing their influence, are discussed below. This will be followed by a description of the research design, sampling procedure, measure, data collection and analysis techniques, and finally the ethical considerations applicable to the study.

In any case study, potential problems may exist. It is the responsibility of the researcher to be aware of these problems and formulate solutions to deal with them before they arise. In this chapter, the researcher synthesizes the work that has been done on the constraints and obstacles inherent to the methodology of the case study approach, and the means to overcome them. These difficulties are described as key methodological considerations that need to be overcome, or at least minimized, in order for the case study to qualify as ideal. Strategies are recommended as a way to manage the difficulties and to decrease the discrepancy between the potential and execution of the case study approach.

Researcher Bias and Countertransference

In the study of an individual case, there is a possibility of researcher bias and countertransference may often be experienced. There may be times when the researcher idealizes the subject and enjoys the status of being connected to such an exalted figure, and at other times, the researcher may find fault with their subject. These emotional reactions are usually of an unconscious or non-deliberate nature, and the researcher may believe that they are only identifying and describing the subject’s personality (Anderson, 1981).

These should be countered through continuous self-awareness and examination of feelings toward the subject such as describing their feelings about the subject, their biases, and
the way they have decided to write about that particular subject. The researcher should also maintain empathy for the subject, as it is especially useful as a safeguard against the tendency to be disapproving, and the researcher should remain open to statements regarding the nature of the relationship with the subject (Anderson, 1981). The researcher may achieve this by asking their supervisors, or other case study specialists to read the manuscript. In this step, particular individuals who are intimately acquainted with the subject’s personality, and scholars who specialize in the study of lives, are requested to comment specifically on the researcher’s relationship with the subject (Anderson, 1981).

Reductionism

According to Runyan (1988), many psychobiographies do not take into account the complex, historical, cultural and social context within which the individual’s life took place, even though the subject’s life is strongly shaped by the culture and sub-culture. Another criticism is that traditionally, psychobiographies place much of the focus on psychopathological processes and give little attention to normality and health (Anderson, 1981). Runyan (1988) describes a third type of reductionism as being incidences in which the researcher explains adult character and behaviour almost exclusively in terms of childhood experiences, therefore neglecting to include later influences.

Researchers should make use of multiple sources of reference. Therefore different kinds of data from multiple sources should be used to gain a correct interpretation, as interpretations would not be valid if the information upon which it rests is incorrect. Interpretations of the individual’s personality need to integrate psychological aspects including both the historical and the social aspects (Fouche', 1999).

Multiple sources of reference have been made use of in this study, such as a biography written of Kurt Cobain’s life, various books and journal articles written about him, information
obtained from the internet, personal information from his own journal written by himself, and a third person observer report personality inventory. The researcher will also make use of the lyrics Cobain wrote for his songs, especially from the later albums during the period of his personal struggle with drug addiction and suicide attempts.

Runyan (1988) also states that researchers should avoid use of ambiguous jargon. Therefore, the researcher has attempted to maintain a consistent use of language which is understandable throughout the study. It is also recommended that the subject of the study be considered holistically as an individual in the context of their socio-historical context (Anderson, 1981).

Validity and Reliability

The quality of the case study design can be measured by four tests, namely: internal validity, external validity, construct validity and reliability (Yin, 1994). The strategies and precautions proposed to meet these tests are discussed in the following section:

Internal Validity

Multiple sources of data, such as the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992), should be used and in-depth research of the material should be performed in order to check for distortions (Kotton, 2002). A biography of Kurt Cobain, various information and articles about him, and a personality questionnaire were utilized in order to increase the internal validity.

External Validity

This entails the extent to which conclusions drawn from the study can be generalized outside of the case being studied. However, due to the nature of the study being exploratory and descriptive, the aim is to represent the details of the individual case without any urgency to generalize to other cases (Edwards, 1990).
Construct Validity

According to Yin (1994), the researcher should carefully select and conceptualize the constructs and variables to be considered, which should be in keeping with the aims of the study. Any potential problems will be overcome by triangulation of data whereby the multiple sources will provide multiple measures to validate the constructs.

Reliability

The objective of reliability is to ensure that if a later investigator followed the same procedure and conducted the same case study over again, the later investigator would arrive at the same findings and conclusions (Yin, 1994). Therefore, a consistent coding scheme will be maintained during the collection of raw data. This will be conducted in accordance with Huberman and Miles (1994) analytic approach to data analysis.

In order to establish reliability and validity within the quantitative approach to the study, objective experts in the field of psychology, as well as an independent expert in quantitative research methodology, such as the researcher’s supervisors, will confirm and validate the results and themes of the study identified by the researcher. Data verification will also be used in order to ensure the integrity of the results (Huberman & Miles, 1994). This will therefore take place by giving the sample of participants’ feedback of the results of the study, and verifying with them what they think about these results.

Inflated Expectations

Some psychobiographers believe that psychobiographical studies are the solution to a number of problems. According to Anderson (1981), psychobiographical explanations should be recognized as speculative as opposed to them being the final conclusion about a specific subject. Anderson (1981) advised that researchers utilizing the psychobiographical approach must be
aware of the shortcomings of the approach, and must know that psychological explanations do not replace, but add to, other explanations.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the preliminary considerations, limitations and shortcomings associated with the psychobiographical approach to the case study approach have been discussed. This also involves the efforts made by the researcher to dispose of any concerns relating to methodology utilized in the present study. Within the next section of this chapter, the research design, sampling procedure and measure is presented. Data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations will also be discussed.

**Research Design**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher aims to explore and describe the personality of Kurt Cobain in a holistic manner by means of the Five Factor Model of Personality, biographical information, and the use of the personality assessment measure based on the Five Factor Model, namely the NEO-PI-R. This is an idiographic study, which makes use of both qualitative and quantitative data and utilizes an exploratory-descriptive perspective. The primary goal of such research is to provide a rich and accurate description of an individual case with the aim of providing an in-depth understanding of the case (Edwards, 1990). The aim of this study is to obtain a comprehensive overview, to explore, describe and analyze phenomena rather than to generalize the findings that may arise from the data. It thus involves identifying the participant’s personality traits that may have contributed to his complex and inspirational nature.

A defining characteristic of case study research is that it excels at bringing an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research (Soy, 2006). This is opposed to the reductionism caused by making use of experimental controls. The qualitative paradigm stems from an
antipositivistic, interpretative approach, is idiographic, thus holistic in nature, and the main aim is to understand the meaning that people attach to their everyday lives (Shurinck, 1998). The aim of this study is to understand Kurt Cobain’s personality as holistically as possible. Therefore, the qualitative method serves this research study well. The study is also quantitative in nature as the results of the NEO-PI-R will be presented in a descriptive table and the findings presented qualitatively in a profile of the subject’s personality traits.

**Sampling Procedure**

One of the reasons for selecting a particular individual for study is related to the individual’s significance and interest (Huysamen, 1994). Kurt Cobain is the single individual selected as the subject in this case study. The sampling procedure was purposive due to the fact that he was deliberately selected as a result of understanding his complex personality, as foreseen in his lyrics, personal journals, and unstable personal relationships, and because of his inspirational nature to the general public.

**Measure**

The measure that was utilized in the study is the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R). It is a concise measure, based on the Five-Factor model, which measures the interpersonal, motivational, emotional, and attitudinal styles of adults and adolescents. It consists of 240 personality items and 3 validity items, and is available in two forms. Form-S is designed for self-reports and Form-R is written in the third person for observer reports (Costa & McCrae, 1995). It is therefore written in the third person for peer, spouse, or expert ratings, and it can be used as an alternative measure or as a supplement to self-reports from adult clients (PsychPress, 2008).

Using objective self-reports, or asking individuals directly for information relating to a particular construct, is extremely prevalent in most areas of the social sciences, including
personality psychology (McDonald, 2008). In the field of personality psychology, asking individuals to respond to questions or statements about what they are like or how they behave seems to be the most preferred method.

According to research, self-reports are the most frequently used questionnaire, due to the fact that if information is need about an individual, one would expect that the individual possessing the particular personality traits should be able to provide the most informative and accurate information about these constructs (McDonald, 2008). In accordance with the basic foundation of such models as the Five Factor Theory of Personality, individuals can convey a vast amount of information about themselves through the expression of certain relatively stable patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions (McCrae & Costa, 1992). Correspondingly, these Big Five traits, namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to experience can be directly assessed through carefully constructed personality questionnaires, such as John and Srivastava’s (1999) Big Five Inventory or Costa and McCrae’s (1992) NEO-PI--R, which measures the five factors as well as more specific facets of the traits (McDonald, 2008).

Self-reported questionnaires are also advantageous in that the respondents are likely to be more motivated to talk about themselves than others, and they may identify with the questions in ways that others do not. Administering personality inventories directly to the individual is also advantageous because scoring the results is very straightforward. However, marked evidence of the validity and the reliability, or consistency, of the actual assessment device must first be established, which does require much effort. In addition to being easy to interpret, self-reports are also used because they are an inexpensive and relatively quick way to collect a large amount of data, especially when obtaining data from a large number of participants
at one time (McDonald, 2008). Convenience and ease are vital for researchers who want to have a high number of cases in their study to improve on the statistical strength of their results.

Though there are many strengths of using self-reports to measure psychological constructs, there are also potentially a number of weaknesses. Firstly, the structure of the questions affects whether the reported information accurately measures the construct under consideration. Self-reports may be an imperfect source of data, as minor changes in question wording, question format, or question context can result in major changes in the obtained results. There are also many potential problems with errors on the part of the respondent. Self-reports may allow for response biases. For example, individuals may respond in such a way that presents them in a more favourable light, even if these responses do not reflect how they actually think or behave (McDonald, 2008). Lack of credibility due to biased responding is problematic because it could impede the validity of the self-report as a measure. Although this is a concern, there are actions that can be taken to try to reduce these biases in terms of improving on the questionnaire construction and instructions given to the participants.

Another related concern regarding credibility of respondents is that individuals do not just respond in a socially desirable manner because they want to present themselves in a certain way. Instead, there is a theory that individuals respond more positively because they have a distorted outlook about who they are. In this view, it is the self-perceptions themselves that provoke the biased responding in the individual because people may be predisposed toward self-enhancement, at the expense of being unrealistic. This causes different problems compared with when one consciously engages in impression management; if there is a distortion in how individuals perceive themselves beyond the typical response biases like social desirability, as it cannot be corrected for through lie scales or other such controls (McDonald, 2008).
Another potential limitation is whether individuals know enough about themselves to be able to accurately portray what the self-report is attempting to determine. In terms of personality constructs, some individuals may not be capable of reporting on their own personality, or they may have a lack of self-knowledge. Other potential issues with self-reports were that test construction is a time consuming process because of the need to show construct validity of the measure, as well as cultural differences in questionnaire response style. Therefore, since there are a number of concerns that arise as a result of using self-report methods, it is clear that other approaches to assessing psychological constructs should also be considered (McDonald, 2008).

Form-R was utilized by a sample of seven participants that have been inspired by Kurt Cobain and are followers of his life. Within purposive sampling, subjects are selected because of some common characteristic, for example snowball sampling (Patton, 1990). In snowball sampling, you begin by identifying someone who meets the criteria for inclusion in your study. You then ask them to recommend others who they may know who also meet the criteria and so forth (Trochim, 2006). The sample was therefore being selected purposively by the researcher, as the sample had to meet the criteria of being inspired by Cobain in order to validate the aim of exploring and describing the personality of an inspirational musician. Some of these criteria include the following: They should own most of Nirvana’s albums, and various books and autobiographies written about Cobain, and viewed him as having an influence in their lives in some way. Their interest and in-depth knowledge in Cobain should have manifested while they were in the Identity vs. Role Confusion Stage of Erikson’s Psycho-Social Developmental Stages. Being between the ages of 12-18 years, they could better relate to his music and lyrics, as Cobain was in a state of role confusion himself when most of his songs were written.

However, the sample is currently between the ages of 20 and 30 years, which therefore categorize them within the Intimacy vs. Isolation Stage of Erikson’s Psycho-Social
Developmental Stages (Harder, 2002). It is assumed that they will be able to better relate to Cobain in this developmental stage, as it was in this stage when he became famous, got married and started a family. He also passed away in this stage.

The sample consisted of seven individuals, four of which were male and three of which were female, between the ages of 20 to 30 years old, and they were contacted directly. Consent forms were utilized in order to allow for the administration of the NEO-PI-R. This is presented in the appendix of the present study.

This sample was therefore utilized as an additional source of information in order to explore and describe the personality of Kurt Cobain. It is important to note, however, the subjectivity involved with completing a third person observer report, therefore, the researcher will took this limitation into consideration when implementing the findings from the results.

**Data Collection**

The researcher made use of qualitative and quantitative measures in this study, which is known as triangulation of data. The researcher utilized both primary (i.e., documents produced by the subject) and secondary (i.e., documents produced by others) data that will be studied in order to gain as comprehensive an analysis as possible. The sources of data included a biography written of Kurt Cobain’s life, various books and journal articles written about him, information obtained from the internet, personal information from his own journal written by himself, and a third person observer report personality inventory. The researcher also made use of the lyrics Cobain wrote for his songs, especially from the later albums during the period of his personal struggle with drug addiction and suicide attempts. This use of multiple sources minimized the potential impact of author bias, allowing for data triangulation or cross-referencing and serving to enhance the internal validity of the data to collected (Yin, 1994).
Data Analysis

As a framework for data analysis the approach suggested by Huberman and Miles (1994) was pursued. According to these authors, data analysis includes three linked sub-processes. These transpire throughout the research, such as before collecting data, during research design and planning, during data collection and early analysis, and after data collection. These processes include data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing.

Data reduction refers to the process by which the potential universe of data can be reduced by the researcher in an anticipatory way (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Therefore, certain data will be abstracted from the data collected and organized in order to sharpen the focus in terms of the research objectives, and to permit conclusion drawing.

Data display involves assembling the data in an organized, concise structure that allows for conclusions to be drawn and/or action taking as a second essential part of the analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Therefore, this process assists in making the information more accessible, aids understanding and data reduction. It also identifies developmental patterns and a unique life structure. Within Huberman and Miles (1994) approach, the data was interpreted by providing descriptive statistics of the domain scores and 30 facet scores of the NEO-PI-R. A consolidated profile of the subject was therefore compiled based on the findings from Form-R of the NEO-PI-R.

Conclusion drawing and verification refers to the researcher making interpretations and drawing meaning from the descriptive framework (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Conclusions were therefore made within the framework of the theory and every attempt was made to avoid premature conclusion drawing.

Huberman and Miles (1994) emphasize the importance of data verification and warn that if data verification is not undertaken during the data analysis process, several important
shortcomings could occur. These include (a) data overload, leading to admissions or
overweighting certain findings, (b) salience of first impressions or dramatic incidents, (c)
selectivity in data, especially when attempting to confirm a finding, (d) co-occurrences
interpreted as causal relationships or correlations, (e) false base-rate proportions, extrapolation of
the number of total instances from those observed, (f) unreliability of information from certain
sources, and (g) accommodation of information which question tentative hypotheses.

The question of reliability for replication of the research rests with the sources mentioned
above, and critical feedback from both the research supervisor and co-supervisor allowed for
researcher triangulation in an attempt to ensure unbiased interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

In terms of the Rules of Conduct pertaining specifically to psychology, the Professional
Board of Psychology under the Health Professions Council of South Africa (1974) has certain
rules and guidelines to take heed of when undertaking research. The researcher ensured that all
these points were taken into consideration and followed accordingly. The most significant points
pertaining to this study are discussed below.

Psychobiographical Ethics

Ethical considerations that are specific to psychobiographies must also be taken into
consideration. According to Elms (1994), the American Psychological Association issued
guidelines in 1976 that are still assumed to be taken seriously by its members. Elms explained the
guidelines as follows:

- Preferably, psychobiographies should be conducted on deceased individuals, who have
  been deceased for a long period of time, and should have no close-surviving relatives
  who may be embarrassed by unpleasant revelations.
• Psychobiographies may only be conducted on living individuals who have freely consented to being studied, interviewed and the results of the study written up for publication.

Runyan (1984) noted ethical issues, which include the invasion of privacy, the potential embarrassment or harm to the subject, and to his relatives and associates. Other concerns arise in terms of the types of data permissible to use, such as the use of archival materials, only what the family views as appropriate, what goes to print, whether the publication is a diplomatic, but honestly phrased presentation, or only what the family of the subject prefers to hear. Elms (1994) thus suggested that all intimate knowledge that is obtained, be treated and documented with respect. Therefore, the researcher will only use documentation from the public domain, in order to prevent harm to Kurt Cobain or to his reputation.

Voluntary Participation

Berg (1995) stated that a subject should participate in an experiment, or research project, only by their own free choice. This also allows the subject the freedom to leave the experiment, or research, at any time. The participants to complete the NEO-PI-R were informed of this nature of the research study as it was stated in the consent form, which can be viewed in the appendix in the present study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent refers to the knowing consent of individuals to participate in an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, or any unfair inducement or manipulation (Berg, 1995). Informed consent was obtained in the form of writing, and written permission was from the participants in this study. See appendix A and B for the consent form and letter to the participants.
Confidentiality and Anonymity

It is the responsibility of the researcher to maintain and ensure the participants’ anonymity. It is also necessary to ensure that all indications of the participants’ identities are removed from all records (Berg, 1995).

The consent form and letter to the participants explains the reasons for the present study, what the study entails, the procedure, and why the participants are essential to the study. It also explains to the participants informed consent, voluntary participation/refusal/discontinuation, risks such as how the study will not resolve to any costs of themselves, possible benefits such as how their participation in the study may add to the body of knowledge of psychology, and it also explains how the participants may have access to the findings of the study.

Conclusion

By discussing the research design and methodology, the data extraction and data analysis techniques were outlined in detail. Ethical considerations are an important part of the research study, therefore, this section was also explained in detail. The findings and discussion of the personality of the subject according to the Five Factor Model of Personality will be presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THE LIFE OF KURT COBAIN

Introduction

This chapter examines the personality of Kurt Cobain according to the Five Factor Model of Personality. The Five Factors are discussed according to the findings of the individual facets that make up each domain. The evidence will be presented by discussing Cobain in his life phases as a child, scholar and musician. The findings are discussed as fully as possible, in terms of their contribution to the various facets, and in order to achieve the aim of this study which was to explore and describe the personality of Kurt Cobain in a holistic manner.

As discussed previously, personality is a complex concept and there are various theories that a researcher can utilize in order to examine an individual. It is therefore not possible to expect to understand personality in its entirety, however, the present study does provide the opportunity for extensive exploration by considering Cobain’s life which was both unique and interesting. The researcher has to set realistic boundaries in order to meet the requirements of a master’s treatise in psychology, and it should be noted that exploration of this topic beyond the findings of this particular study is possible.

In addition to the primary sources of information utilized in the analysis of this psychobiographical account of Cobain, the results were obtained on the NEO-PI-R, which was administered, have been incorporated into the discussion. This will assist the reader to obtain a more comprehensive view of the personality of the subject and will also add more depth to the discussion as discrepancies arise. The NEO-PI-R profiles obtained and their relation to the understanding of Cobain’s life will be discussed in the section that follows.
Personality Profile of Kurt Cobain

An integrated personality profile of Kurt Cobain obtained from each NEO-PI-R that the seven participants completed will be illustrated in the table below. The number of participants (i.e., n) falling within a specific interpretive range (e.g., Very High) is depicted in Table 3 below. In other words, n=2: Very High indicates that two participants fell within the Very High range of scores. The researcher obtained the interpretive ranges of the scores for the categories, by utilizing the table below.

Table 2: Interpretative Ranges for the NEO-PI-R Domains (Costa & McCrae, 1992)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranges of the NEO-PI-R</th>
<th>Neuroticism</th>
<th>Extraversion</th>
<th>Openness to Experience</th>
<th>Agreeableness</th>
<th>Conscientiousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>0-38</td>
<td>0-70</td>
<td>0-75</td>
<td>0-84</td>
<td>0-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>39-58</td>
<td>71-93</td>
<td>76-94</td>
<td>85-109</td>
<td>100-121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>59-81</td>
<td>94-118</td>
<td>95-114</td>
<td>110-137</td>
<td>122-145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>82-101</td>
<td>119-141</td>
<td>115-132</td>
<td>138-162</td>
<td>146-166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>102-192</td>
<td>142-192</td>
<td>133-192</td>
<td>163-192</td>
<td>167-192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Integrated Profile of Kurt Cobain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEO-PI-R DOMAIN</th>
<th>NEO-PI-R FACET</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF NEO-PI-R DOMAIN AND FACET</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF SCORES OBTAINED BY THE PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Identifies individuals who are prone to psychological distress</td>
<td>*n=7: Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anger Hostility</td>
<td>Tendency to experience anger and related stress such as frustration</td>
<td>n=5: Very High n =2: High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Tendency to experience feelings of guilt, sadness, despondency and loneliness</td>
<td>n=7: Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Consciousness</td>
<td>Shyness or social discomfort</td>
<td>n=6: Very High n=1: High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsiveness</td>
<td>Tendency to act on cravings and urges rather than reining them in and delaying gratification</td>
<td>n=5: Very High, n=1: High, n=1: Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>General susceptibility to stress</td>
<td>n=7: Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>Quantity and intensity of energy directed outwards into the social world</td>
<td>n=5: Average, n=2: Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>Interest in and friendliness towards others</td>
<td>n=1: Average, n=5: Low, n=1: Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregariousness</td>
<td>Preference for the company of others</td>
<td>n=1: High, n=4: Average, n=2: Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Social ascendency and forcefulness of expression</td>
<td>n=4: Low, n=2: Average, n=1: Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Pace of living</td>
<td>n=2: High, n=5: Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excitement Seeking</td>
<td>Need for environmental stimulation</td>
<td>n=2: Very High, n=5: High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>Tendency to experience positive emotions</td>
<td>n=1: Very High, n=3: Average, n=3: Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to Experience</td>
<td>The active seeking and appreciation of experience for their own sake</td>
<td>n=3: Very High, n=3: High, n=1: Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Receptivity to the inner world of imagination</td>
<td>n=7: Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>Appreciation of art and beauty</td>
<td>n=3: Very High, n=4: High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Openness to inner feelings and emotions</td>
<td>n=3: Very High, n=3: High, n=1: Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Openness to new experiences on a practical level</td>
<td>n=2: High, n=4: Average, n=1: Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>Intellectual curiosity</td>
<td>n=2: High, n=4: Average, n=1: Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Readiness to re-examine own values and those of authority figures</td>
<td>n=1: Very High, n=3: High, n=3: Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>The kinds of interactions an individual prefers from compassion to tough mindedness</td>
<td>n=5: Low, n=2: Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trust  
Belief in the sincerity and good intentions of others  
n=1: Low  
n=6: Very Low

Straightforwardness  
Frankness in expression  
n=1: Average  
n=4: Low  
n=2: Very Low

Altruism  
Active concern for the welfare of others  
n=4: Low  
n=3: Very Low

Compliance  
Response to interpersonal conflict  
n=1: Average  
n=4: Low  
n=2: Very Low

Modesty  
Tendency to play down own achievements and be humble  
n=1: Very High  
n=3: High  
n=1: Average  
n=1: Low  
n=1: Very Low

Tender Mindedness  
Attitude of sympathy for others  
n=2: High  
n=4: Average  
n=1: Low

Conscientiousness  
Degree of organization, persistence, control and motivation in goal directed behaviour  
n=7: Very Low

Competence  
Belief in own self-efficacy  
n=7: Very Low

Order  
Personal organization  
n=2: Low  
n=5: Very Low

Dutifulness  
Emphasis placed on importance of fulfilling moral obligations  
n=7: Very Low

Achievement Striving  
Need for personal achievement and sense of direction  
n=2: Average  
n=2: Low  
n=3: Very Low

Self Discipline  
Capacity to begin tasks and follow through to completion despite boredom or distractions  
n=1: Low  
n=6: Very Low

Deliberation  
Tendency to think things through before acting or speaking  
n=7: Very Low

*Note: n=number of participants falling within an interpretive range.

The following section will describe the interpretive ranges obtained by the participants within the domain and facet categories of the NEO-PI-R.

**Neuroticism**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, individuals who have a high level of neuroticism are less able to control their impulses and cope with stress than those demonstrating
low levels of this trait. Therefore, these individuals are more prone to psychological distress. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain obtained an overall score falling in the Very High category, and all seven profiles filled out by the research participants, indicated that he fell within the Very High category. Cobain’s personal journals confirm this score, as he wrote many letters, songs and personal writings describing his feelings of anger, insecurity, anxiety, impulsiveness and vulnerability. For example, on the cover of his journal, it is written, “If you read, you’ll judge.” (Cobain, 2003). Nirvana’s lyrics to their songs are also consumed by anger, confusion and vulnerability.

**Anxiety**

Anxiety defines a trait that implies an individual is prone to worry, become tense easily, and fearfulness. According to Kaplan and Sadock (2007), anxiety is a feeling of apprehension caused by anticipation of danger, which may be internal or external. Individuals low in this facet appear to be more relaxed and calm. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain obtained an overall score falling in the Very High category. Five participants indicated that he fell within the Very High category, and two participants indicted that he fell within the High category. Therefore, according to all the seven participants, Cobain is easily anxious and stressed.

As a child, Cobain experienced high levels of anxiety, especially after his parent’s divorce. According to Divorceinfo.com (2009), anxiety comes about through feelings of abandonment, changes in living conditions, embarrassment, guilt, concern about additional separations, and a fear of additional unknown circumstances that must be present in the future. Children suffering from anxiety often become demanding or clingy, and they may pull back from pre-existing friendships with their peers. This is the present researcher’s opinion that is what happened with Cobain, as he began to withdraw, and became weak and clingy. He also disclosed that he never felt loved and secure again, and he was ashamed of his parents. This
therefore resulted in him not wanting to face the pressures of school, and he was also seen as a loner and bully at times (Sandford, 1995).

Throughout Cobain’s adolescent life, he moved between parents, and lived under a bridge at one stage. Therefore, he could have experienced much anxiety, as he had no stability and no source of security. No sense of belonging was established for him as his basic needs, such as food and shelter were uncertain, resulting in him possibly becoming severely distressed.

Abraham Maslow developed the theory of Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs (Simon, Irwin & Drinnien, 1987). The first need that has to be met in order to achieve other needs is Physiological Needs, which include needs for oxygen, food, water, and a relatively constant body temperature. They are the strongest needs because if an individual were deprived of all needs, the physiological ones would become primary in the individual’s search for satisfaction. When all physiological needs are satisfied and are no longer controlling thoughts and behaviors, the needs for security can become active (Simon et al., 1987). Children often display the signs of insecurity and the need to be safe, which Cobain did by becoming withdrawn and clingy. When the needs for safety and for physiological well-being are satisfied, the next class of needs for love, affection and belongingness can surface. Maslow states that people seek to overcome feelings of loneliness and alienation, which involves both giving and receiving love, affection and the sense of belonging (Simon et al., 1987). Cobain was not able to reach this stage as he had no security, sense of belonging, and none of the individuals in his support system welcomed him into their home or expressed love and affection towards him.

When the first three classes of needs are satisfied, the needs for esteem can become dominant. These involve needs for both self-esteem and for the esteem an individual receives from others. Humans have a need for a stable, firmly based, high level of self-respect, and respect from others. When these needs are satisfied, the individual feels self-confident and valuable as a
person in the world, however, when these needs are frustrated, the person feels inferior, weak, helpless and worthless (Simon et al., 1987). Cobain’s level of self-esteem was extremely low. Throughout his adolescent and adult life, he has expressed himself as worthless through his music, interviews and personal journals. He expresses this in the song, “I Know You’re Right” (Nirvana, 2002), as the lyrics include the following, “I will never bother you. I will never promise to. I will never follow you. I will never bother you. Never speak a word again. I will crawl away for good… I have never failed to fail.”

When all of the foregoing needs are satisfied, then and only then are the needs for self-actualization activated. Maslow describes self-actualization as an individual’s need to be and do that which the individual was born to do. These needs make themselves felt in signs of restlessness, as the individual may feel on edge, tense, or lacking something. If an individual is hungry, unsafe, not loved or accepted, or lacking self-esteem, it is very easy to know what the individual is restless about, however, it is not always clear what they may want when there is a need for self-actualization (Simon et al., 1987).

Cobain was also bullied at school. He befriended a homosexual student, and was subsequently also called a homosexual. Cobain wrote many songs about homosexuality, such as “All Apologies” (Nirvana, 1993), which includes the lyrics, “What else should I say? Everyone is gay”. Facing the pressures of being bullied at school resulted in him becoming anxious, angry, hostile and rebellious. The critical feature of anxiety is repeated exposure to the stimuli in which an individual learns that there is a probability of danger or harm. It follows that anxiety may result as a function of repeated exposure to bullying, and may lead to physical or psychological harm. It was found that personal harm, such as an attack by others, was the most frequent and intense worry of children in grades two through six (Craig, 1998). Furthermore, worries concerning their friends and classmates included rejection, exclusion from social activities, being
ignored by others, and betrayal. These worries are examples of indirect aggression, therefore, it is hypothesized that victims will report more depression and higher levels of anxiety (Craig, 1998).

As an adult, Cobain used to de-stress by listening to and making music. It was his escape (Ronson, 1996). Cobain also had a long-term history of drug use, which may have also been used as a coping mechanism for dealing with anxiety, anger and depression.

**Angry Hostility**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, angry hostility refers to the tendency to experience anger and related states such as frustration. It is related to an individual’s readiness to express anger. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Very High category for Anger Hostility. Five participants indicated that Cobain fell within the Very High category, while two said that he fell within the High category for Anger Hostility.

As a child, Cobain was described as anti-social and rebellious and due to his behaviour, he rotated living among family and friends, and lived under a bridge at one stage. He also developed a reputation in junior school as a problem child, which carried through into high school. His peers described him as menacing and said that the look he gave them was something from the Exorcist (Sandford, 1995).

He struggled to adapt to his parents divorce, as well as their re-marriages. He acted out by bullying other children, withdrawing, and vandalizing. According to Hughes (2008), children from divorced families are more likely to have academic problems, and are more likely to be aggressive and get in trouble with school authorities or the police. These children are also more likely to have low self-esteem and feel depressed. Parents who divorce often have a dysfunctional relationship, and yet that is not what their children see (Williams, 2009). The children cannot remove themselves emotionally in order to see their family objectively. Instead, they feel an immense hurt and fear of what is happening in and to their world (Williams, 2009). Each time
their name comes up, they may feel that they are the cause of the divorce, and usually either one or both parents will be more distant from the child, deepening the feeling that they, somehow, are the reason the parent is gone. Consequently their level of self-esteem is decreased (Williams, 2009). Cobain used to dedicate all his poems to his mother, and none to his father. Cobain later described experiencing a sense of betrayal. This may have developed from a sense of abandonment from his father (Ronson, 1996).

Children who grow up in divorced families often have more difficulties getting along with siblings, peers, and their parents (Hughes, 2008). In adolescence, they are more likely to engage in delinquent activities, to get involved in early sexual activity, and to experiment with illegal drugs (Hughes, 2008). In adolescence and young adulthood, they are then more likely to have some difficulty establishing intimate relationships and forming independence from their families (Hughes, 2008). Cobain began to use drugs from the beginning of his adolescence, which continued into adulthood. He also had a number of affairs, as well as largely voyeuristic episodes with women by the time he was twenty-four years old (Sandford, 1995). Cobain’s journal is also filled with aggressive letters, poems, and thoughts, especially surrounding challenging himself and his sense of worth, as well as society’s need for conformity. Nirvana’s lyrics were also associated with aggression at times, using lyrics involving guns, death and murder, as well as cursing. His music videos also had subtle hidden messages of anger and rebelliousness, such as in the music video of “Smells Like Teen Spirit”, where high school students are watching Nirvana play, dancing, head-banging and moshing to their music, and the cheerleaders have Anarchy symbols on their uniforms. This is a symbol for rebellion. Within the music video of “You Know You’re Right”, there are consistent flashbacks of Nirvana, and Cobain is presenting with emotions of anger and sadness, as he is smashing and throwing objects around, vomiting on stage, and at times he has an insecure and sad expression on his face on certain flashbacks.
Depression

Depression, according to the Five Factor Model of Personality, relates to normal individual differences in the tendency to experience depressive affect including feelings of guilt, sadness, despondency and loneliness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Very High category for Depression, and all seven participants felt that he fell within the Very High category for Depression.

Cobain had much hardship in his life, since the day he was born, when he was wrapped in a pink blanket. Many of his songs are associated with gender identity and sexuality, and at one stage in his life, he was confused with his sexuality. Cobain also experienced distress when his younger sister was born, as he ran away (Ronson, 1996).

Throughout his childhood, he was sickly, moody and temperamentally, and did not have many close friends, as he was seen by others as an outsider. He expressed himself through poetry, song writing, and drawing, which was saturated with themes of human anatomy (Sandford, 1995). Cobain also described himself to Los Angeles Times Newspaper that he was very depressed as a child. He went into his adolescence with characteristics of being sensitive, moody, feeling aloof, paranoid, unwanted and betrayed by his parents. He wrote to a fellow classmate explaining that he did not feel that he belonged in the classroom (Sandford, 1995). Cobain became known in Montesano, where his father lived, as the voice of protest against sport, school, religion, family and convention. He had a strong dislike of conformity in relationships, and he believed that people were unreliable (Sandford, 1995). Within Cobain’s music videos, presenting symptoms of depression are also expressed. In numerous music videos Cobain’s hair is lying across his face, he has an apathetic expression, and his eyes also display sadness, as was observed by the researcher.
As an adult, Cobain’s apartment was found with rotting food, old beer bottles everywhere, and dirty underwear lying around. Cobain confirmed this by disclosing that it was typical punk rock décor, as baby dolls were hanging by their necks with blood all over them, and beer, vomit and blood were also all over the carpet amongst garbage (Ronson, 1996).

Cobain also had a number of suicide attempts as an adult. Although most individuals who are depressed do not commit suicide, untreated depression can increase the risk of possible suicide. It is not uncommon for depressed individuals to have thoughts about suicide whether or not they intend to act on these thoughts (Price, 2004). Severely depressed individuals often do not have the energy to harm themselves, but it is when their depression lifts and they gain increased energy that they may be more likely to attempt suicide. Suicide is considered a possible complication of depressive illness in combination with other risk factors because suicidal thoughts and behavior can be symptoms of moderate to severe depression (Price, 2004).

Injunctions are negative, restrictive script messages that emerge from twelve themes that are the basis for an individual’s negative early decisions (Stewart & Joines, 1987). Cobain may have had the possible injunction, “Don't exist”. This injunction refers to those individuals who feel worthless, useless or unlovable. This may have been developed by the individual’s parents, saying words such as, “I wish I had never you”, or “If it weren’t for you, I could have…” These messages are given through verbally as well as non-verbally, and therefore, reinforcing the belief that the child should not exist, and as a result, in extreme cases, individuals may contemplate suicide (Stewart & Joines, 1987). Cobain may therefore have had this injunction, as he felt worthless and unlovable throughout his life. His numerous suicide attempts also confirm this injunction, as well as the final act of suicide.
Self-Consciousness

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, self-consciousness largely refers to shame and embarrassment. Individuals who obtain a high score in this facet tend to be uncomfortable around others, may be sensitive to ridicule and experience feelings of insecurity. This facet may also describe shyness and social anxiety (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to the results from the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Very High category for Self-Consciousness. Six participants indicated that he fell within the Very High category, and one participant indicted that he fell within the High category for Self-Consciousness.

As a child, Cobain was described as a loner. This suggests that he did not feel comfortable around others and may have felt shame and embarrassment due to his parents divorce (Sandford, 1995). Parents are often not aware of it, but a child's whole sense of the world is often based on what they experience of their parents from the moment of conception (Williams, 2009). There are other influences, but the most profound influence is that of the parents' behaviour toward each other. A child is more likely to feel secure if the parents are mature, loving and considerate toward each other. A child may feel insecure if the parents are immature, spiteful, selfish and argumentative toward each other. Therefore, if the parents divorce, it may teach the child that there is no stable, secure, loving place, which is evident in Cobain’s feelings surrounding his parents divorce (Williams, 2009).

Because of a child’s sense of insecurity and low self-esteem, children of divorce are often highly vulnerable. Their desire to build up their self-esteem often drives them to seek approval anywhere they can find it, such as abusing drugs with friends (Williams, 2009). Cobain began the use of drugs at an early age, which continued into adulthood, however, he rebelled against conformity and seeking the approval of others.
According to an Aberdeen reporter who had interviewed Cobain’s mother, she disclosed that Cobain and his mother had similar personality traits as they were both sensitive to criticism, had fluctuating moods, and believed that their abilities were either unappreciated or exaggerated by others (Sandford, 1995). For example, a school teacher of Cobain described an incident in which he shouted at another child for not understanding one of his paintings. However, when his artwork appeared on the cover of the school paper, he was angry as he described his work as no good (Sandford, 1995).

Although Cobain’s grunge band, Nirvana, was highly successful, he also doubted his ability as a singer and songwriter, and questioned the band’s talent. This he disclosed frequently in his personal journals. He often described others thinking of him as an emaciated, yellow skinned, zombie-like, evil drug fiend, junky, lost cause, on the brink of death, self destructive, selfish pug. A loser who shoots up in the back stage area just seconds before a performance. He also commented that he felt that the band had pulled a minor rock and roll con, as he was not as nearly concerned with or about himself, the band or anyone, as much as the media would like to believe (Cobain, 2003).

Cobain may have also had the injunction of “Don’t belong”. This injunction refers to individuals that do not feel as if they fit into a group, and is seen by others as a loner or unsociable. This message may have been developed by parents continuously saying that their child is different from other children, or is difficult (Stewart & Joines, 1987). This can be confirmed by Cobain’s parents, family and teachers, who all described him as being different to other children, and was seen as unsociable and withdrawn (Ronson, 1996).

**Impulsiveness**

Impulsiveness is frequently referred to in terms of risk-taking or rapid decision time (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The Five Factor Model of Personality describes impulsiveness as a
tendency to act on cravings and urges rather than reigning them in and delaying gratification. Individuals who have a low impulsive trait are able to control desires and urges, and are more likely to have a high tolerance of frustration. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Very High category for Impulsiveness. Five participants indicated that he fell within the Very High category, one participant indicted that he fell within the High category, and one participant indicated that he fell within the Average category for Self-Consciousness.

Cobain has expressed much impulsiveness throughout his life, such as running away from home when he found out that he was going to have a baby sister, rotating amongst family when it came to living arrangements, and continuously behaving in a rebellious manner by bullying, non-conforming, vandalizing property, and abusing drugs (Ronson, 1996).

Cobain was also involved in a number of relationships before committing to Courtney Love. Their relationship was grounded in drug use, and when she discovered that she was pregnant, the two got married. Cobain also had a number of suicide attempts, and also absconded from a substance rehabilitation centre. These are acts of impulsiveness. His last act of impulsiveness was committing suicide in 1994, by overdosing on heroin and shooting himself (Ronson, 1996). According to Giegling, et al., (2009) aggression and impulsivity are all personality traits associated with suicide attempts. Impulsivity and harm avoidance have emerged as temperament dimensions independently associated with self-aggressive tendencies in personality, and as such could explain the correlation between temperament and suicide.

**Vulnerability**

Vulnerability portrays an individual’s vulnerability to stress and how they cope with it. If an individual is high in vulnerability, they tend to become easily dependent, hopeless or panicky when faced with stressful situations (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to the results of the
NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Very High category for Vulnerability. All seven participants indicated that he fell within the Very High category for Vulnerability.

As discussed earlier, children who come from a divorced home may feel insecure and have a low self-esteem, therefore, this increases their vulnerability. Cobain was described as weak and clingy after his parents divorce, and he especially became attached to his mother, which Sandford (1995) described as an almost abnormal fixation with one parent. His mother was also overprotective of him. According to Sandford there has been a tradition of temperamental, artistically minded boys being pampered by their mothers and instinctively feared by other children. This interestingly fits the description of most American mass-killers. Cobain also appears to fit this description. His tendency for vulnerability was also shown when he became rebellious, turned to drugs, became withdrawn, and had numerous suicide attempts.

According to Cobain’s writings in his personal journals, he disclosed that he took heroin as a pain killer for a stomach disease, and that he was not an addict. However, when in the Rehabilitation Centre, he absconded, and overdosed on heroin and pain killers when attempting suicide. According to the song “Silver” by Nirvana (1992), the lyrics state, “Mom and dad went to a show, they dropped me off at Grandpa Joe’s, I kicked and screamed, said please don’t go”. The lyrics from “Lithium” by Nirvana (1991) state, “I like it, I ’m not gonna crack. I miss you, I’m not gonna crack. I love you, I’m not gonna crack. I kill you, I’m not gonna crack”. These lyrics support that Cobain did not cope well with stress and was vulnerable to stress.

**Extraversion**

Extraversion refers to the trait of an individual preferring the company of large groups, assertiveness, activity and a tendency to be talkative. It is most associated with sociability (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, extraversion refers to the quantity and intensity of energy directed outwards into the social world. Individuals who have a
A high level of this trait tend to be optimistic, cheerful and energetic. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain obtained an overall score falling in the Average category for Extraversion. Five participants indicated that he fell within the Average category, and two participants indicted that he fell within the Low category for Extraversion.

**Warmth**

Warmth is related to interpersonal intimacy. Individuals with high levels of this facet are friendly and affectionate, and have a genuine interest in other individuals (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Low category for Warmth. One participant indicated that he fell within the Average category, five participants indicted that he fell within the Low category, and one participant indicated that he fell within the Very Low category for Warmth.

As a child, Cobain did not have many friends, as he preferred to be alone, and admitted to bullying other children. He explained that it was enjoyable to joke around with other people (Ronson, 1996). At the age of three, he also displayed an aversion to authority and the law, as every time he saw a patrol car, he would make a derogatory comment about the police (Sandford, 1995). Cobain was close to his mother and wrote love poems addressed to her. In high school, he befriended a homosexual student, whom he defended, and was bullied for. In addition, Cobain began a long lasting friendship with Novoselic, his fellow Nirvana band member. They met through music concerts and consequently began playing their instruments together. This eventually led to them starting up the band, Nirvana.

As an adult, Cobain was described as being intense about music, however, he seemed to shut off completely from everything else. In 1992 when Courtney Love and Cobain got engaged, he disclosed that since the engagement, his attitude had changed drastically, and he could not believe how much happier he was. He even forgot that he was in a band at times (Ronson, 1996).
Cobain’s relationship with Love quickly became destructive, however, revolving around drug-use, and it is still rumoured that Love may have had something to do with Cobain’s death (Sandford, 1995). According to Cobain’s journals, he was hurting as an individual, and would disclose of himself through poetry, songs and letters, often cursing at the individuals in his life, as well as himself. The injunction “Don’t be close” refers to individuals that feel they cannot be emotionally close to people. An individual may reach out time and again, only to get no response, therefore, eventually deciding that their search for closeness is not worth the pain of rejection. An individual may therefore not trust other people, and stay away from developing close relationships in order to protect themselves. They may become suspicious of others, and if someone shows them warmth, he may have his feelers out for rejection (Stewart & Joines, 1987). Cobain’s injunction of “Don’t be close” may therefore also be another indicator of why he has little warmth towards other individuals.

**Gregariousness**

According the Five Factor Model of Personality, gregariousness refers to the preference for the company of others. Individuals who do not have a high level of this facet tend to avoid social stimulation. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Average category for Gregariousness. One participant indicated that he fell within the High category, five participants indicated that he fell within the Average category, and two participants indicted that he fell within the Low category for Gregariousness.

As a child and adolescent, Cobain did not take part in social stimulation, as previously discussed. However, as an adult and part of the band, Nirvana, being a part of the limelight and fame, forced Cobain to socialize, participate in interviews, tour, perform and spend most of his time practicing with his band members. Cobain still liked to withdraw and spend time alone, however, especially when abusing drugs.
As discussed, the seven participants’ results ranged from Low to Average to High, when coming to a conclusion regarding Cobain’s level of gregariousness. Therefore, the subjectivity of this facet plays a significant role regarding the results of this domain. According to Cobain’s journals and lyrics, he preferred to be alone and did not always enjoy the company of others, and this may be due to his own personal anxieties, self-consciousness and anger towards the world. In the song “Lithium” by Nirvana (1991), the lyrics say the following, “I’m so lonely, that’s okay I shaved my head. And I’m not sad, and just maybe I’m to blame for all I’ve heard. But I’m not sure”. This may therefore be interpreted that he does feel lonely. However, due of his aggressive and rebellious behaviour, as well as drug use, he may have felt ashamed, and blamed for many of the problems portrayed in his life, band and relationships.

**Assertiveness**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, assertiveness refers to the trait of social ascendancy or dominance and forcefulness of expression. According to CareInAction.com (Date Unknown), assertiveness is asking for what one wants or acting to get what one wants in a way that respects the rights and feelings of other people. Individuals high in this facet often become group leaders. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Low category for assertiveness. Two participants indicated that he fell within the Average category, four participants indicated that he fell within the Low category, and one participant indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Assertiveness.

The researcher finds this result to be somewhat incongruent with Cobain’s personality, according to research findings obtained. Leadership is positively associated with assertiveness (Sugarman, 2000) however, it does appear that Cobain did not voice his assertiveness as freely as an adult. However, Cobain stood for what he believed in, by not conforming to a group or set of idealized values or morals that he did not agree with, and he also stood up for his views on
homosexuality. Yet, Cobain’s assertiveness may have been confused with rebelliousness or aggression.

Cobain was able to take initiative however, when starting the band, Nirvana, and becoming the lead singer, songwriter and front man of the band. Cobain took his music seriously. Nirvana rotated drummers, and in his personal journal there is a letter Cobain wrote to one of the drummers in which he let him go from the band as he was not putting in enough time for practising, and Cobain did not feel that he was compatible as a unitary member for the band. He also strongly expressed his views on life matters through his lyrics and when interviewed. For example, the song “Rape Me” by Nirvana (1993) expresses that he feels that a rapist should be raped himself. For many of his younger adult, and adolescent followers, he also allowed them to not feel ashamed of whom they were, and empowered them to stand against a conforming society (Ronson, 1996).

**Activity**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, this facet is seen in rapid tempo and vigorous movement, in a sense of energy and a need to keep busy. Active individuals tend to live fast-paced lives. The other side of this facet portrays someone who prefers a relaxed and leisurely tempo. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Average category for Activity. Two participants indicated that he fell within the High category, and five participants indicted that he fell within the Average category for Activity.

As a child, Cobain was described by family members as moody, and he often swung from mania to despair. A relative of Cobain’s, who was a practicing psychiatric nurse, described him as bipolar. He was therefore given Ritalin and sleeping tablets in order to help him sleep, but the medication had no effect on his behaviour. Instead, it made things worse by setting up a pattern that he later clung to by becoming an addict (Sandford, 1995). Although Cobain did not
participate in school activities or was involved with group activities, he spent his energy writing poetry, playing on his guitar, and drawing.

As a member of a highly successful and well-known grunge band, Cobain’s lifestyle was more active than that of most individuals, as he had to have enough physical and mental energy for touring around the world, performing, and still practicing and making new songs for the band. Therefore, an average to high score within this facet is consistent with the lifestyle that Cobain led.

**Excitement Seeking**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, this facet refers to a need for excitement and stimulation. An individual who is high in excitement seeking tends to like bright colours and noisy environments, while a low scorer has no need for thrills. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the High category for Excitement Seeking. Two participants indicated that he fell within the Very High category, and five participants indicated that he fell within the High category for Excitement Seeking.

As a child and adolescent, Cobain received stimulation through writing, drawing and playing music. He also began to seek excitement by attending rock shows in Seattle, and starting the band, Nirvana (Ronson, 1996). Cobain continued to seek excitement and stimulation through performing in his band, and allowing it to become a success. He disclosed in an interview that he was only truly happy when playing music (Sandford, 1995). According to his cousin, Cobain’s fierce ambition and eager to be unique, special, and someone that people would notice and admire emerged only two years after he left Aberdeen (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain was extremely passionate about what he stood for and believed in, and expressed himself through his lyrics. Unfortunately, Cobain also received excitement and stimulation through drug use, yet he did not admit that he was addicted to drugs (Cobain, 2003).
Positive Emotions

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, positive emotions reflect an individual’s ability to experience positive emotions such as happiness, joy and excitement. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Average category for Positive Emotions. One participant indicated that he fell within the Very High category, three participants indicated that he fell within the Average category, and three participants indicted that he fell within the Low category for Positive Emotions. As subjectivity in the results of the NEO-PI-R is considered, the researcher will provide more evidence to support the results of the NEO-PI-R.

Cobain did not experience many positive emotions as a child or adolescent. He was bullied, withdrawn, lonely, and felt insecure after his parent’s divorce. He also moved amongst family members, obtaining no sense of belonging, and reinforcing the belief that he was not cared for, did not matter, and was not talented. He disclosed this in his personal journals, as well as in the lyrics of the song, “You Know You’re Right” (Nirvana, 2002), where he discloses, “I have never failed to fail”.

Although Cobain had much success, and loved being a part of Nirvana, he still felt that he had no talent, and that the media did not think that he was deserving of praise as he was abusing drugs. He disclosed this in his personal journals. However, according to relatives, they described Cobain as having grandiose delusions, thinking that Nirvana was the best, and that he had incredible talent (Sandford, 1995). This is not how Cobain portrayed himself in his journals.

Openness to Experience

According to Costa and McCrae (1992), an individual high in this factor has a life that is experientially richer and is an individual who would be willing to entertain new ideas, unconventional values, and may experience pleasant and unpleasant emotions more enthusiastically than an individual who is low on this factor. These individuals are active seeking
and appreciate experience for their own sake. It is essential to keep in mind that in alternative formulations of the Five Factor Model of Personality, this particular factor is often labelled intellect (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This is a result of openness being related to some aspects of intelligence, such as divergent thinking. However, openness is not equivalent to intelligence, as Costa and McCrae (1992) disclose that some closed individuals are highly intelligent. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain obtained an overall score falling in the High category for Openness to Experience. This indicates that Cobain is open to new experiences, has a broad range of interests and is imaginative. According to the results of the participants, three indicated that he fell within the Very High category, three indicated that he fell within the High category, and one participant indicated that he fell within the Average category for Openness to Experience.

**Fantasy**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, individuals who are open to fantasy have a vivid imagination and tend to daydream as a way of creating an interesting inner world for themselves, not as a means of escaping everyday reality. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell into the Very High category for Fantasy. All seven participants indicated that he fell within the Very High category for Fantasy.

Cobain’s score suggests that he enjoys rich, varied and novel experiences in his fantasy life. As a child, Cobain was always interested in music and spending his time drawing and writing poetry. According to his grandmother, between the ages of four and five, he began to withdraw, and invented an invisible companion, an uncontrollable ball of manic energy he named Boddah, which had his own place setting at the dinner table. Cobain also had another fantasy that he was an alien, sent to earth to study the natives and not subject to the same morals and values as humans (Sandford, 1995).
Cobain’s interest in writing his own songs, and poetry continued into adolescence through to adulthood. Many of his drawings, artwork and poetry are in his personal journals. Some of his drawings include cartoons concerning real life personal matters, aliens, and scary-looking creatures killing other creatures.

Cobain was widely known for his withdrawn nature, focusing on fantasy as a means of escaping from reality, and coping with the life handed to him. According to Egan (2001), a further value of fantasy stories is that they allow the child to play with ideas. They can provide comfort and consolation with regard to pressing real-life problems. In dealing with life's problems, fantasy stories have the additional value that they are richly suggestive of solutions, as fairy tales leave the child fantasizing whether and how to apply to themselves what the story reveals about life and human nature. Therefore, whatever the content of the fairy tale, it is but fanciful elaborations and exaggerations of the tasks children have to meet, and of their hopes and fears (Egan, 2001).

Fantasy can be seen as a prerequisite both for a range of intellectual skills and for an imaginative and flexible engagement with reality. Clearly there are cases where fantasy can combine with psychological problems and perhaps even make them worse (Egan, 2001). Even in the worst cases, where the mind escapes from reality, it may well be that fantasy provides some coping resources. The fantasy, in such cases, is only a symptom, perhaps a catalyst, of something darker, and the fantasy may be the child's one beneficial tool (Egan, 2001).

**Aesthetics**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, high scorers on Aesthetics tend to appreciate art and beauty. They need not have artistic talent, but because of their interest, they develop a wider knowledge and appreciation for art. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell within a High category for Aesthetics. Three participants indicated that he fell within
the Very High category, and four participants indicted that he fell within the High category for Aesthetics.

As discussed, Cobain was creative and artistic from a young child through into adulthood. He had a love for music since the age of two years, and started to write his own songs and practice cover songs since the time he received his first guitar. He also focused his attention at school on all of his art courses, and as an adolescent, his way of escaping and coping with hardship was going to watch punk rock concerts (Ronson, 1996).

Cobain’s love for art and creativity comes from both his parents and their sides of the family. His mother encouraged drawing and his father loved music, therefore, Cobain was able to express himself freely, and there were not any closed doors for him (Sandford, 1995). Cobain also described himself as always singing, and banging on kitchen utensils to make music as a child. He disclosed that he felt happy when he was singing or making music (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain’s love for music initiated the multi-platinum grunge band, Nirvana. He was able to express himself through music, and his personal journals also confirm his love for creativity, as they are filled with lyrics, letters, poems and drawings. Nirvana’s music videos are also extremely creative. Within the music video of “Come As You Are”, there is a gun and a baby floating in water, and Cobain is swinging from a chandelier. Within the music video of “Heart-Shaped Box”, there is a man who is ill, and he dreams of hanging from a cross with crows sitting on the cross. There is also a little girl dressed in a white coat, with a pointy long hat skipping past the cross, and then later she is wearing the same uniform, but in black. Cobain is lying in a field, smoking and getting high. These are only three examples of Cobain’s input of creativity and fantasy into his music videos and it confirms that he was extremely creative, as was observed by the researcher.
Feelings

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, an individual that is considered open to feelings will be receptive to their own inner feelings and emotions, and will place value on emotions as being an important part of life. An individual with a high score on this facet indicates that they experience deeper and more differential emotional states than an individual who scores within the average range. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell within the High category for Feelings. Three participants indicated that he fell within the Very High category, three participants indicated that he fell within the High category, and one participant indicted that he fell within the Average category for Feelings.

Cobain was described as swinging from mania to despair as a child. He disclosed that he was an extremely happy child to one source, and then to another source, he disclosed that he was seriously depressed (Sandford, 1995). Cobain was known to be very moody and aggressive as a child, and spent most of his time alone. When his father re-married in 1987, Cobain did not talk about how he was feeling, as he kept all his feelings bottled up inside, but, he was very shocked (Sandford, 1995).

He therefore went into adolescence with feelings of insecurity, betrayal, and paranoia, and also displayed sensitivity and moodiness. Cobain’s feelings of being unwanted were reinforced by the fact that he had no stable home growing up, and that he did not experience a sense of belonging at home or at school. This led to his feelings of rebellion and the expression of his views to others in a hostile manner (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain was able to express his feelings through Nirvana’s lyrics, and his personal journals. He expressed his love and excitement towards his band, his wife (Courtney Love), and his daughter (Francis Bean) (Ronson, 1996).
Cobain expressed his view on homosexuality clearly, and also appeared to have a fascination with human anatomy, as he often drew pictures in his journals integrating sexuality and aggression. He also drew pictures of male seahorses giving birth and naked individuals, Cobain referred to himself as a lousy little girl as he did not enjoy and play sports (as his father had requested), and was sensitive and artistic instead. As a baby, Cobain’s mother dressed him in a pink blanket, pink fluffy sweater, and was very protective over him (Sandford, 1995). Cobain’s fair skin and bodily features were also described as feminine. It is thus speculated that Cobain’s sexuality may have been in a state of confusion while growing up. The song by Nirvana (1992), “Been a Son” states the following, “She should have stayed away from friends. She should have had more time to spend. She should have died when she was born. She should have worn the crown of thorns. She should have been a son”. It is tentatively suggested by the present researcher that these lyrics may be perceived as being about Cobain. However, reversing the genders between him and that of which is in the song.

Cobain was highly expressive of his views, opinions and feelings. This is evident throughout his life, and what he stood for against conformity. This confirms his receptiveness to his own inner feelings and emotions. His high score on the NEO-PI-R also supports the evidence that he experiences positive and negative emotions more acutely than others, contributing to self-consciousness, resulting in an inclination to being more sensitive to ridicule by others.

**Actions**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, openness to actions is normally identified in behaviours that demonstrate a willingness to try different activities and experience new things. Individuals who fall into the High category for this scale tend to prefer novelty to routine and may partake in different hobbies. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Average category for Actions. Two participants indicated that he fell within the High
category, four participants indicated that he fell within the Average category, and one participant indicted that he fell within the Low category for Actions.

Although Cobain had an interesting, however, unstable life, filled with new experiences and excitement, such as his band becoming multi-platinum, Cobain was miserable and rebellious while growing up. He disclosed that all he wanted was a stable, secure family, and he was not able to cope well with his parents’ divorce (Ronson, 1996).

He was also withdrawn and only interested in art and music. Cobain disclosed that he loved Nirvana and his music, however, he was still unhappy, as he turned to drugs to escape from all the fame and pressures from the media (Sandford, 1995). Although Nirvana’s concerts were described as abrasive, exhilarating, violent and confrontational, it was never comfortable for Cobain, as he preferred structure and musicality, therefore disliking the ‘free-for-all’ his behavior provoked. According to Sandford (1995), when Cobain realized that, for the first time in his life, perfect strangers not only admired but worshipped him, he was confronted with all his old feelings of inadequacy and doubt, and it was this weakness that killed him.

Ideas

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, if an individual exhibits openness to ideas, it can be deducted that they are generally quite curious and open-minded enough to consider new, perhaps unconventional ideas. Openness to ideas is generally thought to contribute to the development of intellectual potential. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Average category for Ideas. Two participants indicated that he fell within the High category, four participants indicated that he fell within the Average category, and one participant indicted that he fell within the Low category for Ideas.

Cobain has always had very controversial ideas, and rebelled against any form of conformity. For example, he wished he was a homosexual, just to rebel against social norms. As
a child through to adolescence, he also expressed his views through poetry and music, and often other individuals did not understand his views, and described him as psychotic or weird (Sandford, 1995).

Nirvana is a grunge band, and grunge has been described as the coming together of freaks and losers (Cobain, 2003). This is one description of the phenomenon. Grunge had non-musical principles. They were negative in connotation: disapproval of the state’s anti-homosexual bills, opposition to the Omnibus Drug Law and mélange of Utopian-socialist mumblings, of which strident feminism was the cornerstone. The image of an anti-social but informed generation, combining in self-protective union, was sociologically attractive, and soon even local politicians were preaching on grunge’s text (Sandford, 1995). Grunge was significant, as it was not just another musical or youth trend, it was the ultimate expression and fusion of most of the defining cultural, ideological and social threads of the modern western world. Feminism, liberalism, irony, apathy, cynicism, idealism, anti-authoritarianism, wry post-modernism, and not least a love of dirty, abrasive music; grunge reconciled all these into a seminal whole (McManus, 2008). Grunge was not nihilist, they really did want a better world for everyone. It was misrepresented as being self-absorbed, but actually addressed big themes, things outside the artists’ private concerns, a rare thing in popular music (McManus, 2008). However, even though a whole world opened up to accommodate Cobain, he remained an outsider (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain succeeded because, unlike others, his voice tapped the everlasting themes of frustration, bewilderment and anger. Suddenly a sizeable part of the world’s youth had a hero figure they could relate to. The Nirvana (1991) song “Smells like Teen Spirit” is about teenagers rebelling against conformity. Cobain also had large amounts of writings in his personal journals expressing his controversial views on society and the world.
There appears to be a discrepancy on this facet, as Cobain appears to fit into the High category for Ideas. This may have been caused by the questionable reliability of the assessment results, due to the possibility of the participants misinterpreting the questions and understanding the questions differently. However, there may be a measure of truth reflected in the participants’ response in that Cobain reflected a capacity to produce ideas, even though unconventional and non-conforming.

**Values**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, an openness to values implies a readiness to examine social, political and religious values. A high score indicates an individual who is less likely to accept authority or honour tradition, and is therefore less conservative. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Average category for Values. One participant indicated that he fell within the Very High category, three participants indicated that he fell within the High category, and three participants indicted that he fell within the Average category for Values.

Throughout his youth, Cobain questioned authority. He did not listen to his parents, and moved around amongst families due to his rebellious nature. As discussed, Cobain was the voice of protest against sport, school, religion, family, convention and conformity in relationships. He also did not complete high school, and lived under a bridge at one stage (Ronson, 1996).

Nirvana is well-known for their expressive, controversial lyrics, such as in the songs “Rape Me” (Nirvana, 1993) and “Smell Like Teen Spirit” (Nirvana, 1991). Cobain’s personal writings also comment on authority and not conforming to society. This is confirmed by the following quotes, “I love my parents yet I disagree with nearly everything they stand for. I understand and appreciate the value of religion for others.” Cobain also wrote the following letter in his personal journal, “For Boys. Step one: Remember that your older brothers, cousins, uncles
and your fathers are not your role models. This means you do not do what they do. You do not do what they say." Cobain also wrote “Sheep” throughout his journal each time he mentioned a conforming society (Cobain, 2003).

**Agreeableness**

Agreeableness is the dimension most similar to Extraversion in the fact that it deals with interpersonal tendencies. According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, agreeableness is the kinds of interactions an individual prefers from compassion to tough mindedness. Costa and McCrae (1992) state that although it is tempting to view a high agreeable factor as socially preferable, it is important to realize that fighting for one’s interest is important. Cobain obtained an overall score falling in the Low category for Agreeableness. Five participants indicated that he fell within the Low category, and two participants indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Agreeableness.

**Trust**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, a high score in trust implies that an individual has the disposition to believe that others are honest and well-intentioned. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell into the Very Low category for Trust. One participant indicated that he fell within the Low category, and six participants indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Trust.

Cobain’s ability to trust diminished after his parent’s divorce. According to Blankenhorn (2001), it is not the divorce itself, but the relationship with parents after the divorce that is the key to trust in adult life. While parental divorce does not affect a child’s ability to develop intimate relationships as an adult, his relationship with his parent does. Cobain did not have a stable and secure relationship with either parent. When his father remarried and inherited two new children, Cobain felt betrayed. His mother also remarried, and her new husband was not accepting of him
as a step-son. Therefore, Cobain may have felt abandoned by his parents, as they were able to accept and love new partners and families without accommodating him (Sandford, 1995). Cobain’s mother also packed his bags and told him to leave when he was in the tenth grade, and he lived with different family members throughout his adolescence. This also diminished his ability to trust (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain’s possible injunction of “Don’t be close” may also be a factor adding to the reason why Cobain fell into the Low domain for trust, as this injunction may have been reinforced and encouraged to develop into adulthood. Cobain also had trouble trusting if his band was worth all the fame, and he did not trust his own ability or his talent. Nirvana also had many rotating drummers, and in one of his personal journals is a letter to a previous band member, which states that he is letting him go from the band, as he feels that the member is only interested in getting a well known name, credentials and notoriety. Instead of sorting through their differences and concerns, Cobain decided to let him go in a letter, without any warning.

### Straightforwardness

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, a high score in straightforwardness refers to frankness and sincerity. Low scorers are more willing to use flattery or craftiness to manipulate others. They may regard straightforward individuals as naïve. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Low category for Straightforwardness. One participant indicated that he fell within the Average category, four participants indicated that he fell within the Low category, and two participants indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Straightforwardness.

This may seem contradictory to Cobain’s personality as he voiced his opinion against conformity freely, and he also openly rebelled against authority figures, yet Cobain was
withdrawn and viewed as a loner throughout his childhood. He preferred to voice his feelings in the form of poetry or music, as seen within his personal journals and as heard in Nirvana’s lyrics.

It may be likely that if Cobain was asked his opinion on a specific subject, he may not have hesitated to have given it, so long as it did not involve anything that may have revealed too much of himself. It may therefore have been easier to give his opinion about something, rather than speak openly or straightforwardly about himself or his feelings.

Altruism

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, individuals who are high scorers in altruism show an active concern for the welfare of others. This is displayed in generosity, consideration and a willingness to assist others in need of help. Low scorers tend to be described as self-centred. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Low to Very Low categories for Altruism. Four participants indicated that he fell within the Low category, and three participants indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Altruism.

According to Freud, a child is born totally egoistic, and feels the urge for instant self-gratification, therefore, altruism is something that is acquired only through societal pressure. As a result, any altruistic behaviour on his part is always secondary to his selfish behaviour. In reality, there are two powerful opposing forces, which are constantly at war within every person's psyche. All human behaviour is derived from contrasting tensions, which can be described as the fierce battle between the individual and his conscience. The intensity of this conflict is manifested according to his personality; if he has obsessive-compulsive traits, or is anxiety-prone, then the struggle is even more traumatic, such as in Cobain’s situation, where he was anxiety-prone. This is highly subjective, and can range from a slight feeling of discomfort to clinical depression, with all the accompanying symptoms of sleep disturbances, strong guilt feelings, and even contemplation of suicide (Arieli, 2006).
Throughout Cobain’s upbringing he had to take care of himself, as there was no constant support from anyone in his life. This may therefore have encouraged his rebelliousness as a way of receiving the attention he longed for, and as a way of protecting himself from the hurt and rejection of others (Sandford, 1995). As a result, Cobain did not display an active concern for the welfare of others. He invested more of his attention and focus towards the band, Nirvana. Music was the only constant outlet for Cobain, therefore, it makes sense that he invested most of his time in the band, as it was the only emotional support he received.

Compliance

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, the facet of compliance concerns an individual’s reactions to interpersonal conflict. An individual who has a high score may inhibit aggression, where a low scorer may be aggressive and compete rather than co-operate and is not reluctant to express anger. According to the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Low category for Compliance. One participant indicated that he fell within the Average category, four participants indicated that he fell within the Low category, and two participants indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Compliance.

As previously discussed, Cobain obtained a Very High score for the category Anger Hostility. Cobain frequently and consistently expressed anger and aggression. As a child he bullied other children, and rebelled against authority. There was also constant conflict amongst Cobain and his parents, especially with his father. He also vandalized a church and other private property (Sandford, 1995).

When Cobain’s dependency on heroin escalated, he also caused problems within his band, as he would not arrive for practice, or arrived intoxicated. This caused conflict among the members of Nirvana. Cobain and Love had a destructive relationship. They abused heroin together, and their relationship was unhealthy and conflictual. It has been speculated by some that
Love murdered Cobain, and that he did not commit suicide. Rumour had it that Cobain was leaving Love. Tom Grant, a private investigator, stated that the way in which Cobain died and the events leading up the event were suspicious. Interestingly, no legal action was taken against him when he went public with his theory, and the medical examiner dealing with his death also said that he had found no forensic evidence to support the notion that Cobain's death was a suicide (Grant, 1994). However, these rumours are all unproven allegations, and were speculations.

Modesty

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, elevated modesty is related to humble and self-effacing behaviour, and a tendency to play down one’s achievement score. A low modesty score indicates conceitedness or arrogance and narcissism. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Average category for Modesty. The results for this category from the participants were widespread. One participant indicated that he fell within the Very High category, three participants indicated that he fell within the High category, one participant indicted that he fell within the Average category, one participant indicated that he fell within the Low category, and one participant indicated that he fell within the Very Low category for Modesty. Therefore, it is important to note how significant perception is within the NEO-PI-R. Cobain did behave in a contradictory manner regarding his accomplishments, however, which may have impacted on the results.

As a child, he did not feel that his poetry or drawings were worth anything. However, when an individual did not respond to the artwork the way in which he wanted them to, he would get upset (Sandford, 1995). Cobain also frequently put himself and his talent as a musician down, as well as the band’s success. Yet, at times he was described as having grandiose delusions regarding his talent and that of Nirvana (Sandford, 1995).
Within Cobain’s personal journals, as well the lyrics of many Nirvana songs, he disclosed how dumb and untalented he was. On one of the Nirvana album covers, he wanted it to read, “I hate myself and I want to die.” He also had numerous drawings regarding his success and pressures from the media. One of his drawings in his personal journals, discloses that now that the lights are out, it is less dangerous, and they are there, waiting for him to entertain them. This may be interpreted that the media put negative pressures on Cobain and who he was as an individual, however, they still wanted him to perform for them, no matter how much the media and rumours may have hurt him (Cobain, 2003).

Cobain created Nirvana as he had a love for music and needed a way of expressing himself. He therefore did not anticipate that the band would become as successful and as well known as it did. Cobain hated the commercial part of Nirvana and had several times encouraged the audience to stop buying their records and to stop coming to their concerts (Sandford, 1995). Cobain thought that most of the fans were false fans and only liked their hit single, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" (Nirvana, 1991). In this period Nirvana mostly played arena rock shows and this was not the way they liked to play. They preferred to play in small clubs where the energy gets more intense and intimate. However, as a result of their habits to crush guitars, amps and so forth, they had to perform in the arena rock shows because of the money. Cobain also started to use heavy drugs, such as heroin and morphine, more often. At this point Cobain described himself as suicidal (Sandford, 1995).

**Tender-Mindedness**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, this facet concerns an attitude of sympathy or concern for others. An individual who is considered low in tender-mindedness would be less moved by appeals to pity. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell within the Average category for Tender-Mindedness. Two participants indicated that he fell
within the High category, four participants indicated that he fell within the Average category, and one participant indicted that he fell within the Low category for Tender-Mindedness. Throughout Cobain’s childhood into adulthood, he was portrayed as withdrawn, aggressive and angry. He did however, have a concern for those individuals who were also seen as loners or different within society. For example, he befriended a homosexual student while in school, and his lyrics also speak against conformity, and encouraging individuals to express themselves for who they are and who they want to be (Sandford, 1995). This was expressed in the lyrics from “Come As You Are” (Nirvana, 1991), indicating that Cobain did have an average tendency to sympathize with others.

Conscientiousness

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, conscientiousness refers to an active process of planning, organizing and carrying out tasks. A conscientious individual is purposeful, strong-willed, and determined. Costa and McCrae (1992) believe that few individuals become great musicians without a reasonably high level of this trait. The trait has previously been preferred to as ‘Will to Achieve’ (Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981). According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain obtained an overall score falling in the Very Low category for conscientiousness. All seven participants indicated that Cobain fell within the Very Low category for Conscientiousness. This is an expected outcome for an individual with substance abuse, dependency, and personality disorder constructs.

Competence

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, competence refers to the sense of capability, sensibility, prudence and effectiveness that an individual possesses about themselves, and their level of self-esteem. A higher scorer is well prepared to deal with life, whilst a low scorer has a lower opinion of their ability. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell
in the Very Low category for competence. All seven participants indicated that Cobain fell within the Very Low category for Competence.

As a child, Cobain had a very low self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation (Van Wagner, 2009). Although there were times that he felt that he was talented artistically, when he was praised for his work, he did not believe the individual commenting on his art was truthful, and he also put his own work down (Sandford, 1996). Cobain also did not finish his Grade 10 year in school (due to not having enough credits), and he went to work as a janitor. Even though he became a highly successful individual that formed the generation for grunge music, Cobain was unable to view himself in this way. Instead, he doubted the band’s talent, as well as his own, and preferred to be alone instead of enjoying the luxuries of fame. Cobain had an ambitious streak. He dreamt of making something of himself one day as a musician, and when this dream became a reality, he was excited to see Nirvana’s songs succeed (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain’s inward feelings of incompetence come through strongly within Nirvana’s lyrics and his personal journals. His continually uses phrases such as “I have never failed to fail”, or “I think I’m dumb”. Within his personal journals, he describes himself as the following, “I am what they call the boy who is slow. How I metamorphosed from hyperactive to cement is for lack of a better knife to the throat, uh, annoying, aggravating, confusing, as dense as cement.” (Cobain, 2003). Within another letter, he wrote the following which illustrates a confused sense of self-esteem, “On second thought, maybe I just tried to let the world know how much I love myself, like a hypocrite in a hippie crypt. I hate myself and I want to die.” Cobain also drew pictures of himself, labelling each picture a different mood he experienced; “Baby”, “Pissy”, “Bully”, and “Sassy” (Cobain, 2003).
Order

Order refers to an individual’s organization of their physical surroundings. An individual who is high in order will keep their surroundings neat and tidy, whereas, someone who does not display a high level of order will have difficulty in getting organized and may be described as unmethodical. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell within the Very Low category for Order. Two participants indicated that he fell within the Low category, and five participants indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Order.

When Cobain left school as an adolescent, and lived on his own with another roommate, his apartment was filled with rotting food and old beer bottles, dirty underpants, and a smell as if someone had died. Cobain described it as being decorated in a typical punk rock fashion with baby dolls heads hanging by their necks with blood all over them. There was also blood and vomit all over the carpet, garbage, and dishes that were not washed for about five months (Sandford, 1995). At a later stage when he moved into another apartment, the same theme continued, however, he now had turtles crawling on his floors, amongst the dolls, blood, vomit and dirty dishes. Cobain admitted that although his apartment was very odorous, he did not mind (Sandford, 1995).

Dutifulness

According to the Five Factor model of Personality, dutifulness can be described as having a sense of duty and a conscience to adhere to ethical principles and fulfil moral obligations. Low scorers tend to be casual about such matters and may be described as somewhat undependable or unreliable. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell within the Very Low category for Dutifulness All seven participants indicated that Cobain fell within the Very Low category for Dutifulness.
According to the participants, they viewed Cobain as having a very low sense of duty and conscience to fulfil moral obligations. This can be supported when analysing Cobain’s rebellious and hostile behaviour, and going against any form of conformity or social morals or norms. Cobain also did not take school too seriously and allowed his drug use to negatively influence his band in the later years of his life (Sandford, 1995).

There was another side to Cobain, however, that was not as clearly seen within the public eye. Many individuals overlooked Cobain and his ambition, as he was always calculating and planning ahead. He had a conventional side to him, and a willingness to compromise to make a living. He was seen to have old-fashioned values and a tolerance for hard work. He was always well dressed and clean-cut for work, and was always on time for work. He was even described by a former employer as a model worker (Sandford, 1995).

Cobain also took his band very seriously and invested almost all of himself into Nirvana. Nirvana worked hard to achieve their accomplishments, as they practised at least five times a week, and made a difference to thousands of lives (Sandford, 1995).

Achievement Striving

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, achievement refers to an individual’s aspiration levels. An individual who displays a high level of this facet will work hard to achieve their goals. They are diligent and purposeful and have a sense of direction. Individuals who are low in this facet tend to be laissez-faire or even lazy. They are not driven to succeed. They may be seen to lack ambition or seem aimless. According to the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell within the Low category for Achievement Striving. Two participants indicated that he fell within the Average category, two participants indicated that he fell within the Low category, and three participants indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Achievement Striking.
Growing up, Cobain did not have many goals that he aspired to, except that he had the dream of being a musician. This is the only goal that Cobain really had and kept to, and worked hard to achieve it.

Although Cobain fell into the Low to Very Low category for Achievement-Striving according to the participants, research obtained from primary sources contradicts this as it indicates that Cobain was highly Achievement-Striving. For example, this is reflected in his attitude towards Nirvana, and the success of the band. A timeline created by Riggs (1998) and placed in the Appendix highlight the success of Nirvana, the band.

Self-Discipline

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, this facet refers to the ability to begin tasks and carry them through until completion, even if bored or in the presence of distractions. High scorers display an ability to motivate themselves in order to complete a job. Low scorers tend to procrastinate and become easily discouraged, so they give up easily on a task. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Very Low category for Self-discipline. One participant indicated that he fell within the Low category, and six participants indicted that he fell within the Very Low category for Self-Discipline.

As discussed, throughout Cobain’s life from a child to an adult, he did not display much conscientiousness, especially towards schoolwork, completing school, and participating in extra mural sports activities. The only area of focus that Cobain excelled in was that of art and music, such as forming a highly successful and influential band. When it came to music, Cobain was self-disciplined and motivated (Sandford, 1995). Yet, the results from the NEO-PI-R may not reflect this. If Cobain, as an individual, is considered in totality and not just focused on his music, his ambition for life was not healthy and positive, including his self-discipline.
Within the later stages of Cobain’s life, when his drug use was excessive, Cobain was also sent to a rehabilitation facility, which he absconded from, and his drug use also began to affect the band negatively. Cobain was lost within himself during the later years of his life, and meaning for anything, even music, began to deteriorate.

**Deliberation**

According to the Five Factor Model of Personality, this facet refers to the tendency to think carefully before acting. High scorers are cautious and deliberate, whilst low scorers are hasty and often do something without considering the implications. According to the results of the NEO-PI-R, Cobain fell in the Very Low category for Deliberation. All seven participants indicated that Cobain fell within the Very Low category for Deliberation.

As discussed within this section, Cobain did not have a strong sense of deliberation all throughout his life. Within his youth, he ran away from home, purposefully got out of extra mural activities, and behaved rebelliously. He spoke his mind against conformity, and authority figures, and did not complete school (Sandford, 1995).

As a successful adult, Cobain continued to verbally express himself through his music and personal journals. He also had no inhibition to tell the media exactly what he was feeling or thinking about anything no matter how controversial it was. Cobain also abused the use of drugs without thinking through any implications, and his many suicidal attempts, as well as his final one, also confirm that Cobain had a very low sense of deliberation (Sandford, 1995).

**Summary**

As the researcher aimed to explore and describe the personality of Kurt Cobain in a holistic manner by means of the Five Factor Model of Personality, biographical information, and the use of the personality assessment measure based on the Five Factor Model, namely the NEO-PI-R, the following profile can be viewed expressing the integrated findings of the
discussion. The following scores presented in Table 4 were obtained by adding up the raw scores of each domain and facet score, and dividing those scores by the mean score. The overall score was therefore distinguished by viewing the interpretive ranges within Table 2.

Table: 4 Personality Profile of Kurt Cobain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEO-PI-R DOMAIN</th>
<th>NEO-PI-R FACET</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF NEO-PI-R DOMAIN AND FACET</th>
<th>AVERAGE OF SCORES OBTAINED BY ALL PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Identifies individuals who are prone to psychological distress</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of free floating anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anger Hostility</td>
<td>Tendency to experience anger and related stress such as frustration</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Tendency to experience feelings of guilt, sadness, despondency and loneliness</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Consciousness</td>
<td>Shyness or social discomfort</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impulsiveness</td>
<td>Tendency to act on cravings and urges rather than reining them in and delaying gratification</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>General susceptibility to stress</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>Quantity and intensity of energy directed outwards into the social world</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in and friendliness towards others</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gregariousness</td>
<td>Preference for the company of others</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Social ascendency and forcefulness of expression</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Pace of living</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excitement Seeking</td>
<td>Need for environmental stimulation</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>Tendency to experience positive emotions</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to Experience</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>The active seeking and appreciation of experience for their own sake</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receptivity to the inner world of imagination</td>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>Appreciation of art and beauty</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Openness to inner feelings and emotions</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Openness to new experiences on a practical level</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>Intellectual curiosity</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Readiness to re-examine own values and those of authority figures</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>The kinds of interactions an individual prefers from compassion to tough mindedness</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Belief in the sincerity and good intentions of others</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straightforwardness</td>
<td>Frankness in expression</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>Active concern for the welfare of others</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>Response to interpersonal conflict</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Tendency to play down own achievements and be humble</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender Mindedness</td>
<td>Attitude of sympathy for others</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Degree of organization, persistence, control and motivation in goal directed behaviour</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Belief in own self-efficacy</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Personal organization</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutifulness</td>
<td>Emphasis placed on importance of fulfilling moral obligations</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Need for personal achievement and sense of direction</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Discipline</td>
<td>Capacity to begin tasks and follow through to completion despite boredom or distractions</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Tendency to think things through before acting or speaking</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Neuroticism**

Based on the information available, Cobain fell within a Very High category for Neuroticism. All the facets within this domain fell within the Very High category, and biographical information, the results from the NEO-PI-R, Cobain’s personal journals and further research all confirmed this result. Therefore, it appears that Cobain experienced much distress and emotional instability within his life. This may have been due to his early dysfunctional
experiences as a child, which continued into adulthood, and resulted in Cobain developing strong neurotic traits as an individual.

**Extraversion**

Cobain fell within the Average category for Extraversion, with the facet scores ranging from Low to High. Cobain fell within the Low category for Assertiveness, however, this was found to be incongruent with the research findings. Cobain expressed his views regarding social conformity and norms, and he was able to stand up for what he believed in, and encouraged the youth to do the same. Overall, Cobain was not excessively talkative, sociable or cheerful, however, he was able to interact socially with Nirvana’s band members, and portray the success of Nirvana in the lime light. However, it does appear that personal experiences may have held him back from really connecting and forming close bonds with individuals, but Cobain did care for Nirvana and music. Therefore, an increase in the level of Extraversion may have been also been due to Cobain’s profession, being a musician and celebrity, as it was also requested from his profession that he had to travel and socialize, which may have portrayed him as being extroverted.

**Openness to Experience**

Cobain scored within a High category for Openness to Experience. He scored within High to Very High categories for Fantasy and Aesthetics, as he was extremely creative, and expressed his thoughts and feelings through music, art, poetry and journals. Cobain also experienced intense feelings towards that which he cared for and believed in, such as music and individuality. He also scored within an Average category for Ideas, however, research suggested that he scored within a higher category for Ideas. The reason for this is that Cobain started the band, Nirvana, and took on the role as lead singer, songwriter and front man of the band, and he also helped the band become successful. The band may also have been successful, as Cobain was not afraid or hesitant
to speak his mind and try new experiences. Overall, Cobain was open to new experiences and was very imaginative. He was able to entertain new ideas, unconventional values and experienced emotions more keenly than individuals who are low on the facet.

**Agreeableness**

Cobain fell within a Low category for Agreeableness, therefore, he may have been more likely to be sceptical of others. Throughout Cobain’s life, since a child, he tended to rebel against conformity and authority figures. He did not trust individuals easily due to his childhood experiences, where stability, security and nurturance were not readily available. He did not have a primary caregiver, and was not able to form an emotional bond with a stable figure in his life as a child. The only constant individual in his Cobain’s life was Novoselic, and they were able to remain close until Cobain’s death.

Therefore, Cobain may have been sceptical of others as a defence mechanism, and way of protecting himself from experiencing hurt by others, however, he was still able to keep a stable relationship with an individual who was constant and trustworthy in his life. Unfortunately, Cobain’s drug use and relationship with Love negatively influenced his relationship with Novoselic.

**Conscientiousness**

Cobain scored within a Very Low category for Conscientiousness, as he scored within a Very Low category for all the facets in this domain except for Achievement-Striving, which he obtained a Low score for. According to the result for this domain, Cobain should have had difficulty planning, organizing and carrying out tasks, as well as not being purposeful, strong-willed or determined. There appears to be some accuracy within this facet when viewing Cobain’s attitude as a scholar and towards life in general, however, when only viewing Cobain in a musical light, there appears to be incongruence with the score for this domain. Cobain was able
to turn his passion for music and dream to be influential into reality, and he also took Nirvana very seriously. They practised everyday and he let uncommitted drummers go when he felt that they did not care enough about the band.

**Conclusion**

Cobain was viewed by the media as an influential human being, as he formed the generation for grunge music, and was also viewed by the youth as someone inspirational, allowing them to relate to an older figure, and allowing them to express their own personal values and beliefs without feeling badly for doing so. Cobain was also a highly complex individual with many elements to him. This chapter explored the personality of Cobain by integrating biographical information, results from the NEO-PI-R, music lyrics and personal writings. The summary provided a brief synopsis of what was discussed at length in the chapter. Chapter 6 will present the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of this study.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The value and limitations of this study will be discussed in this chapter. Firstly, the value of the study will be discussed. Then the limitations related specifically to the psychobiographical case study method will be discussed briefly, as they have been detailed in Chapter 4 in conjunction with the methods that were used to minimize their influence. The researcher will then comment on how methodological considerations were experienced. Finally, considerations and recommendations for further research on this topic will be discussed.

Value of the Study

The researcher feels that this particular study was a very valuable research undertaking. It is a good example of how psychological theory can be used to examine a human life. The fact that the subject of the study was a successful musician adds a different dimension to the nature of this type of research. The study has provided the opportunity to facilitate a holistic understanding of the subject’s personality from the view of a specific theory.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, research in the area of personality, has up until recently, been given relatively little explicit attention, especially to the new developments in the area. Personality is a meaningful concept and its measurement can contribute to insightful findings about musicians and their behaviour, as being a musician represents a combination of personality, genetic and biological contribution, with social and emotional reinforcers received in life experiences. Therefore, benefit is derived from conducting such a study and adding to the body of knowledge of psychology by determining the relationship of the musician, Cobain, and his personality in a holistic manner. It is, however, realistic and responsible to consider in detail any limitations that may have been experienced during the course of the study.
Limitations Related to the Psychobiographical Case Study Method

As noted in Chapter 4, there were potential limitations of utilizing a psychobiographical approach to this case study. These limitations were related to the methodological considerations of utilizing this specific approach. The issues of researcher bias and countertransference, reductionism, validity and reliability, an infinite amount of available information and inflated expectations were all considered and discussed below from a retrospective point of view.

Researcher Bias

Upon completion of this study, the researcher is now able to comment on the preliminary methodological considerations as mentioned above (Anderson, 1981). With regards to researcher bias, the researcher did not experience difficulty in either empathizing with the subject or with maintaining an objective distance. There were times, however, when the researcher felt ‘caught up’ with the data and had difficulty in maintaining a scientific writing style, which would have influenced the language and interpretation of results for the reader. It was therefore necessary to take meaningful breaks from the study in order to facilitate objectivity once returning to the literature. Analyzing a subject posed some challenges in terms of writing and wording of the manuscript. The researcher had to constantly keep in mind that there may be a possibility that the subject’s family and friends may have the chance to read the manuscript, therefore the wording and compilation of the findings had to be executed with sensitivity.

Reductionism

In terms of reductionism, the researcher did not include much emphasis on the subject’s culture, as there was not a great deal of information available surrounding the subject and his culture. Therefore, further studies on the subject and his culture would be recommended in order to further integrate the personality of Cobain holistically. With reference to another criticism of reductionism, that of a focus on pathological personality, the researcher also found it easy to
maintain a healthy perspective on the personality of the subject. This was mostly due to the theoretical framework that was used as it is a theory of normal personality. Another criticism of reductionism is that it may allow the researcher to explain adult character and behaviour almost exclusively in terms of childhood experiences, neglecting to include later influences, however, the researcher was able to utilize multiple sources of reference in order to provide a correct interpretation of the subject (Runyan, 1988).

Reliability

The reliability of this study did cause some concern for the researcher. A great deal of emphasis was placed on the results from the NEO-PI-R. It was evident that the subjectivity of each participant came through within the results, which may therefore have impaired the interpretation of the subject’s personality. The objective of reliability to ensure that if a later investigator followed the same procedure and conducted the same case study over again, the latter investigator would arrive at the same findings and conclusions is also not guaranteed, as the subjectivity from the new set of participants may be different to the participants in the present study, influencing the results from the Five Factor Model, and the outcome of the subject’s personality (Yin, 1994).

Validity

The validity of the study helped the researcher to improve on the reliability of the study, as multiple sources of data were used to support the results of the Five Factor Model of Personality. The researcher also carefully selected and conceptualized the constructs and variables considered, which was in keeping with the aims of the study (Kotton, 2002).

Infinite Amount of Biographical Data

In being presented with an infinite amount of biographical data, the researcher was able to extract the salient features for the inclusion in the study by constantly questioning what
would be most relevant to the specific framework of the study. As the study progressed, the researcher was able to realize the danger of inflated expectations surrounding the study, and made a point of keeping them in mind during the discussion of the results (Anderson, 1981).

**Specific Limitations of this Study**

Whilst undertaking this study, the researcher was aware that the scale of this study does not do sufficient justice to the nature of the subject. As a result of specific parameters set out to meet the requirements of this study, it is difficult to provide a completely in-depth, holistic understanding of the subject. It would have been the preference of the researcher to include more in terms of the theoretical framework of the study, such as including a biological, developmental or cultural perspective on personality. This would have allowed for a more rich and varied multi-dimensional view of the subject, instead of a one-dimensional view. Another benefit that would have been provided by utilizing other theoretical frameworks is that they would have served to improve the reliability and validity of the study. Where one theory may have weaknesses, others may have strengths, therefore, it would be able to test the accuracy of any assumptions or results made by the researcher.

This raises a further point. The study of personality is a complex topic and at times has caused contentious arguments. By electing to explore and describe the personality of Kurt Cobain, one automatically limits the outcome to a prescribed paradigm.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

It is recommended that in a future undertaking of a similar study this would be done on a larger scale than the present study. A doctoral thesis, for example, might serve as a superior format to accommodate the intricacies of the research subject, thereby doing greater justice to both the perplexing nature of such an undertaking and the legacy of the subject. The researcher would recommend including the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ) and the Schema Mode
Inventory (SMI) in order to better understand the underlying cognitive structures, also known as schemas that are thought to create vulnerability to personality disorders. This may therefore add to the understanding of the personality of the subject.

For any further studies based on this particular subject, the researcher suggests that this study is utilized as a point of departure in studying the personality of the subject. It should not be considered a final product with conclusive evidence. It should rather be considered a foundation on which one can build a more comprehensive and illuminating description of the subject’s personality.

Further researchers could consider employing additional theoretical approaches to psychological development, thereby supplementing the research already conducted. Findings of future research endeavours could be compared to either enhance the reliability and validity of existing data due to corroboration, or to highlight discrepancies providing the space for further exploration. Finding discrepancies also spurs the opportunity for creating new, yet related topics for further research.

Future researchers undertaking more in-depth research on this subject may consider working on an inter-disciplinary basis. For example, the researcher might enlist assistance of a historian, who could provide more detail regarding possible influences of the historical period during which the subject lived.

**Conclusion**

Although there is much value that can be derived from a study of this nature, it is necessary to consider the parameters of any study that is being conducted. To neglect to do so would be a serious omission on the part of any researcher. The parameters that are imposed sometimes create limitations to a study, yet at the same time, they supply the structure and act as a very necessary guideline to focus the research. The limitations that have been mentioned in
this chapter should not be viewed in a negative light or seen as detrimental to the study in any way. They should rather be seen as a possibility to conduct new and improved research studies in the future.

The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe Kurt Cobain’s personality in terms of the Five Factor Model of Personality. To this end the researcher is of the opinion that the aim of this study has been accomplished. The study has helped to understand the subject as an individual and one could make deductions as to the reasons for his success and controversial behaviour based on the information in the study.

In conclusion, the researcher aspires for this study to be the solid stepping stone upon which further insights may be built, especially to those individuals who could relate to Cobain and whose lives were changed through his inspirational lyrics. To gain a deeper understanding of a figure who left an unforgettable print on not only the newly formed genre of grunge music, but also on the youth all over the world.
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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM
A Case Study of Kurt Donald Cobain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the research project</th>
<th>A Case Study of Kurt Donald Cobain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal investigator</td>
<td>Candice Pieterse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact telephone number</td>
<td>(O41) 504 2330</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A.1 I HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:

1. I, the participant, was invited to participate in the above-mentioned research project study that is being undertaken by Candice Pieterse of the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Health Sciences of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

The following aspects have been explained to me, the participant:

2. The following aspects have been explained to me, the participant:

   Aim: The researcher aims to explore and describe the personality of Kurt Cobain in a holistic manner by means of the Five Factor Model of Personality, biographical information, and the use of the personality assessment measure, the NEO-PI-R.

   The information used is to further the insight into the personality of Kurt Cobain in the form of a case study approach.

   Procedures: I understand that I will be utilising the NEO-PI-R personality assessment measure.

   Possible benefits: As a result of my participation in this study, the study may add to the body of knowledge of psychology by determining the relationship of Kurt Cobain and his personality in a holistic manner.

   Risks: Participation in this study will not resolve in any cost to myself.

   Confidentiality: My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the researcher.

   Access to findings: Any new information/or benefit that develops during the course of the study will be shared with me by means of a report of the findings.

Voluntary participation/refusal/discontinuation:
My participation is voluntary.
My decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect my present or future lifestyle.

3. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactorily.

4. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participation and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage without penalisation.

5. Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.2</th>
<th>I HEREBY VOLUNTARILY CONSENT TO PARTICI PATE IN THE ABOVE MENTIONED PROJECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signed/confirmed at ___________________________________________ on _______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signature of witness ____________________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signature or right thumb print of participant ____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full name of witness ___________________________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. STATEMENT BY RESEARCHER
I, Candice Pietere, declare that
- I have explained the information given in this document to and/or his/her representative

- he/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions;
- this conversation was conducted in Afrikaans English X | Xhosa | Other

and no translator was used
- I have detached Section D and handed it to the participant

Signed/confirmed at

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of witness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full name of witness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

on 20

D. IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PARTICIPANT

Dear participant
Thank you for your participation in this study. Should, at any time during the study:
- an emergency arise as a result of the research, or
- you require any further information with regards to the study

Kindly contact at telephone number
(041) 504 2330

Candice Pietere
Researcher
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS
A Case Study of Kurt Donald Cobain

Dear Participant

I am currently completing my Masters degree in Counselling Psychology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and as part of the degree I need to complete a research treatise. The topic I have chosen to research explores and describes the personality of Kurt Cobain in a holistic manner.

The importance of researching the personality of Kurt Cobain, will add to the body of knowledge of psychology, and the findings will add value to the literature and research data base of psychology. By participating in this study, you will therefore enable the psychologist and society in general to gain a better understanding of the personality of Kurt Cobain.

If you decide to participate in the research, you will be asked to complete a personality assessment measure, namely the NEO-PI-R, regarding Kurt Cobain’s personality. The assessment measure will take approximately 1 hour to complete in a time that is suitable to you.

Participation in this study is voluntary and if you decide to participate in the study you may withdraw your consent at any given time. The information obtained during the study will be kept confidential at all times and no identifying information will be required from the participants. The results of the study will be presented numerically and the interpretation thereof will be presented by explaining the findings in an understandable manner.

Your signature below reflects that you have read and understood the information provided above and that you are volunteering to participate in the research study. It further signifies that at any given time you may withdraw your consent and cease to participate in the study.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Signature of Participant                      Date:

Signature of Researcher (Miss Candice Pieterse) Date:

Signature of Supervisor (Prof Greg Howcroft) Date:

Signature of Co-Supervisor (Dr Louise Stroud) Date:
APPENDIX C

FEEDBACK FORM
Dear Participant

Thank you for participating in the research study. Please would you fill in the following details in order for the researcher to explore the validity of the study commenced.

1. What was your opinion of the research study?

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2. What was your opinion on the NEO-PI-R Form R?

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3. What was your opinion on the questions asked in the NEO-PI-R Form R?

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4. Did you find the NEO-PI-R relevant to the study? Comment.

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5. What was your opinion regarding the outcome of Kurt Cobain’s profile according to your answers? Did you agree with it?

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6. What was your opinion regarding the overall outcome of Kurt Cobain’s profile concluded in the study? Did you agree with it?

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7. Would you participate in another study of a similar nature? Comment

………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………. 
8. Please provide any comments or suggestions relevant to the study, or to future research studies.

Your participation was greatly appreciated.

Signature of Participant  Date:

Signature of Researcher (Miss Candice Pieterse)  Date:

Signature of Supervisor (Prof Greg Howcroft)  Date:

Signature of Co-Supervisor (Dr Louise Stroud)  Date:
APPENDIX D

TIMELINE OF THE SUCCESS OF NIRVANA
According to Riggs (1998), the following timeline shows the success of Nirvana.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE OF NIRVANA’S SUCCESS</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Kurt meets Krist. They play in several bands together, including Stiff Woodies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1986</td>
<td>Kurt, Krist and drummer Aaron Burckhard form the original lineup of Nirvana in Aberdeen, Washington.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 30, 1988</td>
<td>Kurt smashes his first guitar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 25, 1990</td>
<td>Dave Grohl, former drummer for Washington, D.C.’s Scream, joins Nirvana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1991</td>
<td>Nirvana signs with DGC Records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1991</td>
<td>Nirvana opens for Sonic Youth on a European festival tour, which includes a landmark performance at the Reading Festival. The tour is documented in the film, “1991: The Year Punk Broke”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 24, 1991</td>
<td>“Nevermind” is released.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 12, 1991</td>
<td>“Nevermind” is certified a gold album</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1991</td>
<td>The band starts a six-week European tour as Nirvana mania sweeps the United States. MTV airs &quot;Smells Like Teen Spirit&quot; video constantly; the song is hailed as an anthem for a generation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 11, 1992</td>
<td>“Nevermind” reaches No. 1 on the Billboard 200 album chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January/February 1992</td>
<td>Nirvana tours Australia, Japan and Hawaii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1992</td>
<td>Nirvana appears on the cover of Rolling Stone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June/July 1992</td>
<td>Nirvana tours Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 15, 1992</td>
<td>“Incesticide” is released. It goes gold the following spring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 9, 1993</td>
<td>Nirvana plays a concert at San Francisco's Cow Palace to raise awareness of and generate aid for rape survivors in Bosnia-Herzegovina. L7, the Breeders and Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy are also on the bill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 21, 1993</td>
<td>“In Utero” is released.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 18, 1993</td>
<td>Nirvana starts a three-month tour of North America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 19, 1993</td>
<td>Nirvana tapes an all-acoustic show for &quot;MTV Unplugged&quot; at Sony Studios in New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 16, 1993</td>
<td>MTV airs Nirvana's &quot;Unplugged&quot; show.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 7, 1994</td>
<td>Nirvana plays in the Seattle Arena. It will be the band's last U.S. show.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 6, 1994</td>
<td>Nirvana embarks on a tour of Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 8, 1994</td>
<td>Kurt Cobain is found dead of a self-inflicted shotgun wound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1, 1994</td>
<td>Nirvana's &quot;MTV Unplugged&quot; performance is released as “MTV Unplugged in New York”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1, 1996</td>
<td>The Nirvana live album, “From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah” is released, featuring performances from 1989 to 1994</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>