



## Case Study 35

Robert McCrae and  
Paul Costa

Eric is a beginning assistant professor of meteorology in a medium-sized university in the Midwest. Sometimes he wonders how he got this far. During graduate school, he always thought that if he were going to be successful it would have to be because of his master's thesis or his dissertation or the articles he had written. He is fairly unattractive physically and has always been painfully aware of that fact. Likewise, he understands that his social skills are not the best. And so he did not believe that he would be able to obtain any type of job where he needed to interact with people in a face-to-face manner. He assumed that he would be rejected at the interview stage and believed that his research and writing skills would have to get him a job, one in which he did not have to interact much with people.

Eric certainly was a misfit as a graduate student. He was the lone Jewish student in the Department of Meteorology and was quite aware of that. Indeed, he often reminded others of it by bringing upcoming Jewish holidays such as Yom Kippur to their attention. He was very proud of his Jewish heritage—it was actually one of his defining characteristics—and his concern about increasing the awareness of others about the Jewish culture was certainly admirable. However, it was offset by his paranoia. He frequently felt persecuted because of his Jewishness. Any slight, real or imagined, was considered anti-Semitism. Some of these offenses, which we all experience at one time or another, were actually the result of other characteristics besides his Jewishness. For example, as a graduate student, he initially was not asked to be a teaching assistant because of his lack of social skills. The professors in his department did not believe that he could adequately fulfill the duties of the job. Eric, however, believed that he had been discriminated against because of his ethnic background.

and situ-  
cause of  
ig five as  
artially,  
e factor  
search,  
th newer  
e, and as  
it the  
r the big  
theories.  
chology  
ertainly  
very.  
t could  
e areas

Eric was an extremely precise researcher. His dissertation was based on a study of one storm that lasted five days. He spent two years studying the storm and another year writing up his analysis. Although it was very specific, it was an excellent piece of research, and he was able to publish it in a national journal.

Likewise, he was very exacting when he determined his forecast for a forecasting game the meteorology students played every week. The graduate students would determine their forecasts for a period of five days, and the student who was most accurate won the contest. Eric spent a lot of time determining his prediction, but even with this frivolous activity, Eric would show some paranoia. He was concerned that the other students would use his forecast as a basis for theirs and improve on it, thereby winning the contest. Therefore, Eric was very secretive about his forecast and was among the last to post his predictions, even if he had completed them much earlier.

Eric's meticulous nature also showed itself in his sole social outlet outside of work: his fantasy baseball league. When he began playing this type of game, they were played through the mail; today they are played on computers over the Internet. In this league, players play baseball seasons with members managing the team and determining such characteristics of the game as batting lineup over the Internet. Players in the league would send each other necessary information, and then the player who received the information would play the baseball game and relay the results to the other members of the fantasy league. This activity—either the Internet version or the mail-in version—suited Eric well because he preferred not to interact with many other people. He rarely went out, and even though he was heterosexual, he went to great pains to avoid women. He was convinced that no woman would be interested in him because he was physically unattractive. In fact, one first-year meteorology student, who was a woman and who was trying to get to know the other graduate students, introduced herself to him, and he responded, "I'm Eric, you don't want to know me." Eric did make a few friends during the time he was in graduate school. They were mostly other misfits like him, but these relationships took a long time to develop. Eric did not trust anyone until he knew that person for a long time. And, there were many other graduate students that he did not like or did not trust. He certainly did not endear himself to many of the other graduate students with his self-deprecation and his persecution beliefs. But even other, more minor, behaviors alienated Eric from some of the other graduate students. For example, his office was located next to the department mailroom, so many people would go in and out. His office mate, being a friendly sort, would often greet and talk to the other people who stopped to pick up their mail. This irritated Eric, and he would frequently comment that he was "working here!" Likewise, he would complain to his office mate about playing music on his computer; it disturbed Eric's ability to concentrate.

Some of Eric's friends tried to get him to try other activities, but they were unsuccessful. He did not want to go to any museums, sporting events, or the theater. Eric preferred a simple, uncomplicated life. In many of his practices, he was very set in his ways. His clothing and his apartment were all utilitarian, and when something wore out, he simply replaced it with something similar. He did

not have a t  
outfits were  
frivolous or

Using McC  
answering th

1. How ca  
stable? t
2. Would
3. Based o  
convent
4. Based o  
ness? Er
5. Is Eric t

1. Which  
compar
2. What w  
Allport
3. Compar  
differen

not have a true sense of style and really did not care whether his apartment or his outfits were aesthetically pleasing. In fact, his only piece of clothing that was frivolous or decorative was his Boston Red Sox baseball cap.

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Using McCrae and Costa's five factor theory, describe Eric's personality by answering the following questions.

1. How can Eric's disposition be characterized? Is he neurotic or emotionally stable? Give evidence from the case to support your answer.
2. Would Eric be categorized as introverted or extraverted? Explain.
3. Based on the evidence in the case, would Eric be characterized as open or conventional? Explain.
4. Based on evidence in the case would Eric score high or low on agreeableness? Explain.
5. Is Eric conscientious or aimless according to the case? Explain.

### THEORY COMPARISON QUESTIONS

1. Which of Horney's neurotic trends is Eric displaying? How do these trends compare with the traits of McCrae and Costa?
2. What would be some of the central dispositions of Eric, according to Allport's theory?
3. Compare the traits of Allport, Cattell, and McCrae and Costa. How are they different? How are they the same?