CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Life's a journey… Enjoy the ride…"

1.1 Introduction

The Internet began in 1969 as an USA Department of Defence project called ARPANET. By the end of that year, the first four 'host' computers were attached to the network. Since its inception the Internet has included provisions for person-to-person electronic communication, for example by e-mail. Technological development resulted in the design of hypermedia products that ordinary people can *inter*act with. What started out as a Defence research project, now covers the whole universe and has had a huge impact on civilian populations throughout the world.

Everyday use of the Internet as communication medium contributed to renewed thinking in both civilian and research environments about personality as a phenomenon of multiplicity. A **chat-room** is an artificial environment that is created by some variation of computer software in which the user can interact with fellow users without ever meeting them face-to-face. The experiences people share in these chat-rooms connect them to each other in a borderless world. Here unique virtual interaction patterns develop that lead to the emergence of a cyberspace culture. During on-line interaction where the individuals cannot see each other "people are able to build a self by cycling through many selves" (Turkle 1995: 79). "The Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with constructions and reconstructions of the self that characterise postmodern life" (Turkle 1995: 180). Construction and reconstruction imply deconstruction. These developments in turn have affected existing cultures. On-line interaction provides people with endless opportunities to shape and reshape their personalities.

Culture can be defined as "a set of beliefs or standards, shared by a group of people, which helps the individual decide what is, what can be, how to feel, what to do and how to go about doing it…" (Johnston & Johal 1999: 183). Furthermore the Internet provided a new variation on human reality i.e. virtual reality. According to Chambers' Dictionary of the 21st Century **virtual reality** can be defined as: "… a computer simulation of a real or artificial environment that gives the user the impression of actually being within the environment and interacting with it …"Virtual reality is synonymous with the term cyberspace. According to Bishop, Taylor and Froy (2000) the cyberpunk writer William Gibson first coined the term **cyberspace** in 1984 to refer to the 'alternative' universe he felt would develop

through the globalisation and integration of computer-mediated communication. Once the two terms are combined **cyberspace culture** is "a set of beliefs or standards, shared by a group of people, which helps the individual decide what is, what can be, how to feel, what to do and how to go about doing it *when using the Internet*" (Johnston & Johal 1999: 183).

Cyberspace plays an active role in the information era during the process of transforming traditional and conservative cultures to new and modern technology driven cultures. The research results of this study attempt to illustrate how Internet chat-rooms are constructive creative products used by South Africans as communication tools to:

- *Adapt to a rapidly changing technological environment on a global basis:*
  Computers can be found in the home, school and office and new digital technologies are being developed on a daily basis connecting people with each other across the globe. This innovation has an impact on societies all over the world that has to adapt as quickly as possible (Tapscott 1998).

- *Keep abreast with the world and its totality:*
  Living in this global world implies keeping in contact with it in its totality, being constantly aware of changes on a global basis and how it affects living within a specific local culture. The Internet ensured that no specific culture or society are viewed in isolation any more, making the impact of a tragedy such as the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in the United States of America, be felt and experienced throughout the world on a global basis (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004).

- *Close the gap between virtual and real spaces / lifestyles:*
  The Internet is used by ordinary people on a daily basis for example to interact and communicate with friends or to discuss important projects and work related issues with international colleagues in different continents, making it an effective tool to narrow the gap between virtual and real life. It is not just a 'nice to have' technology anymore but an important tool to communicate and live by from day to day whether it is via e-mail communication, chat-room interaction, virtual conferences or webcam interaction (Kiesler 1997).

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- *Revisit traditional cultural value systems and replace them with new cyberspace cultural values:*
  The Internet has dramatically changed the views people hold about themselves and the cultural groups they live in. Global computerised networks connect even the most remote cultural groups with each other and with the constant flow of new information from around the world into one particular system makes it possible to relook and assess traditional belief systems on a continuing basis.

Based on the title of a novel by Canadian author Douglas Coupland, the term **Generation Xers** has been applied to a section of the society born between 1965 and 1976. This group of people felt themselves e**x**cluded from jobs in general and meaningful participation in society. "They were viewed as a bitter, disenfranchised, and negative group" (Tapscott 1998: 33). According to the 21st Century Dictionary of Slang the "term applied to those born after 1965 who have proven to be an indefinable block in many socio-economic sectors. Generation Xers had plenty of disposable income but no distinct preference patterns as consumers" (Watts 1994: 99). Johnston and Johal (1999) elaborated on the definition by combining demographics and psychological traits in a psychographic description of these individuals and described them as:

- Under the age of 30
- Technically more sophisticated
- Innovative
- Fashionable
- Stimulation-seeking individuals.

Codrington and Grant-Marshall did a lot of work around the Generation Theory within South Africa and they provided the following description on Generation X people. This group of people was born between 1970-1989 although other authors gave parameters of 1960-1980 (2004: 19). Personal computers arrived on office desks at about the same time Xers pitched up for work. Few Xers have used a manual typewriter or heard of a telex machine. Computers took care of all that and Xers took full advantage of modern technology for word processing and communication both in and outside of the office. The Internet, e-mail and Web pages have become commonplace during their lives" (2004:124). According to these two authors Generation Xers want to be able to communicate "24/7" anywhere in the world, making the Internet part and parcel of their everyday life. "Xers, the so called dot-com generation, is the first generation to seriously contemplate changing people's minds by means of technology (2004: 269).

1.2 Aim of the study

The study aims to provide a description of a particular group of people, defined as the 'Generation Xers', who is believed to have and still is developing a new 'cyberspace culture' through interacting in cyberspace chat-rooms, by means of a twofold process of firstly developing cyberspace personalities or 'pseudopersonalities' that are different from their individual 'normal' personalities, and secondly by sharing unique values, opinions and attitudes. This study will analyse and interpret these and other related cyberspace phenomena in depth.

1.3 Research objectives

The overall research objective of this study is an analysis, assessment and description of the specific cyberspace culture developed by Generation Xers. This objective will be pursued by a number of subsidiary objectives, namely by analysing and describing:

a)   Social interaction processes in chat-rooms by answering the following questions:
   - What type of individual decides to use the Internet for socialisation and other purposes?
   - Do these people differ from the general population in South Africa, in other words, are they a sub- or counterculture?
   - How does this form of interaction differ from traditional ways of socialising?

b)   The development of the on-line pseudopersonality as compared to the real or everyday-life personality.

c)   Aspects which interacting Internet users emphasise as important or necessary for transmission to other Internet users that eventually do lead or could lead to a new value system imbedded in a new cyberspace culture.

d)   The applicability of the Internet chat-room as a new psychological research tool.

e)   Ethical research standards applicable to Internet research, more specifically to on-line focus groups.

1.4 Key concepts

A number of key concepts were referred to in this introductory section. These are: the Internet, multiplicity of personality, on-line interaction, personality construction, reconstruction and deconstruction, general culture against cyberspace culture, virtual reality and Generation Xers. Three further concepts need to be clarified namely:

- *Personality in everyday-life, the so called real personality:*

  The real personality can be described as the keeper or integrated host of our many selves (Van den Berg 1974). It is a construct used to describe the "combination of those relatively enduring characteristics of an individual which are expressed consistently across situations and over time" (Baron & Byrne 1991: 522).

- *Pseudopersonality:*

  The word 'pseudo' comes from the Latin word for "false". The anonymity of cyberspace makes it possible for individuals to create cyberspace personalities or pseudopersonalities.   For the purpose of this study the pseudopersonality is defined as a "temporary construction of the self without revealing the 'real me' during on-line interaction" (Wood & Smith 2001: 58).

- *Value systems:*

  Schwartz in Seligman, Olson and Zanna has defined values as "desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance that serve as guiding principles in people's lives. Values are the standards that the self uses to judge and justify itself; and the stability of value systems is necessary to express the coherence of the self over time and situations" (1996: 2). "For each individual, the values are organized in a value system, which is an enduring organization of [values] along a continuum of relative importance". In the traditional approach the value system was seen as a relatively stable system that guides thought and action across a multitude of situations. From the multiple value-system perspective value systems are dynamic and the value system that is constructed in any given situation is very much dependent on the context in which the individual is asked to do so (Seligman, Olson & Zanna 1996: 55).

1.5 Overview of the envisaged research process

Cyberspace culture is both a conceptual as well as a physical context, making it an unstable, ever changing prerequisite for modern communication in the 21st century. The question can be asked, how do one analyse an unstable context? The decision was made to place the focus on the *development process used by Generation Xers to develop cyberspace culture.* Figure 1.1 aims to provide a graphic illustration of the research process and different colours were used to distinguish between different levels and processes imbedded in the project.

The first challenge of any scientific investigation is to transform the researcher's abstract, creative ideas, hypotheses and questions into a practical, structured, executable research process. Within the broad framework of science, research projects are not executed in isolation, instead the researcher consults all available literature in order to:

  a) Determine the context within which the proposed investigation will occur and;
  b) Justify and motivate why a scientific investigation is needed.

Relevant literature and theories will contextualise the research project within a psychological paradigm. The CEMDA (Complimentary Explorative Multilevel Data Analysis) method will be applied to study the process of cyberspace culture development. During the research process quantitative and qualitative methods were combined in order to compliment the limitations imbedded in each methodology.

The research process starts at the microlevel where 384 chat-room protocols are selected in order to analyse the interaction that takes places between creative chat-room participants. These participants create defensive and constructive on-line 'pseudopersonalities' that are different from their individual off-line 'normal' personalities. On the mesolevel, the researcher will compare computer-mediated communication patterns with traditional face-to-face interaction patterns. Chat-room groups develop into long term sustainable virtual communities and on the macrolevel, cyberspace culture develops that Generation Xers share on a global basis. (The validity of the research results will be evaluated by identifying similarities between the sample of chat-room participants, the local Internet population and Generation Xers as cultural group). Culture develops and changes as a results of individual actions and interaction, but the opposite is also true; culture also influences behaviour. The research results will illustrate how existential cyber behaviour symbolise unique cyber values, morals and attitudes, ensuring strong group cohesion between Generation X'ers across the globe. In conclusion the chat-room will be evaluated in terms of its applicability and usefulness as a research tool within the South African context guided by ethical considerations applicable to Internet research methodologies.
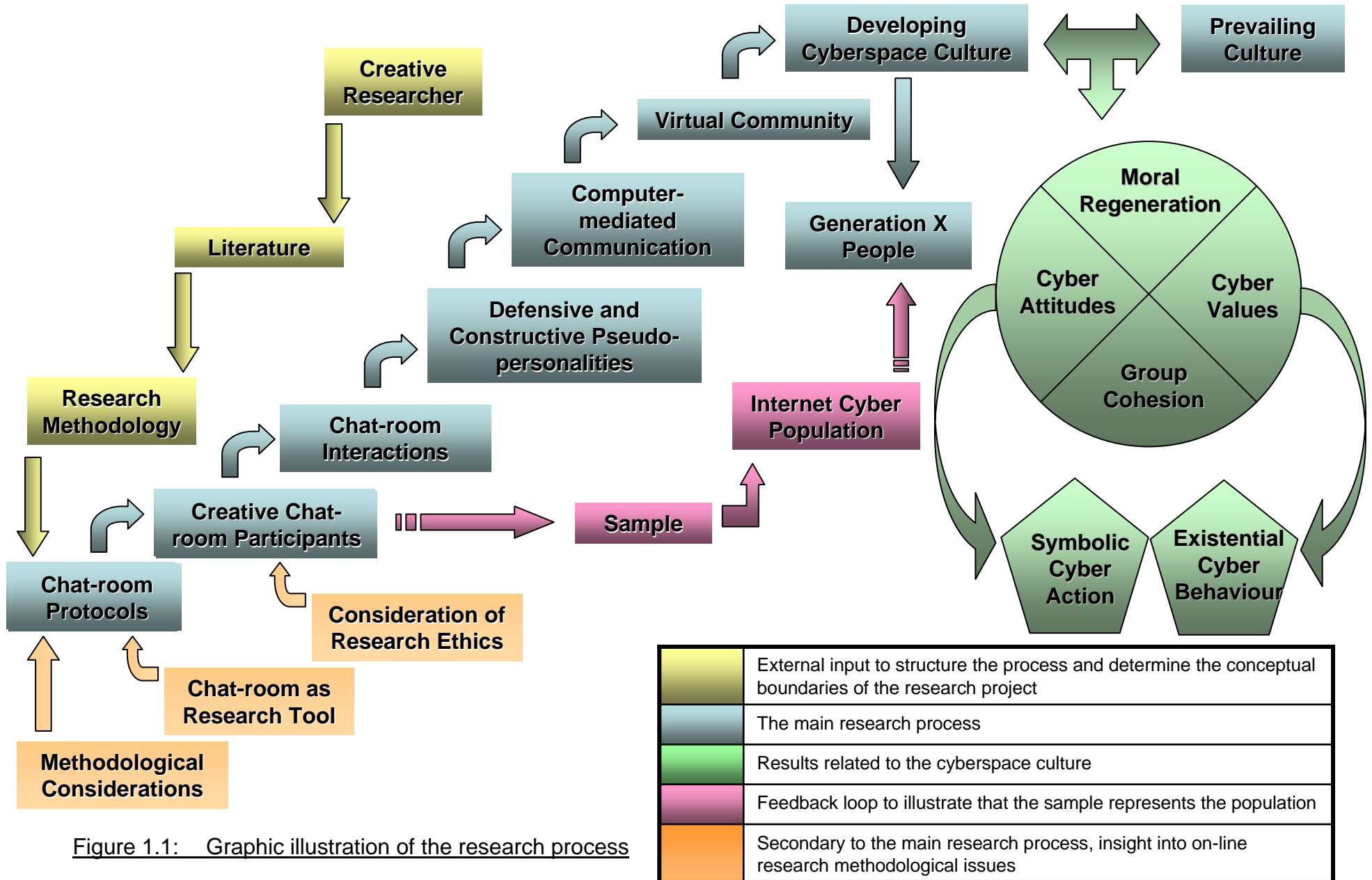
Figure 1.1:   Graphic illustration of the research process

(yellow)	External input to structure the process and determine the conceptual boundaries of the research project
(blue-grey)	The main research process
(green)	Results related to the cyberspace culture
(pink)	Feedback loop to illustrate that the sample represents the population
(orange)	Secondary to the main research process, insight into on-line research methodological issues

CHAPTER 2: MOTIVATION FOR A SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CYBERSPACE CULTURE

"I believe that what fascinates me is the unstated question that lies behind much of our preoccupation with the computer's capabilities. That question is not what will the computer be like in the future, but instead, what will we be like? What kind of people are we becoming?"
(Finnegan, Salaman & Thompson 1987: 252).

2.1 Introduction

Prior to 1993, Internet surveys were limited to scientists and US military personnel, who represented the majority of people with e-mail addresses (Sampson 1998). The August 2001 figures published by NUA Internet Surveys stated that the number of on-line Internet users worldwide was approximately 513.41 million. Going back in time, the Internet was introduced to the South African public around 1997. At that time only 1-2% of the South African population accessed the Internet but this figure increased to 7.5% in 2004 (http://www.nua.com 20 Jul. 2005). As Mark Shuttleworth, the first African and South African that entered space, puts it:

"The Net is still on course to become the fundamental platform for all communications… from your cellphone to your fridge, they will all talk TCP/IP …" (National chat-room)*.*

2.2 Web spaces as mediators between on- and off-line living

The relationship between the human race and technology is not new and certainly not one that has only developed in the last two decades or so. In fact, it has been a longstanding and ongoing relationship that started with someone picking up a stone to break open a fruit. The relationship has, however, grown and in the 21st century the question is being asked: Is it humans that are making technology (tools) or are humans being shaped by technology? Technology, in this case the Internet, has become

a social and economic context or environment and not a fixed concept restricted to as having only one universal and standardised meaning. Therefore, in the context that modern people find themselves now, technology is far more pervasive and penetrating than technology was in the previous century. The human race uses technology to adapt to an ever changing environment. Interactive web spaces is one example of how Internet technology is used to create another dimension to living; existing and interacting making it possible to create multiple pseudopersonalities in cyberspace, a phenomenon something that is difficult in the off-line world.

These web spaces are not screen-based imitations of printed information but are unique in that their content cannot be exactly expressed in other forms, because the "medium is the message, and the web is a medium of interactivity" (McKelvey 1998: 6). For the purpose of this research project, Internet interactivity is defined as a response to albeit from another person or from the system. Visitors are connected through a carefully designed interfaces that adjust to their needs or specifications whenever they are communicating on-line. Traditional ways of socialising and communication mediums known to the off-line world has changed. Web spaces are created to:

- Provide access to a global audience, thereby gaining information about the world and its different cultures, through new ways of thinking about evolution, relationships, sexuality, politics and identity.
- Allow users to interact with information and information providers thereby co-producing new information that flows in both directions.
- Act as places where 'virtual' communities meet to share interests, ideas, values and interests (McKelvey 1998).

Web spaces creatively mediate communication between individuals, regardless of personality and other differences or geographical distance between communicating parties. They have the opportunity to interact with one another on a daily basis and express how they experience the changing world. More specifically in a chat-room being human is emphasised by telling the world, or an individual what one feels and what makes sense, whether this entails replaying personal events, asking questions or resorting to full out swearing. Visual artists of cyberspace create virtual spaces wherein physical bodies can interact without meeting each other physically (Richards & Small 2005: 7). Compared to traditional face-to-face socialising processes, in web spaces there is no need for all the limbs or senses to work, or to exist for that matter. People can simply connect to the Internet and trust the visual artists of cyberspace to bring them closer to other Generation Xers. They can be part of on-line conversations and virtual communities and on a macrolevel they can experience cyberspace culture.

2.3 Motivations for a scientific investigation

Despite this changing social context, what aspects necessitate a scientific investigation, especially from a psychological perspective? The answer is threefold:

- Within the unique social setting of South Africa, foreign literature especially on research done in America does not help to describe the typical South African Internet user and the dynamics behind his or her usage patterns. However, due to lack of local research results and literature, work completed in other parts of the world especially in the USA were used to provide a solid theoretical foundation for this research project. The applicability of these theories and literature will be tested against the research results based on a qualitative content analysis of 384 South African chat-rooms protocols as well as South African data bases that provide an opportunity to develop a statistical valid and reliable profile of the South African Internet user.

- Furthermore there seems to be a gap within social scientific research when exploring the Internet. According to Coward (2002) "the niche that was not being addressed in our eyes was the impact of the Internet from a social science perspective – the Internet's impact on societies throughout the world and the impact of the Internet on the social scientists themselves. From the social science perspective, the changes occurring because of the Internet are unprecedented – it enables new variations of human to human linkage that have not been encountered before" (http://www. pinkerton.emeraldinsight.com   20 June. 2002).   To date, research on computer-mediated communication (CMC) has be localised within the communications and education fields (Gackenbach 1998). "The Internet explosion happened so rapidly that we have not had much time to step back from the medium and look at it more systematically, as a new environment that can have potent effects on our behavior" (Wallace 1999: 1). Research about actual on-line behaviour is still sparse. As a human environment the Internet is relatively new and much can be learned from how it affects humans but looking closely at what is going on from a psychological perspective. Wallace continues by stating that "we need not start from scratch; we know a great deal about the factors that affect behavior in other settings and meaningful parallels could be drawn" (1999:3). Therefore theories and books produced on the topic of Cyber Psychology are limited but draw valuable insight from social, personality, abnormal and clinical subspecialties and secondarily on cognitive, sensation/perception and developmental perspectives (Gackenbach 1998).

- The third part of the answer lies in the need for new research methods especially within the South African context. "The dramatic changes in the global environment, coupled with technological advances in data collection analysis and dissemination, imply that researchers will need to broaden their capabilities in order to design, implement and interpret research in the 21st century. New tools incorporating the latest technology will need to be mastered and creative approaches to understanding behaviour in differing cultural contexts developed" (Graig & Douglas 2001: 82).

In response to the above comments this project will address the issues as follows:

- By combining results from various local data bases a statistical valid profile will be provided of the South African Internet population. A detailed qualitative analysis of chat-room behaviour will shed light on the dynamics behind their usage patterns linked with their pseudopersonalities and the values imbedded in the cyberspace culture.
- The research results will show that websites, more specifically chat-rooms, can be seen as cultural mediators.
- In response to the comment of Graig and Douglas (2001) the applicability of the Internet chat-room as a new psychological research tool will be explored. Against this backdrop, psychological researchers have to look at new but ethical ways to explore thoughts, feelings, perceptions and behaviour of the Internet society. The current set of ethical standards for research has to be evaluated by the actual users of the standards. Currently the South African guidelines are adapted to incorporate guidelines set out by the European Society of Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) for Internet research. Whilst focusing on Internet research methods, the researcher aims to briefly deal with the ethical standards protecting individuals' rights and privacy, that can be applied to Internet based research projects, especially on-line focus groups.

2.4 Concluding summary

Before ethical research processes and methods are described it is important to observe the spontaneous and uninterrupted on-line interaction processes between individuals. Chat-room interaction will provide a platform to describe the values underlying the cyberspace culture. Once the human-Internet transaction processes are understood through the eyes of South African Generation X members, only then can researchers start to generate regulations to ensure an ethical research process when observing and analysing individual Internet behaviour within the South African context.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"Things should be made as simple as possible, but not any simpler"
(Albert Einstein)

3.1 Introduction

The project was contextualised in the previous chapter by providing background information on the social context of cyberspace culture and gaps within the existing literature to describe the Internet experience from a South African perspective. These questions pave the way for a thorough scientific investigation into:

- The development of the cyberspace culture
- A description of the typical Generation X member living in South Africa
- Ethical research methods that can be applied in the South African context to investigate thought processes and interaction patterns of the Generation Xer.

The Internet is not only a piece of technology but also an engine of social change, one that has an influence on work habits, education systems, the global economy, politics and ultimately, research processes. In order to understand the Internet as communication environment it has to be seen as part of people's socio-cultural networks that maintain their communities. Cyber Psychology enables one to think and theorise about how people make connections between cyberspace and the rest of their off-line lives. This process implies the following:

- The Internet can be experienced in different ways by individuals
- The Internet is both social and cognitive space
- The Internet experience is always situated in a specific context, even if one is alone in front of one's computer chatting to others in a chat-room
- Interaction, more specifically chat-room interaction can only be fully understood by means of an analysis of the social context in which it takes place.

During this study chat-room behaviour will be analysed by applying qualitative content analysis techniques in order to focus on simple and complex language constructions that can be used to analyse the social context of chat-room interaction. Words are units with individual meanings, but when these are placed in relationship with each other, a specific context is created for unique reasoning patterns. Choices of words and themes reveal a lot about personality, self-image, world views, value systems and use of psychological defence mechanisms that individuals resort to on a daily basis. By means of qualitative content analysis the linguistic context as well as the broader shared meaning context arise.

The content of chat-room protocols will be analysed on different levels namely:

- Figure interpretation since many individuals use figures to describe their pseudopersonalities.
- Word interpretation will be needed for the analyses of the unique .co.za-dictionary that developed during chat-room interaction.
- Sentence analysis is important since many of the online conversations is short and to the point.
- Paragraph analysis in order to identify overall trends and patterns that characterise the chat-room interaction on a broader level.

3.2 Units of analysis for Internet research

In order to analyse social interaction within this changing context, the **three-level (domain) model** of social context was used (Mantovani in Guiseppi & Galimberti 2001: 22). The basis of this model is the relationship between cultural norms and values and use of computer technology during human interaction. The microlevel looks at interaction between individuals via an artefact for example a computer. The mesolevel focuses on everyday life situations and the macrolevel describes the social context of cyberspace culture. Relationships between levels can be studied in reciprocate directions starting from either the micro- or macrolevel. On-line individual interaction influence everyday situations leading to the development of cyberspace culture on a macrolevel. In the opposite direction, cyberspace culture supplies tools such as 'netiquette' needed to correctly interpret on-line situations and behaviour. Visually the model can be depicted as follows:
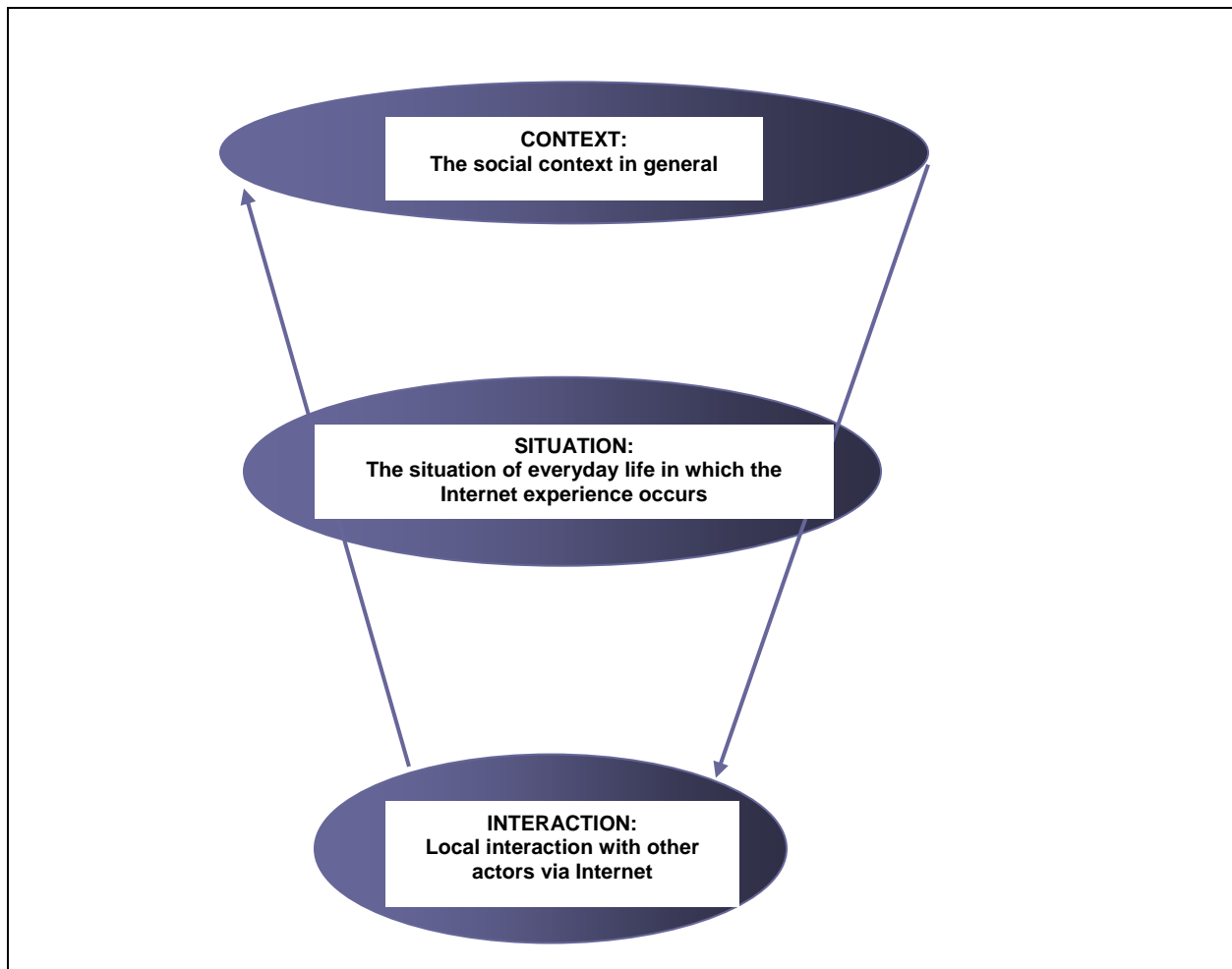
Figure 3.1:   A three-level model of the Internet experience

Microlevel: Interaction

Carl Roger's ideas and thoughts around creativity will be used to describe behaviour, goals and personal motivations of an individual to interact and form relationships with other individuals via the Internet.   This level forms the basis or starting point of the development of cyberspace culture.

Mesolevel: Situation

Chat-room groups develop within a borderless world of cyberspace with unique constraints and potentialities different from traditional face-to-face encounters. Specific roles, functions and behaviour such as pseudopersonality development will be described that characterise this unique electronic situation people encounter on a daily basis.

Macrolevel: Context

The focus of on-line interaction is on a unique culture of cyberspace with specific social rules to guide interaction in chat-rooms on the situational level. The Symbolic Action Theory within the framework of Cultural Psychology will be applied to discuss this top-down developmental process.   Cyberspace culture influences other institutions within broader society, such as the globalisation of economies and social relationships across continents. This project will emphasise the continuing mediating process between technological innovation and human social change, implying that the cyberspace culture is indeed both a social as well as a cognitive concept, making it an unstable, ever changing prerequisite for communication in the 21st century.

In addition to the three-level domain model, the CEMDA (Complimentary Explorative Multilevel Data Analysis) method will be applied to study these units and the relationships between them. The CEMDA method provides a structured framework to analyse Generation Xers development of cyberspace culture from a psychological perspective. CEMDA provides researchers with the potential to conduct parallel and interconnected research in the same domain (Guiseppe & Galimberti 2001).

The main characteristics of the CEMDA model can be summarised as follows:
- The main aim is to integrate research results in a general framework to understand the phenomenon under question for example cyberspace culture.
- There is a different focus for each level, allowing the researcher to explore the relationship between levels of the Internet experience.
- Researchers have the flexibility to combine various quantitative and qualitative methods in order to compliment the weaknesses imbedded in each. Quantitative methods are applied to extract statistically valid and reliable patterns whilst qualitative methods capture the essence of the phenomena for example the personal experience of chat-room interaction.

3.3 Stages in Complimentary Explorative Multilevel Data Analysis

Guiseppe and Galimberti (2001: 33) identified the following stages to be used when structuring a research project:

- Stage 1:   Determine the scope of the research
- Stage 2:   Define the different levels
- Stage 3:   Define a start level

- Stage 4: Identification of links between the start- and other levels
- Stage 5: Analyse the direction(s) of the links between the levels
- Stage 6: Formulate hypotheses with regard to the links between the levels
- Stage 7: Identify the overall approach to the research
- Stage 8: Define the methods
- Stage 9: Data collection and selection of data sets
- Stage 10: Integrate quantitative and qualitative results
- Stage 11: Integrate the data from the different levels
- Stage 12: Interpret the data and present the results
- Stage 13: Formulate new hypotheses based on the results.

Stage 1:   Determine the scope of the research

The study aims to provide a description of a particular group of people, conveniently designated as 'Generation Xers, who are developing a new 'cyberspace culture' through interacting in cyberspace chat-rooms, by means of a twofold process of firstly developing cyberspace or 'pseudopersonalities' that are different from their individual 'normal' personalities, and secondly by sharing unique values, opinions and attitudes.

Stage 2:   Define the different levels

The three-level model in figure 3.1 was used to determine the following levels:

- Interaction
- Situation
- Context.

Stage 3:   Define a start level

The process starts at the microlevel where individuals use the Internet during interaction with others.

Stage 4:   Link the start level with the other levels

For the purpose of this project the development process was described from bottom to top, that is from individual interactions via the Internet on a daily basis, that eventually develops into cyberspace culture with an unique value system.

Stage 5:   Analyse the directions of the links between the levels

The 'bottom-up' development process will be analysed with a specific focus on the individual's need for creativity, as described by Carl Rogers in 1952. In order to guide the description of the 'top-down' process, assumptions of the Symbolic Action Theory described by Boesch in 1991, will be applied.

Stage 6:   Formulate hypotheses with regard to the links between the levels

SUB-THEME 1:   Develop a profile of the Generation Xers living in South Africa and provide a description of their on-line interaction processes in chat-rooms. This provides the platform for:

SUB-THEME 2:   A description of the development of a unique situation with unique characteristics for example the development of the pseudopersonality that differs from the individual's 'off-line personality'.

MAIN THEME: By understanding the patterns of Internet behaviour and the exchange of information through the eyes of chat-room participants, conclusions can be drawn about **values of the cyberspace culture**.

By understanding and describing the phenomenon the researcher will explore the following secondary themes.

SECONDARY THEME 1:   Exploration of the application of the Internet chat-room as research tool for example on-line focus groups within the South African context.

SECONDARY THEME 2:   Describing ethical standards applicable to Internet research in the South African context.

Stage 7:   Identify the overall approach to the research

The development process of the cyberspace culture will be studied from a psychological perspective, more specifically the Humanistic approach to maintain focus on the human experience of cyberspace culture.

Stage 8:   Define the methods

Triangulation will be used as research strategy whereby qualitative and quantitative techniques will be combined with AMPS results to provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon (Babbie 1989). The research process will be completed as follows:

a. Literature study

The literature study will aim to:

Identify theories used in Psychology to describe the cyberspace culture specifically using chat-room behaviour as the unit of investigation. It will involve a look at:

- Social interaction processes in Internet chat-rooms. This will be done by means of cyber-psychological theories as well as Carl Roger's views on the individual's need for creativity.
- Carl Roger's Self Concept Theory will lead the discussion around the development of the pseudopersonality. Other valuable input within the framework of Social Psychology will compliment the discussion.
- The processes used by generation Xers to develop a cyberspace culture will be described by means of a cultural-psychological perspective focussing on theoretical assumptions used in the Symbolic Action Theory.

b. Quantitative analysis

Trended population figures will be provided to develop a demographic profile of the South African Internet population compared to the general population.

c. Qualitative content analysis of South African chat-room protocols

A pilot phase will be included whereby 20 chat-room protocols will be analysed to refine aspects such as:

- Quality of protocols
- Identification of specific variables to be included to identify specific trends
- Applicable method of content analysis.

For the purpose of this study a chat-room protocol can be described on three levels namely:

- Level 1:   A set of original data that is also known as source data
- Level 2:   A set of rules by which people's verbal responses are recorded for analysis
- Level 3:   A source to gain insight into personality profiles since it provides information about individual behaviour, emotional experiences and underlying pathology.

Stage 9:   Data collection and selection of data sets

a. AMPS data sets

With the AMPS (All Media and Product Survey) database, trended population figures will be provided to develop a demographic profile of the South African Internet population compared to the general population. Where applicable other available sources for example census data will also be used.

b. Population and sample size

The content of **384** chat-room protocols will be analysed. The formula used to determine a sample size of 384 is:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 * 0.50\,(1 - 0.50)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

Currently the population is infinite, since it is unknown how many South Africans visit Internet chat-rooms. The following assumptions apply:

- $z = 1.96$ for the 5% significance level or 95% confidence level. This is the number of standard deviation units in the 'normal distribution' that will produce the desired level of confidence (significance).

- $p = 0.50$. When the researcher has no idea beforehand of what percentage of the population has the characteristic of interest, and then he or she must be conservative and take it as 50%. This is the estimated proportion of the population who possesses the characteristic of interest for example Internet chat-room participation.

- $E = 0.05$. This value determines that the sample result should not differ from the population figure by more than 5%. It is the permissible error. It states the expected deviation of the sample result (survey result) for the probable population figure, under the specified significance (confidence) level.

In summary, with 95% level of confidence it can be expected that the sample statistics (results) will not differ from the population statistics (actual values) by more than 5% if the sample is 384 and consists of randomly selected respondents from the infinite population.

c. Interviews with South African researchers and psychologists

A total of 10 in-depth interviews were conducted regarding:

- Internet research
- The applicability of on-line focus groups in the South African context
- Ethical considerations for Internet research.

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Stage 10:   Integrate quantitative and qualitative results

Chapter 7 concentrates on results from various quantitative data sets and provide a reliable and statistically valid profile of the South African Internet user population. It is complimented by the results of the qualitative content analysis of 384 chat-room protocols to provide an in-depth understanding of on-line interaction group processes

Stage 11:   Integrate the data from the different levels

In order to integrate relevant literature and research results, chapter 9 focuses on the cyberspace culture specifically the development process that starts with interaction between individuals in chat-room groups that develops into virtual communities culminating into cyberspace culture.

Stage 12:   Interpret the data and present the results

Chapters 7 to 9 deal with this process in detail.

Stage 13:   Formulate new hypotheses based on the results

The research process is summarised in the final chapter of this thesis. Insights, key learning areas and new avenues for potential future research will conclude the project.

3.4 Concluding summary

In summary the process makes it possible to look at the Internet experience at different levels. The main research theme is broken down into two subthemes and followed by two secondary themes. Each level dictate the method being used, for example AMPS figures provide a statistical profile of the South African Internet population and the interaction patterns will be best described via qualitative content analyses of chat-room protocols. The quantitative figures represent the phenomenon as a finite set of variables usually portrayed as numerical data, but with the qualitative content analysis of the protocols the person and his or her interaction patterns are described.

CHAPTER 4: THE INTERNET - A PRODUCT OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS DESCRIBED BY CARL ROGERS

"Value the gift of creativity… "

Figure 4.1: Starry night by Vincent van Gogh

4.1 Introduction

Prior to a discussion about any creative process it is important to note that this chapter is based on proceedings titled 'Toward a theory of creativity' delivered by Carl Rogers in Granville, Ohio in 1952 at the conference on Creativity. The value of his work lies in the fact that 53 years later, his theory is still applicable to developments in the Internet environment confirming the assumption that the creative act has an universal nature and can be applied to new ideas and technological creations, irrespective of time frames.

4.2 Social need for creativity

Many contemporary authors will tend to agree with Rogers in reasoning that the past 53 years can be described as a period where creativity was not seen as the most vital points on any society's agenda. Educational systems produced conformists, stereotypes and individuals whose education is complete, instead of producing free, creative, original thinkers (Rogers 1952: 249). In the field of media

development, television specifically was described as a way of providing passive entertainment to a so called 'coach potato' audience. In the industrial world creative processes were only available to a selected few individuals in managerial positions, designers or executives in research departments. "In the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the books we read, and the ideas we hold, there is a strong tendency toward conformity, toward stereotypes. To be original, or different, is felt to be dangerous" (Rogers 1952: 249). At then there was the Internet … The inception of the Internet and its availability to the general public meant the start of a wave of information readily available on screen in the office, in the home or in the classroom. This instant exposure to global information forced humanity to realise that well known environments keep changing and the only way to keep abreast with it is to *creatively* adapt to change.

During the 1950s, Rogers predicted that "unless man can make new original adaptations to his environment as rapidly as his science can change the environment, our culture will perish. Not only individual maladjustment and group tension, but international annihilation will be the price we pay for a lack of creativity" (Rogers 1952: 250). When one looks at differences between the generations, one will see that the cyberspace culture has developed out of a need of individuals to control environments and not for looking toward a governing body to make those decisions for them. What makes the 2005 version of the Internet different from the 1969 version? Nowadays the Internet is not something distant and foreign and only available to IT specialists in the USA Defence Force. Internet users perceive it as a tool to interact with their environment, to keep abreast with the world in its totality, even if it means chatting on-line with a friend in America about the Academy Award won by Charlize Theron an actress born in South Africa, using an Internet connection at home in South Africa. The digital revolution, unlike previous revolutions such as the industrial revolution, is not controlled by external groups, political parties or governments but by individuals.

4.3 The creative process

In order to scientifically understand an abstract concept such as creativity, there should be something observable, a product of creation in this case the Internet. This product must be a novel construction. This novelty grows out of the unique qualities of an individual in his or her interaction with the creative product or the Internet for example pseudopersonalities that are created once individuals interact with others in chat-rooms. The creative process can be described as follows: "It is the emergence in action

of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other" (Rogers 1952: 251). One of the functions of psychology, is to think and theorise about how people make connections between cyberspace (a novel relational product) and the remainder of their off-line lives.

4.4 Motivation for creativity

One could ask the question: So why be creative? Rogers agreed with colleague Maslow, also a Humanistic thinker, that the primary motivation for creativity is "man's tendency to actualise himself, to become his potentialities" (Rogers 1952: 251). Rogers takes it further and described it as the directional trend evident in all human life: The urge to expand, develop, extend and mature. Although it may be buried under psychological defences, hidden from the face-to-face world that denies its existence, it exists and awaits proper conditions to be released and expressed. This might be another motivation for the development and success of the Internet. Cyberspace provides people with a vehicle to express individual originality, a window whereby creativity can be expressed and shared with others 'like me', but under the protective cloak of anonymity. Furthermore Rogers felt that no distinction should be made regarding the degree of creativity since it is a value judgment extremely variable in nature. In the chat-room this also holds true because whether it is a first year student or a CEO, on-line everybody operates under pseudonyms ensuring equal status. Cyberspace provides a safe space whereby one can be what he or she wants to be.

4.5 The social value of creativity

Rogers makes a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' creativity for example on-line self-help group members that operate under pseudonyms in order to protect their identity since they are HIV+ compared to the paedophile acting as a 12 year old in a chat-room for adolescent boys, looking for his next victim. Both are creative acts even though their social values and objectives are different. How can science determine when creativity is constructive or destructive?

The distinction can certainly not be based on examining the product that is the Internet. Can one say that the Internet is evil because of child pornography or the availability of thousands of sexual websites available to anyone, more specifically those members younger than eighteen? In the context of many

television shows and popular journalism children should be kept away from this new form of evil. To play devils advocate, what about the following gentleman's statement? Trocchia and Janda (2000: 6) recorded this verbatim response from an elderly wheelchair-bound informant:

"Informant: I like to get on the chat line and talk to young people

Interviewer: Do you tell them your age?

Informant: Oh, no, I tell them that I'm in my 30's

Interviewer: Why do you do that?

Informant: Because who wants to talk to an old man? It's great because I can be whoever I want to be. Last week I had fun talking about sports and music with young people. I felt like I fit right in."

Is the Internet really such an evil thing? What is the conclusion? The constructiveness of the creative product does not lie in the examination of the product (Internet) itself. The answer to the question lies elsewhere.

Another avenue to identify a constructive creative product is to look at the purpose of the individual participating in the creative process, or maybe by evaluating the product's creativity at the time it was formed?   The Internet was developed in 1969 as a specific closed system namely the American military environment. Surely if the Internet as a possible constructive creative object had been evaluated during the early seventies one would have concluded that it is a product effective within the military environment but not a creative work of art applicable in the public sphere of life. As is the case with many artists' works such as Van Gogh's work, his real creative power only became evident years after his death. The same applies to the Internet, but it was in the early nineties that the Internet exploded and only then did its real creative potential become known. Luckily science did not get stuck in its focus on the original purpose of the development of the Internet. Compare the social value and benefits the Internet system has in life in the 21st century to its original purpose in 1969 that is internal communication within a military environment. What is the conclusion? Constructive creativity cannot be determined by:

- The time when a creative product was formed: or
- The purpose of individuals participating in the process.

A constructive creative product's value lies in its sense of direction towards a common good. Products that allow people to function freely and fully as true beings, true to the creativity they find within themselves. As Rogers put it: "When a man's unique capacity of awareness is thus functioning freely and fully, we find that we have not an animal whom we must fear, not a beast who must be controlled, but an organism able to achieve, through the remarkable integrative capacity of it central nervous

system, a balanced, realistic, self-enhancing, other-enhancing behaviour as a resultant of all these elements of awareness" (1952: 253). Keeping the progress towards a common good in mind, Rogers also stated that this constructive creative behaviour is not always conventional, not always conforming but individualised.   In 1952 he asked whether this could be socialised?   Indeed, within cyberspace culture this train of thought is one of the cornerstones, whereby individuality is albeit eccentric, different and unconventional, respected under the cloak of common good.

4.6 Inner conditions of constructive creativity

If Rogers back in 1952 had to provide a description of a particular group of people, conveniently designated as 'Generation Xers, he would have started with a description of conditions that had to be present in an individual to be able to be associated with constructive creativity.   He summarised his description in these three points namely:

- Openness to experience
- An internal locus of evaluation
- The ability to toy with elements and concepts.

When an individual is open to experience, psychological defence mechanisms are not necessary any more.   Since pseudonymity is part of the on-line experience the stimulus can be freely relayed without being distorted by means of a process of defensiveness.   According to McKenna, Katelyn and Bargh "the Internet provides a kind of experimental laboratory in which one can try out various possible selves and different roles in a safe and risk-free manner" (2000: 67).   Rogers' descriptions are echoed when one reads descriptions of cyberspace and Generation Xers views on the importance of tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to receive conflicting information without forcing closure upon the situation, as well as openness to the unknown.   This openness creates the possibility for creativity and because of this openness, the product of creativity can be destructive or constructive.

Looking at the second point of an internal locus of evaluation, the typical Generation Xer is more inclined to base decisions on personal meaning, rather than on peer group pressure.   Creativity is evaluated by asking questions such as "Does it express a part of me – my feeling or my thought, my pain or my ecstasy?" (Rogers 1952: 255).   Keeping the direction towards a common good in mind, this internal locus of evaluation does not imply the individual to be oblivious towards or unaware of the judgment of others.

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Lastly Generation Xers feel it is their right to experiment with different elements and concepts, that is creativity in motion. Different 'self-pictures' are tested in cyberspace where the individual interacts with the world and by experiencing others' on-line reactions the individual sees him- or herself through the eyes of other Internet users. They display an ability to spontaneously play with ideas, relationships, shapes, other ideas to shape hypotheses and test them, and to create...!

4.7 External conditions fostering constructive creativity

Because of the nature of inner conditions of creativity it is evident that it cannot be forced upon people. This implies that external conditions have to be developed in order to foster and nourish and allow creativity to develop and grow. Rogers stated that this external environment should be a place of psychological safety and freedom. Psychological safety firstly implies a space where individuals will be accepted in their own right, hence a space where they can actualise themselves in new, spontaneous ways. The Internet provides the individual with anonymity and personal control over contact with fellow Internet users and thus provides a platform for the individual to explore and finally actualise the real self. As Rogers puts it: "The good life … is the process of movement in a direction which the human organism selects when it is inwardly free to move in any direction" (1961: 187). The self-concept and personality evolves from human experiences and the individual has the freedom of choice during Internet conversations to creatively explore different aspects of the self-concept without bearing the risk of conditions that apply for experiencing acceptance of others.   "Under the protective cloak of anonymity chat-room participants can express the way they truly feel and think. The assurance of anonymity gives one far greater play in identity construction than is conceivable in face-to-face encounters" (McKenna, Katelyn & Bargh 2000: 67).

Furthermore a climate is provided in which external evaluation is absent. For an individual to find himself in an atmosphere where he is not being evaluated, not being measured by some external standard, is enormously freeing. Evaluation is always a threat, and creates a need for defensiveness. If judgements based on external standards are absent, then only the 'I' can be open to my experiences, my own likes and dislikes, my own locus of evaluation, continuously on the path toward my own creativity.   If this is the case during chat-room interaction why then are there conflict and aggressive

behaviour such as flame wars? An absence of external evaluation does not mean an absence of 'having reactions'. A reaction such as 'I don't like your idea' is not an evaluation, but a reaction. In many cases individuals cannot distinguish between the two.   This distinction can be made easier by applying the notion of emphatic understanding: 'Although I disagree with you, I can still accept you and learn about you'.

4.8 Concluding summary

In conclusion, these conditions pave the way for psychological freedom. A shy and lonely boy can start communicating with girls on-line. This will give him the freedom to later on in life meet girls in face-to-face situations, thus enhancing his interpersonal relationships with the opposite sex. By using the Internet as a constructive creative tool, people can teach themselves in a safe environment how to be firstly true to themselves, to develop their own unique ways of being creative and ultimately use that 'I-ness' towards a common good. Hereafter they can with dignity and confidence move on to more involved interpersonal relationships.

During this chapter the focus was placed on the creative roots of the Internet. The next chapter will elaborate on the development of a cyberspace or 'pseudopersonality' during encounters in cyberspace. For this purpose, theoretical assumptions within the broad field of social psychology as well as the Self-Concept theory of Carl Rogers will be applied.