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*Published in:*  
Intercultural Mirrors: Dynamic Reconstruction of Identity

*DOI:*  
[10.1163/9789004401303\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004401303_002)

*Licence:*  
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*Recommended citation (APA):*  
Patron, M. C. (2019). Hansel and Gretel Revisited: Quixotic Reflections of Online Dating. In M-C. Patron, & J. Kraven (Eds.), *Intercultural Mirrors: Dynamic Reconstruction of Identity* (pp. 25-50). Brill.  
[https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004401303\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004401303_002)

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## Hansel and Gretel Revisited: Quixotic reflections of online dating.

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### Abstract

The unprecedented wave of immigrants relocating to western societies makes this a propitious time for interdisciplinary research to focus on identity negotiation. Studies in multicultural contexts offer fascinating insights into the complexities of human interaction, revealing that - irrespective of age - dynamic remodelling of identity still occurs (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Mahtani, 2002; Giguère, Lalonde, Lou, 2010). The transitional processes of acculturation in Australia from the sixties onwards provide compelling evidence that our social interactions are in stark contrast with those within our cultural group. Placed in relief with the host national group, the perceptions of self, derived from these interactions thus give rise to the dynamic negotiation of our identity. The traumatised childhood of young migrants whose identity was transformed through 'intercultural mirrors' projecting racism and discrimination can leave residual effects on intimate adult relationships. This chapter explores the impacts of the quixotic images projected from online dating through the lens of a fifty-something, Franco-Australian professional, Coco. Her ethnographic chronicle and introspection place her identity reconstruction through intercultural contact with her suitors under the microscope,<sup>1</sup> and documents simultaneously how those mirrors are effecting dynamic changes to sociocultural norms. **Are modern societies becoming ethically bankrupt?**

**Key Words:** intercultural mirrors; identity renegotiation; online dating; quixotic images; illusion; Don Quixote; societal changes; shifting sociocultural norms; self-acceptance; relationships.

### Author's note

*Coco through the looking glass* (Patron, 2018) is a creative piece based on a compilation of authentic intercultural experiences and anecdotal accounts. Pseudonyms were employed to protect the identity of all

protagonists and antagonists portrayed in Coco's narrative, in accordance with the ethos of 'Do no harm' that underpins qualitative ethnographic research (Ellis, 2007).

### **Introduction**

*Coco through the looking glass* exposes fascinating insights into the murky world of online dating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Salient issues emerging from Patron's (2018) publication of the chronicle provide a unique platform from which to record dynamic changes in personal identity and sociocultural norms. The transitional process in Coco's identity remodelling is documented and analysed qualitatively from a psychological and philosophical lens, predicated on Jacques Lacan's (1977) interpretations of the mirror theme and underscored through Duckworth's (1983) critique of Welsh's (1981) deliberations on Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. These interpretations of the mirror theme are significant in the context of dynamic changes to societal norms. I posit that the intercultural online reflections from Coco's emotional roller-coaster journey in the hedonistic playground of Millennials, X-, and Y-Generation members<sup>2</sup> project quixotic images of human behaviour onto modern society.

Online dating can be fun, is certainly affordable, and can be efficacious in finding a suitable partner, but this medium has been dubbed a *Jungle* and *Zoo* by subscribers. Survival of the fittest? In this contrived technological playground fostering self-presentation and self-disclosure, how does one authenticate genuine profiles from fake ones? One needs to remain circumspect without being cynical, yet, naïve daters continue to fall prey to the hype promulgated by dating agencies.

At this critical time in history where the relentless flow of immigrants toward Western nations increases exponentially, researchers are presented with a kaleidoscope of images reflected through intercultural mirrors across the globe. The transitional processes of acculturation and enculturation, as migrants adjust to a foreign culture, are fraught with difficulties, the least of which concern linguistic shock and other cultural factors governing their former relationships. Adjustment is reputedly traumatic but when compounded by a tepid welcome by xenophobic host societies, the notorious effects of stereotypes, racism and discrimination can have lasting impacts on the psychological development of the newcomers' identity. The residual effects of these processes on children as they grow into adults represent a perennial source of anxiety for new migrants and their offspring, proving to be fertile ground for social and interdisciplinary academic studies.

This chapter contributes to the growing body of research on complex intercultural identity negotiation and other issues afflicting immigrants. I examine how traumatic childhood experiences of naturalised migrants can impact an individual's life choices, continuing to influence their future intimate relationships. Coco's trials and tribulations began in childhood, continuing throughout her adult life and resurfacing at the current period in her life where she turns to online dating to search yet again for her soulmate at age 50+.

Coco's narrative creates awareness of the pitfalls that can assail unsuspecting daters as well as potential rewards. The creative piece based on a compilation of authentic intercultural experiences and anecdotal accounts reveals incongruous outcomes of online dating for Coco and her mature cohort of daters. Notoriously considered as despair-inducing, online dating can, nonetheless, represent a panacea to loneliness and lead to self-acceptance. That is, for those who have the mental fortitude and patience to sift through the online shenanigans to find the one they seek.

The intercultural mirrors in the context of online dating for Coco represent heartache, despair and disillusion, tempered by the joys of friendships formed, self-acceptance and renewed self-esteem. This is evidently not the narrative of all individuals involved. The dynamic changes to Coco's identity constitute a highly selective process where she integrates only positive aspects that enhance her chances of rebuilding her self-esteem. This process contrasts dramatically with the automatic incorporation of a complexity of negative interpretations on her childhood psyche in Australia of the sixties; a perennial 'battle' ....

The chronicle has highlighted dichotomous variables governing the phenomenon of online dating; some positive, but I would argue that the considerable adverse effects are provoking disquieting trends that are changing the fabric of society. Anecdotal evidence is difficult to substantiate because of privacy concerns as well as scant research findings on this subject. Online media articles currently provide one of the best sources of authentication until longitudinal and cross-sectional studies are published. Werber writes that, '[i]n the absence of hard data, it's anecdotes that shape the conversation about online dating safety' (2017).

Space constraints preclude a thorough analysis of a range of nefarious aspects of online dating emerging from this book. The most prominent are discussed in this chapter. The remaining impacts of online dating, of equal significance, will appear in my forthcoming publication, entitled *The Smorgasbord Effect on Mature Female Online Daters* (2019).

### **1. Philosophical interpretations - The dynamic effects of intercultural mirrors**

Jacques Lacan's (1977) interpretative philosophical discussions, perceived through the lens of online dating, can provide fascinating insights into the challenges individuals face when they choose this technological medium for their encounters. Lacan's conception of the mirror stage is predicated on a child's early stages of development, as the infant begins to distinguish the self from others through the image reflected in the mirror. This represents the first step in forming the personal 'I'. This analogy is pertinent in the context of the adjustment of immigrants in multicultural settings, as the intercultural mirrors reflected by host society members assist in the renegotiation of their cultural identity, essentially synchronising their old self with the new self. We rely on ascribed and avowed identities in the context of intercultural communication because a newcomer uses the ascribed identity to communicate initially. This is how he or she is being perceived (Collier, 1997).

Irrespective of existing ascribed identities that define an individual, i.e. those we are given at birth or involuntary identities, the dynamic reconstruction of identity is reactivated with the first foray into online dating. The vigorous process that ensues can, however, have lasting consequences on the self-esteem of an individual, both encouraging and destructive. The images that the new and accessible medium of online dating presents to the newcomer can manifest into a myriad of troubling issues for those unaware and unprepared for the potential pitfalls. Social media and online dating are growing exponentially, offering people technologically controlled platforms to share their private lives, thoughts and photographs with others to construct their most desirable self-images.

#### **1.2 Cervantes. Don Quixote de la Mancha**

Alexander Welsh's *Reflections on the Hero as Quixote* (1981), critiqued by Duckworth (1983), provides fascinating insights into Miguel de Cervantes' masterpiece, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. The analysis offers an ancillary, but fitting heuristic lens, from which to examine the impacts of online dating on personal and social identity. I argue the recent phenomenon can be perceived as a technological medium,

in which certain human truths at the heart of ... [some inherently depraved] behavior[s] are seen to be 'reflected' (illuminated *and* bent back) by the quixotic behavior of other heroes [genuine daters] (Duckworth, 1983).

Unsuspecting individuals blindly trust online dating projections that promise the chivalric romances, the illusory, extravagant perception that individuals will find their perfect match based on fabricated images. The expectations of significant rewards are predicated on the hyped algorithms that work 24/7.

Based on the (2018) investigations into online dating, I contend this technologically arbitrated medium is in fact a *Pandora's Box*, chimera in motion because we are effectively being sold an illusion. Buyer beware! **Furthermore, we are witnessing a significant shift in community values, the impacts of online dating threatening to induce an ethically bankrupt society, wearing away traditional social mores and core values, essentially redefining the fabric of society.** We are witnessing the erosion of our concept of reality as we each transfer all our fairytales, our wishes, our wants onto the screen. Therein lies non-reality. This transference can be perceived in the following way,

[Online dating] provides a view of life that runs counter to absolutisms finding their justification in a final cause of one sort or another. Quixotism thus serves as a perennial criticism of teleological faith [the outcome is a means to an end]; it subverts ideologies that discover optimistic perspectives in the historical process; and it provides the basis for a redefinition of realism (Ibid. p.2).

Reality is eroded by putting the screen between two individuals. A person transfers to the screen their deficiencies and at the same time takes out of the screen their fantasies, hopes and dreams. Like a quantum psychological projection. Reality has almost been reversed; people think real life is inside the net (or the screen). Life outside a screen is some kind of illusion.

The increasing penchant for embellished *selfies* that is all pervasive on dating sites encourages us to create the images we want to project online, significantly distinct from our real self. The prevalence of inadequate *selfies* in the male profiles is thus startling because one wonders why they have not tried to put their best face forward. I consider *selfies* to be distorted versions of oneself instead. The nefarious practice of *Catfishing*, where individuals alter their identity

by using false information to create a persona online takes narcissistic behaviour to extraordinary levels.

There are alarming implications for modern society if we perceive the images emerging from online dating as provoking dynamic changes in human interactions and identity, in the process threatening traditional family and core values. In multiethnic societies, disparate cultures merge with the host society dominant culture and the reflexive intercultural mirrors they represent project quixotic and dynamic reflections on individuals as they interact. Each encounter brings a favourable or unfavourable outcome, sometimes constructive, but where undesirable, they cast ugly shadows that can alter the lives of hapless victims forever.

Dating practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are unparalleled with any other time in history, and brazen agencies unashamedly boast unrealistic success rates in matching individuals for romantic or sexual encounters. These practices are a permanent fixture in the lives of members of younger demographics, but today, the Baby Boomers and older cohorts of daters from a multitude of cultures are increasingly lured to new sites promising instant rewards. They have their neurotransmitters, dopamine and serotonin to thank for their addiction to this avant-garde social dating medium. They remain largely unaware of the adverse effects – health and lifestyle issues, poor time-management, decreased genuine interactions with close ones, shame and embarrassment at being duped, etc.

In multicultural contexts especially, these questionable images are triggering disquieting trends that affect the most vulnerable groups, mature daters, and migrants not fully integrated into the host society. The flagrant disregard for traditional core values – including the culture of acceptance, truth, integrity and respect – is escalating as discord results from intolerance of divergent cultural dimensions and behaviours, linguistic issues, and incompatible ethical principles. Moral rectitude, integrity, generosity and trust are being replaced by depravity, avarice, deception, and cynicism online, and these negative standards, reflected by the questionable behaviours in online dating are spilling onto modern society. Cultural conflict is common if diversity is not embraced but when some migrant groups join dating sites without the sanction of their families and church groups, the incidence of family violence and disrespect, fraudulent activities, and tactics are bound to increase exponentially. The consequences of changing family values on cultural identity are thus significant.

## **2.1 Discussion**

### **2.2 Quixotic images of online dating on modern society**

The ubiquity of the Internet, comprising a digital population of over four billion active users among the 7.6 billion people on our planet (Statista, n.d), has altered the landscape of dating forever. The immediate global reach, especially vis-à-vis instantaneous access to profiles for social media users and daters, has secured the dating game a place in the annals of social encounters; add to this, the new modes of communication and algorithmic formulae that ostensibly guarantee a match. The process of encountering potential partners online transforms three-dimensional individuals into two-dimensional displays of varying length and content that fail to capture inherent experiential aspects of social interaction, indispensable in evaluating compatibility (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, Sprecher, 2012).

Conventional dating is now *passé*, but, will the dynamic changes in societal values provoke resurgence in traditional modes of dating? An imminent move back towards the bars and clubs may be possible for mature daters, but for Millennials? Unlikely, given deteriorating communication skills. How could they possibly cope without their technological tools and Apps to articulate every facet of communication? Old fashioned dating seems like a step backwards. How could they have coherent conversations and arguments without Emojis and abbreviations?

Research shows that the attention span of online daters, and not just the younger demographics, is also diminishing as users become lazy and their patience challenged. Let's face it, with a smorgasbord of potential partners to satisfy the palates of the most voracious adherents, irrespective of their objectives, online dating is an irresistible drawcard; and it is not going anywhere, anytime soon. If the image, profile content and subsequent phone calls are incongruous, daters are ruthless and superficial, dismissing the candidate instantly. Why? Plenty more fish in the sea! Online dating gives individuals a false sense of security and an inflated ego. If they engineer their profiles using Photoshopped images and structure the parameters to design the 'perfect' partner, he or she must be just around the corner. Right? Wrong! So many factors govern this strange new world. Is narcissistic behaviour becoming mainstream in our society as a result of this?

There are fewer romantics these days who entertain the idea that Cupid's arrow will find them without a little intervention from advanced social media platforms, dating gurus, and online dating sites that promise love, romance, and increased levels of endorphins. Yet, as the quixotic reflections from every facet of online dating reach their target, these incorrigible romantics remain hopeful; but the images projected from this medium are skewed, guaranteeing instant sexual

gratification laced with deception, disillusion and pain instead of fairy-tale endings.

### **2.3 Positive impacts of online dating**

The intercultural mirrors in the context of online dating are credited with projecting a few constructive images on modern society, even if this form of dating is governed by the metaphorical double-edged sword. The recent status of social acceptability is the most appealing facet of online dating, a significant improvement, bearing in mind this medium is not solely focused on romantic encounters. The reflexive mirrors emanating from online suitors can hypothetically, not only lead to romantic love, but also to the formation of lasting friendship networks, thereby reducing loneliness, as per Coco's experience.

Risk-aversion is highly beneficial as the two-dimensional perspective affords daters privacy and security prior to an eventual encounter. If the online journey is managed strategically, daters can exercise control to avert latent risks and, in the process, improve their self-confidence. This safety measure is especially recommended for mature daters. Whether the online prospect brings companionship, love or sex, it can also restore quality of life if older daters elect cohabitation, as bills are shared, and transportation issues minimised. This is multifaceted, especially the underlying risks for mature daters.

The potential for positive transformations of identity, and a committed and loving relationship, are considerable advantages in online dating. Especially in intercultural contexts, where tolerance and acceptance of interracial unions are beginning to manifest, the progressive methods of dating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century present a fascinating opportunity for self-reflection and resultant personal growth. This is a positive social change.

The liberation of sexuality online, where inter-sexed individuals and gays can disclose their HIV status, is another clear benefit. With increased honesty and transparency come better chances of finding a partner. Traditional prostitution is thus naturally less prevalent as people can find gratuitous sex online from willing partners (Brooks, 2001). However, the double-edged sword is ubiquitous.

### **2.4 The nefarious practices of Internet dating**

The nefarious side of online dating is, unfortunately, not a figment of imagination. We can ignore the negative online images being projected on modern society at our peril, or we can attempt to instigate changes through cultural awareness. Is it too late to put the

genie back into the bottle? The two most prominent and alarming issues arising from the 2018 chronicle concern the unconscionable behaviours of many members engaged in online dating and the *Smorgasbord Effect* on mature daters, especially women.

The 2018 ethnographic chronicle has thrown ageism into the limelight as the gender gap threatens to become a chasm. This is central to the issues affecting Boomers and older generations, the intricacies involved proving most perplexing for mature single or divorced women. This issue has been identified as a huge societal challenge. The gender bias is blatant when the issue of parity is raised, older demographics of females especially, facing dire circumstances after separation or divorce. The quixotic projections of online dating appear to compound their problems instead of alleviating their burdens. Ageism and other associated issues concerning the 50+ women will be discussed in my forthcoming publication as well as the impacts of the exponential increase of infidelity and promiscuity in the community, leading to the proliferation of STIs (Sexually Transmittable Infections) globally.

Despicable behaviour is pervasive across all online mediums because of overarching anonymity and impunity, practices that evidently encourage criminality. This is the choice playground of gamesters, scammers, and predators. Bullying and intimidation are deep-seated issues within society that need to be addressed urgently. They have always existed, but now, their increasing prevalence is being fuelled by social media channels. Targeted, instantaneous messaging can have devastating effects on the psyche of all involved, irrespective of age, and now its reach is widespread.

In multicultural contexts, increasing numbers of teenagers of both genders, from a mix of cultures, have become experts at tormenting youngsters to the point of suicide in many instances. I argue that the immunity and notoriety on social media is predictably propelling them to push beyond the boundaries as they discover new communities of online dating and the Dark Web. Where panoply of fake profiles, sexual predators, and psychopaths abound, it is impossible to determine just how dangerous online dating is. Why? Simply because security measures are ineffective, and dating sites remain tight-lipped about this and many related issues.

It appears *Catfishing* and other disreputable dating games are still predominantly masculine pursuits, but it is difficult to authenticate anecdotal reports at grass roots level about increasing female involvement in all facets of game-playing and infidelity on- and offline. Is depravity no longer gender-specific? Recent testimonials volunteered by both sexes suggest women are increasingly competing in these games. These findings are outside the scope of this chapter

but research in this area will certainly feature in my forthcoming publication. If men are accused of increasing infidelity, many of their female partners could be just as guilty. Whatever gender the perpetrator of online deception and misrepresentation, the outcome is familiar: reduced resilience and self-worth.

Irrespective of the triggers, once victimisers have enjoyed notoriety, they thrive in a pack mentality. Greater complications arise in intercultural contexts because of cultural dissonance based on opposing core values, cultural postulates, social structures, role expectations, stereotypes leading to xenophobia, and hatred. Some traditional co-cultures refuse to sanction unions outside of their religious philosophies and are less likely to accept other than heterosexuals as equals. This is but the tip of the iceberg.

Our traditional family and core values are meant to serve as a yardstick for human behaviour in the maintenance of our culture because they essentially shape our social norms. Human interactions have become increasingly complex. Is the maxim *liberty, equality, fraternity* losing its significance? What of ethical behaviour, cooperation, humanism, openness, and respect?

The online dating world is no stranger to bullying and intimidation, and it does not take long to become a victim of psychological games such as *Catfishing*. New tactics such as *Breadcrumbing*, *Ghosting*, *Benching*, *Catch and Release*, and *Slow Fade* (Cliff, 2017) are creative new terms added to our lexicon. And the list is growing. The *modus operandi* of the *Breadcrumber* is to leave a trail of breadcrumbs along the treacherous road to a meeting that never takes place. Also known as *Hansel and Gretelling*, this game is heartless and can last weeks or months; much worse than *Ghosting* that appears to be the predilection of youngsters and interstate suitors. *Ghosting* is perceived as less painful because there is closure as one is forced to move on, but *Breadcrumbing* leaves a window of opportunity and is more malicious and deceitful, as it perpetuates unhealthy communication (Sareen Nowakowski, 2017).

The risks of online dating are very real and only the intrepid should apply – pathological lying, scammers seeking financial exploitation, unsolicited electronic sexual aggression, disillusionment, and broken dreams and promises ... Why? Because they can. Deception and misrepresentation are prevalent, encouraging unprincipled acts by perpetrators that have no fear of detection. Distinguishing the little white lie, generally about one's veritable age, from blatant forms of deceit leading to fraudulent acts is not a simple matter. Everyone wants to be appealing in the dating world; this is not rocket science, but the instrumental motivations of daters provide interesting contrasts.

Erring on the side of precaution, Coco and many of her suitors refused to reveal their real age. Their *a priori* assumptions, in self-justification, for the perceived honourable lie, were that disclosing too much information online leads to identity fraud, an irrefutable element. Current photos proved to be a more acceptable option, except that men rarely subscribed to this idea, believing photos five to ten years prior and ten kilos lighter, to be a perfect representation of their persona. In addition, being placed in the wrong age bracket was counter-intuitive, many men declaring, 'I am tired of 78-year-old women hitting on me. And they are relentless. Let's face it, there are not too many women who look like Jane Fonda at 79' (Patron, 2018, p.61).

Many mature daters are hoping to assuage the loneliness and desperation they feel, attempting to balance their meagre retirement packages as longevity increases in tandem with government austerity measures. This situation affects the quality of life of both sexes as the discrepancy in life expectancy narrows between the genders.

I perceive the *Smorgasbord Effect*, a term I find appropriate in the context of Internet dating, as addictive, and the reflections cast by the online prospects are directly impacting on interpersonal relationships within society. This phenomenon offers the unique opportunity for two-dimensional cyber identity reconstruction of profiles with incongruous descriptions and mismatched photographs. Daters hold on for that perfect, elusive 'designer partner' that is carefully selected according to the parameters on dating sites. At what point does a discerning attitude turn into fastidiousness and judgment? Aspirational dating is already an established feature of online dating, a hopeful pre-emptive line suggesting, 'I am batting way above my average here, but ...' Delusions of grandeur give daters the impression that if they employ known tactics such as *Benching*, *Catch and Release*, or *Slow Fade*, their strategies are sure to succeed. With this callous attitude defining new modes of human interactions, many daters toy with the emotions of their prospects, imagining there is always a better one out there somewhere. The reality is, there is no room for complacency. To catch the best fish, individuals need to put their best face forward. First impressions count, but watch out as some women especially, are reputed to respond with caustic remarks if guys do not make an effort.

In the 2018 chronicle, *Benching* was perceived as an inconvenient by-product of online dating. Some profiles remain perennially posted on dating sites whilst members engage in this tactic. Like the common practice of placing sportspeople on the *bench* for multiple reasons, in online settings *Benching* is losing its stigma because the *Smorgasbord effect* requires a strategic measure of pragmatism in managing

potential suitors. Members are spoiled for choice, and the process inadvertently schools most daters in the art of game-playing. Reinstating profiles is a tedious process when budding relationships collapse, as they so often do. Chatting simultaneously with several people before moving forward with someone is therefore common, with the tacit proviso that one acts with integrity and full disclosure. Unfortunately, if the two-dimensional image fails to match the expectations of the hype online, members coldheartedly move on. The strategy becomes clearly unethical if daters concurrently play the field offline. Who would know? Online dating is no picnic ....

Hiding behind their computers, gamers will play for hours in their jungle. Other tricksters revel in other tactics. *Catch and Release* is not a cryptic concept. Just like game fishermen hunting for the marlin, tagging and recording their skilful exploit for posterity, and then releasing it back into the wild, this is a huge ego boost. However, disreputable subscribers go much further, they snare their prey, normally a gullible member, toy with their minds for a while, and then release them. *Slow Fade* is also not enigmatic, the game leaving emotional scars.

Selecting from a massive Buffet can sometimes make you lose your appetite or turn you into a cynic. Some female Boomers, especially, who cannot compete with the younger demographics, are obliged to retreat to traditional dating methods in despair, or resign themselves to loneliness. This is due to the predominantly male penchant for younger women as there are no physical, social or moral barriers to stop them. The male behaviour has forced female daters to focus on self-protection financially and emotionally. As equity disputes grow ever larger, at least some women are becoming savvier. There are also existing inequities relating to the ratio of male to female Internet daters. This is not categorical as statistics are not easily obtainable from dating agencies with an agenda. Daters also fiercely guard against total disclosure of their affairs online. The anonymity of Internet is, after all, one of the biggest attractions.

The dating site's parameters can be restructured at a whim. They are spoiled for choice. I would argue, this overzealous pickiness, inspired by unrealistic checklists, is compounded by the culture of instant sexual gratification, hastening changes in societal values and mores governing interpersonal and intimate relationships. When respect disappears, narcissism and selfishness flourish.

Why settle for the mediocre when you can indulge in an array of delicacies? Why contemplate a committed relationship when you have an abundance of willing candidates to play with? Meanwhile, children watch and learn to mimic adults. Are the discouraging traits of self-centeredness and avarice beaming from the online reflections

being inculcated into their psyche as acceptable behaviour? This sounds callous, and rightly so. It is a dismal scene that most members of society ignore. Most of us bury our head in the sand until sensational news reports shock us with brutal realities emerging from online dating.

Many males are confessing to a less honourable facet of their personality as they engage in the dating game. The practice is apparently bringing out a feature they reluctantly admit aptly stereotypes their gender. They increasingly claim women are playing their game.

Women are becoming fierce online. Some make the first move, providing phone numbers immediately. They hop into bed on the first or second date. Well, I'm a male. Am I going to say no? But you know what, if we don't meet their expectations, if we take too long, when they are satiated, they just leave ... Why are we shocked? We've always acted that way ... (Anonymous, 2017).

With attraction come the hype, the lies, the cheating, the dates, and predictable rejections. Whilst a distinct advantage of online dating concerns the relative safety, ease and guilt-free option of ending toxic encounters – as this reduces the potential for retaliation and physical aggression – Coco's narrative also exposed the downside, the negative impacts on self-esteem from rejection and being 'dumped' by SMS or on social media sites. Older daters who cannot compete with the tech-savvy fare the worst once more. The two-dimensional mirror in the context of online dating contrasts dramatically with traditional encounters where the eyes of suitors reflected a cornucopia of images interpreted through body language and non-verbal communication. Non-verbal cues are a more accurate gauge for detecting the truth. Clear advantages to terminating online encounters exist, but only if you have a conscience. Terminating a relationship by text messages is hardly conducive to fostering respect and friendship in the community.

Predictive cues that non-verbal communication affords formerly made it a little easier to move forward. Body language is a huge asset when gleaning first impressions during initial contact situations. Appearance, facial expressions, posture, gestures, touch and the most important, eye contact, are features that provide invaluable information on an individual's cultural, socioeconomic, and educational background. In conjunction with verbal exchange, these factors can influence the outcome of contact situations at first glance, all assessed instantaneously and subconsciously at times.

The significance of eye contact provides the key for successful assessment of a first encounter. This, amongst other rules governing the laws of attraction, are clearly lacking online. The magical power of eyes, such effective mirrors thanks to their unique reflexive qualities, is key to determining the next move. These incredible mirrors can unwittingly send ambiguous messages that one can only decipher with continued interaction, but two-dimensional images are frozen in time. The 2018 investigations revealed that due to constraints such as the absence of non-verbal communication online, many daters have become intransigent in their judgments of suitors because they feel they have been deceived. And the ending is swift. Next, next, and on it goes.

The specificity of choice is hugely significant in the context of online dating. Anecdotal reports from both genders suggest the phenomenon has encouraged infidelity where women now have a different agenda in the cheating game. Their motivation has changed dramatically according to new findings. As many couples begin to weigh up potential financial losses and the breakup of the family unit with the freedom to engage in cheating using online sites, Internet dating must certainly bear some responsibility for increasing rates of infidelity. Again, this is currently changing the face of society (Hartley, in Brooks, 2011).

Never in history has it been so easy to cheat whilst maintaining the status quo, as inconspicuousness online guarantees an endless supply of allegedly willing candidates; again, this is no longer gender-specific (Brooks, 2001; Dogson, 2017; Patron, 2018; Walker, 2018).

Weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of Internet dating, disappointingly, the pervasive lying, attempted financial and romantic exploitation, and risk of aggression from scammers appear to trump the positive benefits (See also Vanderweerd, Myers, Coulter, Yalcin, & Corvin, 2016).

I shall now examine the impacts that intercultural mirrors had on Coco's psyche in the context of her online journey.

### **3.1 Coco's story**

Coco's investigations into the dynamic changes in societal norms and values were a direct consequence of the impacts the online projections had on her cultural identity. Her online search for love began after four years alone. The nefarious practices inherent in online dating emerged quickly. The cryptic images emanating from the dating scene shocked her into reality as she witnessed the propensity for online games and fraudulent activity. The

reprehensible behaviours prompted her to create awareness of the dangers lurking behind allegedly attractive profiles of the men she encountered online. She had not quite expected the complexities of intercultural interactions on various sites to provoke dynamic changes in her identity but as a susceptible subscriber, the shame of falling for the common online tricks caused much anxiety. Thus, *Coco through the looking glass* was created.

As Coco delved deeper, she was forced to also acknowledge increasing reports of the changing perception of women's activities online. Were female members really beginning to rival the males in online games and cheating? Whilst the sources of these disturbing revelations were credible, there is no concrete evidence to support assertions of female offenders in online dating – at least, not yet...

Coco has never identified as entirely Australian, despite her passport. The gratitude and pride she feels as an Australian citizen has not moderated the belief that she does not fit into the Australian context; not in Melbourne where she grew up, and even less in her current place of residence on the Gold Coast. Feeling like a fish out of water is not exactly conducive to successful relationships. Her perpetual identity crisis dates back to the 60s in Melbourne. Cultural attitudes of the times were such that successful assimilation into the hegemonic Anglo-Saxon culture was contingent on ethnicity, skin-colour, linguistic proficiency, and cultural competence. Conditions placed upon Coco were to haunt her for most of her adult life. The parallels in the narratives concerning the trajectory of her life and career with that cohort of migrants are revelatory.

Coco's former relationships had prepared her for the customary dissention based on cultural distinctions that served to distance her from her partners. Whilst she had rejected the identity of *Victim*, she was still a work in progress. Suffice to say, she was ill-prepared for the emotional online roller-coaster ride. Coco is a self-professed contradiction – invincible, yet most vulnerable.

### **3.2 The challenges of intercultural relationships**

The intricacies of interracial partnerships constitute a growing body of research as new issues emerge on couples from vastly disparate cultures contemplating a union. Economic globalisation and academic mobility have thrown cultures together, and at least in some countries, barriers are being dismantled as intercultural awareness, tolerance and empathy begin to positively influence social change. However, where ethnocentricity and intolerance persist, unresolved

issues can be responsible for the failure of many partnerships (See also Patron & Holden, 2015). The impacts of ascribed identities from one partner onto the cultural other are significant. Based on a multitude of factors from skin colour to creed, this intangible ascription is known to influence the way their behaviour and judgments are perceived (Bennett, 2013). The levels of sensitivity to these ascriptions can consequently provoke a dynamic reconstruction of identity.

Intimate relationships are challenging at the best of times, despite culturally similar backgrounds, but in intercultural unions, the stakes are heightened exponentially as culture-related stressors come into play. This is especially contentious when diametrically opposed cultures unite. Intercultural relationships certainly add more spice to life, but research confirms the predominance of cultural dissonance based on incompatible beliefs, contrastive worldviews and core values, lifestyle and parenting/disciplinary styles, communication issues exacerbated by linguistic difficulties, and lack of respect and support from extended family, to name but a few (Cihlář, 2014; Zhang, 2016).

Religion, especially, is predictably a massive hurdle to negotiate. These factors are evidently not exclusive of existing psychological issues, personality traits, behavioural problems, and sexual orientation, etc. Some culture couples are also not exempt from many of these characteristics that culminate in separation and divorce statistics, as communication and compromise are not always successful. Based on this scenario, the 2018 exploration into online dating practices has brought polemic intercultural issues impacting on modern societies into the limelight.

### **3.3 Those fickle mirrors**

Some of the images emanating from the mirrors of Coco's four former relationships, with variations in age demographics and length of time, have left their emotional scars. Each was an intercultural mix with its own challenges that reinforced negative sentiments of inferiority and inequality. The dynamic remodelling of her identity within the confines of each partnership had induced her to make changes of a physiological and behavioural nature to meet the exigencies of the males in question. Some were not so subtle. Altering core values was strictly off limits. Their controlling behaviour had led her to understand that love and marriage were conditional on the way she presented herself, the activities she enjoyed, even her friendship networks, some sadly losing their closeness.

The deliberate acts of some partners who progressively engineered this distancing strategy caused a great deal of pain, frustration, bitterness and consternation, but Coco chose to stay. Shades of the Battered Wife Syndrome? She was desperate to fit in, be accepted. Conforming to the ideals of her partners was necessary for the relationships to work. Why did she keep choosing Alpha personalities whose autocratic tendencies made her cringe? Yet she remained loyal, prolonging the misery out of fear, always fear of being alone with children who needed stability.

Fear and guilt are such wasted emotions, but they are powerful. The underlying feelings of insufficiency contributed to decreasing levels of self-esteem until Coco found the courage to end the relationships. The discord and cultural disagreement that defined those interactions were uncannily reminiscent of the struggles emanating from her childhood traumas. Coco's feisty disposition failed to reverse the negative images those intercultural mirrors continually sent her. She remained on the defensive when confrontations turned into emotional and psychological abuse, but to no avail. The same paradigm was reproduced time and time again.

In partnerships where disharmony was primarily focused on cultural distinctions, rather than rapprochement based on similarities, being the butt of racial jokes took its toll on the relationship. Targeted remarks employed to highlight the male supremacy of the White, European heritage of 'real' Australians caused undue pain for Coco as it reinforced her perennial identity crisis. Whilst this was fortunately not an overarching feature of all past relationships, the issue never failed to underpin her feelings of inferiority.

When Coco acknowledged the powerful mirror images projected through the intervention of her family and closest friends, she conceded that some partners may have indeed been in denial, their behaviour dissimulating their own inferiority complex. This was the epiphany that triggered positive changes to her identity. Perceiving the situation in a new light, Coco had ended each relationship from a position of strength. Rebuilding her self-esteem was, however, a laborious process.

Coco's interpersonal experiences shed light on a conclusive factor explaining the breakdown of two partnerships. The following remark contextualises but one incidence in the middle of a promising relationship. Her partner's sister-in-law uttered words that cut to the core of Coco's being, 'Coco, I think the world of you. Please don't let this family's WASP (White Australian Anglo-Saxon) mentality derail your plans for marriage'. The devastating impact of this comment brought in its wake the statutory feelings of not being good enough to officially enter this eminent Australian family. The husband worked in

the highest echelons of his profession. Coco would never be truly Australian as another partner took great pains to demonstrate.

‘I am so proud of you. The little Mouse has turned into a Tigress’. The prophetic words from her dearest German friend living in Europe proved ineffective in altering Coco’s state of mind in that instance. The transformative words had initially fortified her soul when she had ended her marriage, the positive reinforcement instrumental in remodelling her identity. She had subsequently found the courage and self-confidence to forge a new career for herself – strong, resilient, and independent as a single mother. Her friend reiterated this comment at regular intervals, but Coco certainly did not feel like a tiger at this low point in her life. This mantra was, however, never far from her mind, and she took comfort from those words as she hopped on yet another roller-coaster, refusing to allow anyone else to decimate her self-esteem.

The intercultural mirrors Coco faced in previous relationships had predictably conjured unflattering and painful self-images that confirmed her identity crisis and diminished self-worth. Coco had effectively integrated the negative images to her psyche, creating a composite vision of herself through the eyes of her culturally different partners. The dissolution of former relationships was evidently not solely based on cultural discord as significant personality and behavioural factors were also at play.

### **3.4 Coco’s emotional roller-coaster**

Coco is easily distinguishable as a naturalised Australian because of her fluency in English, her tertiary education, and her use of Australian vernacular, but this is where the similarities end. During her previous relationships, she identified recurring issues that made the success of the unions challenging, especially when children, parenting styles and discipline were the focus of regular disputes. The *Brady Bunch*<sup>3</sup> configuration, or variations of blended families, feature prominently in subsequent mature-aged unions.

After doing her due diligence into the online dating world – from personal, psychological, financial and health risks, to the inherent stigma – Coco had jumped into the deep end, online dating finally a mainstream social practice. Casting her baggage overboard, she believed she might find her Mr Right with a carefully structured profile. Her emotional roller-coaster ride lasted seven months. She had become schooled in online dating under the guidance of her children, whose pastoral care of their mother was instrumental in her recovery. The visceral bonds with her BFFs (Best Friends Forever) were indestructible. They rescued her when the roller-coaster dived from

vertiginous heights of joy to the depths of despondency. They offered soothing words of advice with a bottle of *Bubbly* and tubs of ice cream with two spoons, listened attentively to her stories, and suggested strategies that proved immeasurable in her emerging unscathed from the online experience.

The process was challenging, and the gamesters and scammers tested her patience, but the intercultural mirrors of the Gentlemen Coco met online assisted in the positive reconstruction of her identity. The carefully selected guys she met on various dates succeeded in restoring her diminished self-respect as she reached a stage of self-acceptance for the first time in her life. Online dating for Coco was indisputably a panacea to loneliness. The disclaimer is evidently that her personal experience is not a prescriptive outcome for all online daters as the metaphorical two-way street is always present. A multitude of predictor variables determine the kind of experiences an individual can have online.

Coco learned that 'forever' did not exist, but she still yearned to share her life with someone special. The repeated interactions with her online Beaux had led to self-understanding, confirming the thesis proposed in this book. She remained a resilient, poised, confident professional thanks to her personal growth. Coco felt confident that she could hop on and off her online roller-coaster if she kept a tight rein on her heart, capable of navigating the online dating journey without repeating the same mistakes.

### **3.5 Coco's Mr Right?**

Coco's delight at having found her Mr Right proved premature. Paradoxically, they had met offline at the end of her journey. The complimentary reflections from those vibrant green eyes of the Australian Gentleman had, alas, proven unreliably enticing, confirming that 'forever' did not exist. Despite their best efforts, the relationship had only lasted three months. Plagued by distance, disagreements and disillusion surfaced early in the piece. Cultural distinctions and utterly opposing personality traits played a huge role in dismantling the budding relationship. Opposites attract, but in this case, the retired introvert and the exuberant Coco were not likely to last the distance.

Two individuals firmly set in their ways represent a confronting issue affecting most partnerships among the Boomer generations. Compromise proved increasingly difficult to achieve. The discrepancy in importance of family values was the leitmotif that had contributed to the demise of each intercultural partnership, and this budding

relationship suffered the same fate. The cultural stressors had had a clear impact.

Her partner's adult children had been reared very differently from Coco's, whose traditional close ties and family values of caring and nurturing were of great comfort to her. His children cared less that he had found a new Lady, were not interested in meeting Coco, let alone getting to know her family. Predictable discord based on contrastive behaviours caused a fracture that proved irreparable. Coco moved on, but a tenuous friendship remains. Endings had proved difficult before, but this was less painful, a distinct marker of her personal growth. In this case, Coco did not allow the negative mirror images to destroy her self-worth. She remained stoic.

The amicable ending had taught her additional lessons. Coco was highly discerning in her choice of men. She instantly rejected the negativity projected from the nasty elements she found online, instead readjusting her self-image based only on positive feedback. Some of Coco's suitors inadvertently induced her to recalibrate her physiological image, her attitudes, and her behaviours, but once more, only superficially. Clear limitations prevailed, as changes to her core values and ethical behaviour were never negotiable. She remains steadfast on this stance.

Coco is clearly dependent on others' perceptions of her, once more – a close fit with the philosophical themes of this book. This is a persistent issue that threatens to derail any progress she has made thus far, to break free from other people's opinions of her. It is an ongoing internal battle. Coco's road to complete recovery is fragile because it only takes one discriminatory or racist remark to catapult her back to the days where she endured bullying and vitriolic abuse from ignorant children and adults. Only a few of Coco's European friends have managed to loosen the shackles of those traumatic times.

### **3.6 Back into the fray**

Coco retreated to the comfort of her workaholic status after this disheartening breakup, but she remained self-assured. When she confidently threw herself back into the maelstrom of Internet dating after eight months navel-gazing, she was caught unawares. Armed with a new profile, she tightened the parameters. No games, just additional security measures. She was ready to continue her search for Mr Right.

Suffice to say, the new venture into online dating brought unsettling surprises and disturbing emotional reactions. *GHOSTED!* Twice. Not again! That was quick. This common tactic of terminating all communication with a prospect at a moment's notice, profiles,

conversations, photos, always baffled Coco. Was her first contact a Nigerian scammer marauding as an American from Los Angeles with a beautiful daughter he provided in an additional photo to convince her? The fraudster was a foreigner, clearly visible through the cutting and pasting of snippets of information from other profiles intertwined with poor syntax. Coco was proficient now in the art of detecting fraudsters and *Catfishers* online. Those snippets of authentic information embedded throughout the discourse provide the clues that help identify perpetrators. However, there are no guarantees that one will not get caught. Predators are inveterate liars and they are ruthless.

The steep learning curve over the seven-month emotional journey the previous year had prepared Coco well, but her self-assurance was shaken. Was she still in control? Was the Tigress taking on the world of online dating again or transforming back into the intimidated little Mouse? Her intuition made her acutely aware of the denizens of cyberspace. Surprisingly, this was not even the world of ghouls and trolls that lurked mostly on the Dark Web. Was this tantamount to cynicism? Always circumspect, Coco avoided disclosing too much information online, but this was ridiculous.

Dusting herself off, Coco continued to peruse the selection of eligible males. Unbelievable! The familiar faces beamed back at her, ready to pounce, all over again! 'Haven't seen you for a while Coco?' Where were the new fish? Same pond, same fish ... Ever the hopeful romantic, she had held a smidgen of hope that the attractive and well-constructed profiles she selected might be authentic. *Catfishers* and gamesters are like the mythical *Lernaean Hydra*; cut one head off and two more resurface in an alternate location, sometimes on the same day. They are brazen, and the games can go on for months.

The dating agency had pre-empted Coco's denouncement of the perpetrator by suspending the member. Some dating sites, conscious of acute criticism for their lack of authenticity, were employing tighter controls on users, and their vigilance had paid off – two profiles removed in seven days, not bad. Coco again considered moonlighting as a masked heroine, to detect *Catfishers*. *Big Brother*<sup>4</sup> was hovering above, scrutinising exchanges. It was a necessary evil, when it worked. Her at times torturous journey had not been futile. Was this the harbinger of things to come if Coco were to trust the dating sites in her renewed search for the 'One'? Finding her Soulmate was no longer a priority. Did he really exist? And the search continued in tandem with her mounting cynicism. No way! Not three potential scammers in three weeks. Coco was disheartened. Should she give up? Again?

Coco considered searching for a culturally-similar 'Other' this time, believing this strategy would generate better chances of a lasting and

committed relationship, but eligible males responding to her search criteria were limited. Her online prospects had been predominantly an intercultural mix of Australian or British. The Italian Beaux were the closest she had come to males matching her own culture. They were mostly naturalised Australians like her, but these guys of apparently similar worldviews demonstrated cultural insularity that contrasted dramatically with Coco's. Where was the empathy and tolerance for the refugees and immigrants who fled from repression, wars, and persecution? Intercultural inclusivity was not part of their agenda. They endorsed a pervasively disturbing trend in European sentiment towards the interminable influx of immigrants. This militant Italian group seemed obsessed with political, nationalistic rhetoric disseminated on the airwaves of Italian news and multi-media sites daily. And this generally resulted in Coco distancing herself.

Interstate phone conversations that revolved around politics for an hour left little time for romantic pursuits, despite one cheeky Cub teasing her, 'Well, you don't like a bit of *tutti frutti*?' (Patron, 2018, p.104), as she was not interested in a fling. Coco had initially enjoyed the sparring, keen to show that she was not a nun. Well, at least she was practising her Italian! So, she moved on. Next! Furthermore, as the Italian contingent was mostly from Victoria and South Australia, the tyranny of distance was an additional hurdle.

One thing was certain. The familiar online tactics were resurfacing faster than the previous year. That did not augur well for this new venture. *Hansel and Gretel revisited?* Without a doubt! This time, however, Coco was not interested in setting a honey trap for a scammer or another *Breadcrumber*, 'Well, well! Young Hansel. So, we meet again. Or not! What? No more breadcrumbs?' (Patron, 2018, p.143). Coco's calculated quip when Hansel had attempted to deceive her for the second time on another site had resulted in his swift retreat, but words only brought a small degree of satisfaction. The nerve of this man (or woman, who knew?) who continued the sick games online until caught, if ever. The unabashed Hansel had not even bothered to change his profile – same photos, same information. Such are the unrealistic reflections emerging from the intercultural mirrors in the context of the *Online Hunger Games*.

Most members of society remain blissfully unaware of the distressing images bouncing off Internet dating sites and other social media outlets. Despicable behaviours go unnoticed until an individual is the target of abuse, on or offline. Sensational news reports come and go and the incidents are relegated to the back of people's minds. Why dwell on negativity when we are bombarded by horror stories on a daily basis.

#### 4. Shifting social mores

Not unexpectedly, some unscrupulous dating sites are specifically engineered to prey on the vulnerabilities of Mature Daters and migrant groups. Many members are technologically challenged. They lack the skills to detect fraudulent and predatory behaviours that are so prevalent online. They are flailing in cyberspace as they search for a partner, blindly trusting technologically-generated platforms that continue to lure them into a web of lies and deceit. The allure of online dating is irresistible for most users, and like most forms of addiction, extricating oneself is no easy feat.

The online projections have dual effects, firstly, provoking negative social implications for the creators of the dating mediums that thrive on avarice and unprincipled behaviour; and secondly, generating consequences for the hopeless romantics who are increasingly enticed to the sites searching for love and companionship. This is challenging for the 50+ cohort and older, as salient issues explored in *Coco through the looking glass* (Patron, 2018) have revealed. Confronted by alarming divorce rates with potential impoverishment in some socioeconomic circles, the prospects of many Baby Boomers look bleak.

This phenomenon is global. Their fear is all too real when compounded by the unconscionable tactics that are employed online to catch the unsuspecting, naïve dater. Many older daters remain unaware that expert gamesters, predators, and contemptible individuals maraud as upstanding members of the community searching for love, companionship or sex. Many Boomers have no choice but to throw themselves into the self-indulgent playground of younger cohorts because they have acknowledged the futility of searching for love the old-fashioned way, especially women as they reach 50+ and above. The sense of urgency to secure a relationship is well-established.

The 2018 chronicle is enriched with anecdotes volunteered by friends and online contacts, eager to share their stories for the same reasons as Coco. The revelations are somewhat unsettling. The issues identified at grass roots level are by no means original, but they have certainly become entrenched in our modern societies. They represent new challenges for different cohorts.

Contemptible behaviour begins in childhood, in the bosom of the family, and is enacted in school yards and online. The complexities of the issue are inextricably tied to the deep structures of culture and socialisation. Through childhood lessons inculcated in the institutions of the family, the state (community), and worldview (religion), individuals learn about the functions of their culture; about

cooperation, identity, core values and behaviours appropriate to that culture. Globalisation has redefined families throughout the world and has been recognised as the critical driving force that is fundamentally restructuring the social order globally (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, Roy, 2017). The Internet, perceived as both a blessing and a curse, is provoking a raft of changes in each of the deep structures of our society. It is little wonder, then, that online dating has opened a *Pandora's Box*, with its reflexive images.

As traditional core values are being eroded, the increase in bullying in our schools is gaining significant attention in Australia. Is the tyrannical dominance over innocent victims transmuting into despicable tactics employed online, leading to cyberstalking, verbal and physical abuse? The idea is not far-fetched if we consider the over-proliferation of fraudulent tactics and games that can turn the dating world into a playground from hell for novices. There are significant risks as perpetrators are allegedly no longer predominantly males.

A multitude of factors help explain what induces perverted individuals and narcissists with dubious personality traits to indulge in indefensible activities online. Loneliness is at the root of many problems. Amongst other factors, low self-esteem, guilt, self-loathing, crumbling relationships, lack of popularity, escapism, dissatisfaction on a myriad of personal levels, insecurities based on sexual performance and orientation all constitute factors that contribute to *Catfishing* and all its derivatives (The Conversation, 2018). Coincidentally, Coco's narrative reveals that these same features help explain why human beings react in unexpected ways when lured by false profiles online.

When else in history has such a window of opportunity been on offer? The impacts of quick dissolutions of marriages on Boomer and older generations are arguably behind some of the serious societal changes that are taking place, increasingly visible through the practices of online dating. The rules of dating and courtship have changed when compared to the days of old, when casual meetings in bars and social circles were congenial and random, and gauging the genuine intentions of a suitor was not orchestrated through complex technological tools such as algorithms.

## 5. Conclusion

*Coco through the looking glass* (2018) was intended to inspire individuals who suffer from diminished self-esteem and a lack of self-acceptance, arising from complex intercultural contact situations, to let go of fear and to allow personal growth to change their lives.

Singles who have encountered deep-seated effects of bullying, overwhelming loneliness, and who have endured perennial psychological and emotional abuse in intimate relationships, can learn that perhaps online dating might hold the key to greater self-understanding and self-acceptance. Coco's chronicle offers no guarantees that the process will culminate in a positive, uplifting experience; but chances are, a positive attitude of a glass half-full will assist in changing their mindset.

Discussions based on conceptual psychological and philosophical deliberations underscore the argument that the intercultural mirrors in the context of online dating project quixotic reflections that are provoking dynamic changes to individual cultural identity, as well as to traditional societal norms.

The Patron (2018) chronicle has identified deep-seated issues within society that are addressed in this chapter. Lies and deception dictate the outcome of the dating game. Inventive online tactics such as *Catfishing*, and *Breadcrumbing* now form part of English lexicon. Changing social norms are predicted to impact even established relationships from all demographics. It appears our modern society is becoming ethically bankrupt.

From an intercultural lens, the challenges and rewards the intrepid Coco experiences along her journey of self-discovery provide fascinating insights into the practices of mature daters as they compete with younger adherents in this self-indulgent playground. Those who are unprepared for the nefarious practices of Internet dating need to remain circumspect and learn how to strategically navigate the *mind field* of online dating. If they succeed, significant rewards await them as the journey can prove to be character-building, uplifting and exciting. If they do not, the journey is potentially despair-inducing. Forewarned is forearmed, and Coco's journey is an awareness-raising exercise for members of most demographics.

## **Notes**

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1. For a more complete development of the ideas discussed in this chap readers are directed to Marie-Claire Patron's (2018) publication, *Coco through the looking glass*. Balboa Press. A Division of Hay House. Bloomington, IN. USA.

<sup>2</sup> Nicknames have been devised for each generation since the 20th century, with variations according to the academic, author or journalist proposing them. These popular names are generally based on certain characteristics of the groups.

<sup>3</sup> *The Brady Bunch* was a 1969 popular American sitcom around a large blended family – uniting the father’s three boys and the mother’s three girls.

4. *Big Brother* – originally a Dutch reality television competition that was franchised internationally. The figurative meaning suggests perennial surveillance by individuals or organisations.

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