

All Aboard the Mateship

‘Mateship should be understood as a discourse; inclusive and exclusive mateship are related but distinct discourses, which differ on the basis of who is empowered by each’¹. An understanding of both aspects of the term is required in the analysis of its effect, with the masculinist aspect contradicting the traditional egalitarian understanding. Reardon identifies the two discourses – exclusive and inclusive – as ‘two separate major discursive forms of mateship’². Inglis Moore similarly recognises the contradicting aspects of the term in his research, though his explanation fails to recognise females, using the terms inclusive and exclusive to differentiate two expressions of men’s mateship in ‘social’ and ‘environmental’ contexts³. The approach undertaken in this study considered these differing understandings and, as a result, investigates the notion that mateship is a single discourse that embodies two divergent meanings that are applied depending on the environment in which it’s developed. ‘Inclusive’ mateship is the traditionally understood and accepted meaning, in theory allowing inclusion of all aspects of society. This is the ideological form of mateship seen throughout Australian literature, romanticising Australian mateship formed in male dominated environments in which people must band together against a common enemy, for example harsh bush conditions, combatants in war or in the face of natural disaster. Although on the surface this form is inclusive, its traditional origins are in exclusively male environments, it has therefore created a divisive concept from which feminine and subordinated masculinities are omitted. My questionnaire findings indicate that this divisive concept of mateship is losing influence, with 73.3% of 101⁴ respondents disagreeing with the statement “But- and there is no sense denying it – Australian mateship is mainly for men. It was – and is – difficult to be mates with a woman”⁵. This shows an inclusive understanding of mateship in contemporary Australian society on the micro level. The response to this question was consistent across gender lines and across nationalities, however there is a clear distinction in responses between under 25s (60% disagree) and over 25s (82% disagree)⁶. This suggests that the experience of youth may be more gender segregated than that of adults, creating different understandings of social norms and expectations that may be more based on

¹ Reardon, J (2003). *The development of the discourses of mateship in Australia with special reference to the period 1885-1925*. PhD thesis, James Cook University

² Ibid

³ Inglis Moore, T (1971). *Social Patterns in Australian Literature*. Australia: University of California Press.

⁴ See Appendix A for Questionnaire

⁵ Knightly, P (2001). *Australia: A Biography of a Nation*. Australia: Random House. p36.

⁶ See Appendix A for Questionnaire

stereotypes and the absence of lived experience, thus suggesting an environmental influence. This explanation for the age discrepancy is based on a subjective judgement of differences between cohorts but is based on the most apparent distinguishing factor between those groups. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to investigate the exclusionary societal effect of the application of mateship as a national characteristic.