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**The development of the discourses of mateship in Australia  
with special reference to the period 1885-1925.**

Thesis submitted by

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in July 2003

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the school of Humanities  
James Cook University

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## Abstract

Mateship is widely considered to be an Australian convention that embodies egalitarianism in Australian culture. It is commonly thought of as a unitive convention that is most obvious in times of adversity. Yet while many Australians describe mateship thus, others call it a men's creed. These two opposing descriptions – egalitarian and masculinist – are difficult to reconcile, and give mateship a paradoxical nature that is difficult to explain. Most studies of mateship do not attempt to explain this paradox, and merely reproduce the assumption that while mateship is a significant Australian convention, it is exclusive to men. This study differs from others in that here, mateship is defined as a discourse that has two major discursive forms: one inclusive and representative of the egalitarian component of mateship; and one exclusive and representative of the masculinist component of mateship. These discourses are traced to their origins in the period 1788-1850 as a re-reading of “the label of difference” that held the convict population subordinated to the upper class. The discourses of mateship evolved as the means of self-help that supported people in their quest to reverse the subjection by “difference” and thereby to survive and prosper. It is argued that exclusive mateship gained its ascendancy over inclusive mateship during the nineteenth century when mateship became a surrogate religion for many Australians. The mateship discourse melded with Christianity, and when it did, it caused mateship to be an inclusive discourse with a masculinist nature in the same way that Christianity is inclusive, though women are subordinated to males through its central masculine god. Exclusive mateship is shown to have consolidated its dominance over inclusive mateship during the period 1885-1925 with the assistance of the men's press, particularly The Bulletin under the editorial leadership of J. F. Archibald. Mateship, as it is commonly understood, is shown to be divided in itself, and while inclusive mateship is unitive, exclusive mateship is divisive. Exclusive mateship's divisiveness causes social problems, and its impact upon the lives of women is explored. It is argued that exclusive mateship is maintained in its dominant cultural position by reading practices which, over the years, have become dominant, making mateship appear to be a convention that is important to Australianness, but nonetheless restricted to men.

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## STATEMENT OF SOURCES

### DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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