

Modern Dating Rituals in Australia, 1940-1970

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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Laura Ticehurst

Abstract

This research maps out a history of romantic rituals in Australia from 1940 to 1970. In doing so, it analyses changing conventions as modern forms of ‘dating’ replaced ‘calling’ throughout Australian society, bringing romantic behaviour into the public eye. It also investigates the construction of these conventions, and situates them clearly in a social, political and economic context. There is a particular focus on the tension between the regulation of dating behaviour as a precursor to marriage and subversion of these norms and expectations, and how these varied among different groups of Australians. Dating regulations were used as a form of attempted containment by various authorities, including governments, churches, the medical establishment, and legal institutions. However, dating could also be experienced as an act of escape and pleasure: as a site of resistance (in a Foucauldian sense) to seemingly inescapable discursive power. For some, this rebellion was a necessity as much as a choice, as many individuals were explicitly excluded from the accepted norms of dating behaviour. Gay men and lesbian women were not able to marry or publicly date their partners, and the social and romantic lives of Aboriginal Australians were subject to surveillance and intervention by state and federal governments. For European migrants to Australia in the post-war period, romance and marriage were inextricably tied up in the act of migration and were taken very seriously. This work explores the discourse around dating as it varied due to gender, age, sexuality, and race, represented through these groups’ own experiences of, and often resistance to, the rituals of dating in Australia in the mid-twentieth century.

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I wrote this thesis on the land of the Awabakal people, where sovereignty has never been ceded. I pay my respects to Elders past and present.

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