

University of New England

# Sex & Gender

An archaeological analysis of rock art of the northwest Kimberley

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## Abstract

The study of rock art throughout the world has recently taken a retrospective view of the theoretical approaches traditionally adopted in its analysis and reporting. This has been triggered principally by feminist arguments that much of the ethnographical and anthropological scholarship was largely male centric. Reviewing existing data generated by both male and female researchers revealed that a Eurocentric and androcentric reporting was endemic and this stimulated new approaches. The cry was for 'women to be placed back in the picture' and the pendulum swing was impressive. Feminist advocates had their day with 'gender' taking front of stage. This was a healthy reaction to its absence and has resulted in analysis of feminist issues been absorbed into recent mainstream archaeological research. However, it is now time for a more considered approach to be taken where the male, female and other are considered and are given equivalent attention.

My recording of rock art sites focused on the Aboriginal lands of the far northwest section of the Kimberley in Western Australia. Analysis was designed firstly to confirm the relative sequence developed by Walsh and to discover the gendered roles performed by the people living in this area over time. The analysis was focused on identifying the primary sexing keys to identify male/female/unsexed ratios and to isolate secondary keys that are gender specific. The secondary keys chosen for testing were those identified as explicitly masculine or feminine on sexed figures and included headdress type, weapon association and accoutrements type/level. These iconographic keys are considered to be features chosen by the culture to be worn or used by male, female or other in the culture at a particular time. Iconography is used throughout the world as signage, especially in non-literate cultures; it informs society and is familiar to the participants of that society.

Superimposition analysis confirmed the relative stylistic sequence established by Walsh as accurate and analysis of the stylistic periods showed the culture was not static.

Repetition of motifs specific to style and period was a dominant structural occurrence with motifs repeated across the study region, within rock art complexes and isolated shelters. Results showed that particular iconographic keys were used in combination or in isolation to convey the sex of an individual and at times the gendered role that was performed by them. The theoretical approach taken in this thesis has provided a means to discover the middle ground for sexing and assigning gender to anthropomorphic motifs through iconography.

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I also certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all other sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



17/12/14

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Signature of Candidate

Date

#### ENDORSEMENT



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Signature of Supervisor

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