Influences of Worldviews, Values and Mythologies in Australian Rural Landscapes: Considering Culture, Change, and Transition

Peta Louise Dzidic

This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University of Technology

October 2009
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other persons except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Signature:....................................

Date:..........................................
Acknowledgements

A very big thank you to all of the lovely peeps that have supported me in the process of completing ‘the beast’.

First and foremost, a huge thank you goes to my Mum and Dar. This would not have been possible without your unconditional support and love. Mum, thank you for all of the decisions you made regarding my education, and for the lessons and skills that you have taught me. Thanks also for reading it end to end, and for liking it, that means a great deal to me.

Dale, thank you for loving me unconditionally and for telling me that everything is going to be alright – turned out you were right. Thanks love.

To Dales family, the Langs and the Skippers, thank you for your support and interest in my work. Mr Lang, it has been a joy talking to you about all things agricultural.

My Girls (and yes, the boys too!), you know who you all are, the lovely peeps in my life that are tolerant enough to not expect to see me for months on end, and be as overjoyed as I am when the time comes that we do see each other, and we can carry on from when we left off. I cannot wait to start living my life ‘normally’ with all of you. A special mention to Ewin, thank you for being such a supportive neighbour and friend.

Thanks to my colleagues who provided me with a sanctuary of comedic relief and intellectual stimulation. I really appreciate your support, thank you.

Many thanks to Brian Bishop, Geoff Syme and Jeff Camkin for their supervision. Geoff it was a conversation back with you in 2004, Honours year, that sparked an interest in this area for me. And to Jeff, thanks for fostering my interest in the North of Australia. Here I also wish to acknowledge the financial and post graduate support of the CRC for Irrigation Futures and the Northern Australian Irrigation Futures Project. Thanks also to the School of Psychology and Speech Pathology at Curtin University, similarly for financial and post-graduate support. It has been a privilege to have been a student of the school, thank you.

Brian, you probably were not quite aware what you were getting yourself into when you took on the role as my supervisor! Thanks for your patience and faith in me. I will always be grateful for your ability to reflect back what I am saying so that it makes sense. Working with you made what could have been a very isolating experience, an enjoyable one. Thanks Brian.

And of course, thank you to all who participated in this process. You welcomed me into your homes and workplaces, shared with me and discovered with me. Without
your willingness and trust there would be no thesis. I am indebted to your generosity and honesty.
Dedication

Dedicated to Mum and Dar and to my Nanny, who told me not to do anything radical until after I get my degree. I appreciate your words of wisdom Nanny, and I have no regrets.
Abstract

Rural Australia is facing the apparent need for change. Commentators have pointed to factors such as increased input prices, commodity pressures and climate change as potential threats to rural ways of life. It is now being recognised that these issues are not just economic or biophysical but are also social in nature, requiring input from the social sciences including psychology. To understand how rural communities contend with such challenges, it is necessary to attempt to understand the nature of rural community in Australia. This research aims to consider the role that worldview, values, mythologies and culture play in rural change and transformation of rural communities. The second aim is to critically consider the social research process. The research is based on grounded contextualism and involved working with two communities in Western Australia (WA) the dryland farming regions of the Wheatbelt and the irrigation community of Kununurra. Qualitative interviews were conducted (87 in all) and an analytic method called Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) was adapted to provide information at a number of ecological levels. As part of this analysis a number of psychological dynamics were identified. Psychological paradoxes were observed in the communities. The most significant included the paradox of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft and the paradox of environmental sustainability. The first of these paradoxes creates tensions for rural communities as there is ‘stuckness’ or inability to resolve paradoxes due to the different ways in which city dwellers identify issues compared to rural communities. The second paradox of environmental sustainability refers to the rhetoric of sustainability being adopted whilst simultaneously the environment is degraded. This is then considered in terms of ramifications for social transformation as it relates to the Third Position (Newbrough, 1995).
# Table of Contents

## Contents

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... ii  
Dedication ................................................................................................................... iv  
Abstract ........................................................................................................................v  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ vi  
List of Tables ................................................................................................................. ix  
List of Figures ............................................................................................................... x  
List of Acronyms ......................................................................................................... xi  

Part One Underpinnings and Direction ..................................................................... 1  
Prologue ....................................................................................................................... 2  

Chapter One ............................................................................................................... 13  
1. Conceptualising the Countryside ................................................................. 13  
   1.1. Phases of Land Management ................................................................. 13  
      1.1.1. Indigenous Land Management – Fire Stick Farming ............ 13  
      1.1.2. Colonialist Productionist Phase .................................................. 15  
      1.1.3. Neo-Liberalism ........................................................................... 21  
   1.2. Ramifications .............................................................................................. 28  
      1.2.1. Tönnies Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft .................................... 29  
      1.2.2. Empowerment ............................................................................... 30  
      1.2.3. Participation in Natural Resource Management .................... 32  
      1.2.4. Social Change .............................................................................. 33  
   1.3. Interpretation ............................................................................................. 35  
      1.3.1. Paradox ........................................................................................ 35  
      1.3.2. Deficit Model ............................................................................... 37  

Chapter Two .............................................................................................................. 40  
2. Research Paradigm .............................................................................................. 40  
   2.1. Foundational Underpinnings ................................................................. 40  
      2.1.1. Grounded Theory ......................................................................... 40  
      2.1.2. Post Modernism ........................................................................... 41  
      2.1.3. Contextualism .............................................................................. 45  
   2.2. Deconstruction Tool: Causal Layered Analysis ...................................... 47  
      2.2.1. The Case for a ‘New’ Deconstruction Framework .................. 47  
      2.2.2. The Layers .................................................................................... 49  
      2.2.3. Adoption of Causal Layered Analysis ....................................... 53  
      2.2.4. Conceptual Considerations ......................................................... 55  
   2.3. Reconceptualising the Researcher – Participant Relationship ............... 57  
   2.4. Issues of Research Trustworthiness ......................................................... 63  
   2.5. Method ....................................................................................................... 65  
      2.5.1. Archival Analysis .......................................................................... 65  
      2.5.2. Observation and Immersion ......................................................... 66  
      2.5.3. Intensive Interviews ................................................................. 68
2.5.4. Parameters for Participation................................................................. 72
2.5.5. Issue of Anonymity and Confidentiality in Small Towns.................. 73
Chapter Three ............................................................................................. 75
3. Ethical Considerations............................................................................... 75
  3.1. Problematic Assumptions .................................................................... 75
  3.1.1. The Assumption of the Objective Researcher ............................... 77
  3.1.2. The Assumption of Espoused Theories of Ethics ......................... 79
  3.1.3. The Assumption of Participant as Data ....................................... 83
  3.1.4. The Assumption of One-Off Consent ......................................... 87
  3.1.5. The Assumption that Ethics is Obliged Until the End of the Formalised Research Process................................................................. 87
3.2. Concluding Comments ....................................................................... 88
Part Two Findings ....................................................................................... 89
Chapter Four ................................................................................................. 90
4. Findings in Space and Time..................................................................... 90
  4.1. Overview of the Structure of Findings ............................................. 90
Setting One – Wheatbelt........................................................................... 93
  4.2. Demographics .................................................................................. 93
  4.3. Researcher Narrative ...................................................................... 94
  4.4. Wheatbelt Causal Layered Analysis Summary of Findings .............. 109
4.5. Causal Layered Analysis – Farmers ................................................... 120
   4.5.1. Litany ......................................................................................... 120
   4.5.2. Social Structural ....................................................................... 124
   4.5.3. Worldview/Discourse ................................................................. 143
   4.5.4. Myth/Metaphor Level ................................................................. 150
   4.6.1. Litany ......................................................................................... 157
   4.6.2. Social Structural Level ............................................................... 160
   4.6.3. Worldview/Discourse Level ........................................................ 170
   4.6.4. Myth/Metaphor Level ................................................................. 176
Setting Two – Kununurra ......................................................................... 181
  4.7. Demographics .................................................................................. 181
  4.8. Researcher Narrative ...................................................................... 181
4.10. Causal Layered Analysis – Irrigators ................................................. 197
   4.10.1. Litany ......................................................................................... 197
   4.10.2. Social Structural ....................................................................... 200
   4.10.3. Worldview/Discourse ............................................................... 216
   4.10.4. Myth/Metaphor Level ................................................................. 225
   4.11.1. Litany ......................................................................................... 230
   4.11.2. Social Structural ....................................................................... 234
   4.11.3. Worldview/Discourse Level ........................................................ 241
   4.11.4. Myth/Metaphor Level ................................................................. 244
Part Three Interpretation............................................................................ 251
Chapter Five ............................................................................................................. 252
5. Paradox and the Unconscious........................................................................... 252
  5.1. Paradox 1: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft: ‘Community’ values within a
       ‘societal’ world .............................................................................................. 254
        5.1.1. Wheatbelt Experience ...................................................................... 255
        5.1.2. Kununurra Experience ..................................................................... 264
  5.2. Paradox Two: Environmental Sustainability Paradox ............................ 265
        5.2.1. Wheatbelt Experience ...................................................................... 265
        5.2.2. Kununurra ...................................................................................... 268
  5.3. Proposed Underpinnings of Paradox .................................................... 271
Chapter Six ............................................................................................................. 276
6. The Changing State of Communities ........................................................... 276
  6.1. The Third Position and the Paradox of the One and Many ..................... 277
  6.2. Considering the ‘Unbalanced’ Third Position ........................................ 278
        6.2.1. The Third Position ........................................................................... 279
        6.2.2. Erosion of the Gemeinschaft Community ..................................... 280
        6.2.3. The Gesellschaft Society ................................................................. 282
  6.3. Implications for a Just Community ....................................................... 283
Epilogue .................................................................................................................. 284
References ............................................................................................................. 288
List of Tables

Table 1. Dokecki’s interpretation of Pepper’s Four World Hypotheses as they relate to psychology ................................................................. 45
Table 2. Comparisons between causal layers and the direction of other analytical methods ............................................................................................................. 54
Table 3. Comparisons of positivist and naturalist terminology ......................... 64
Table 4. Means of assessing Trustworthiness....................................................... 65
Table 5. Comparison of conventional conversational interviews to intensive interviews based on Charmaz (2006) ................................................................. 71
Table 6. Participant summary ............................................................................. 73
Table 7. Summary of problematic assumptions ................................................. 76
Table 8. Summary of the CLA analyses for the Wheatbelt ................................... 110
Table 9. Summary of the CLA analysis for Kununurra ...................................... 192
Table 10. Community Process and Society Process .......................................... 258
List of Figures

Figure 1. Research locations. ............................................................ 67
Figure 2. Photo of Rural Towns Program signage positioned outside a town on Great Eastern Highway .................................................. 95
Figure 3. Photo of dead trees in waterlogged salinity affected landscape. .......... 98
Figure 4. Photo of tractor and tree planter with saplings. .......................... 103
Figure 5. Photo of drainage canal. .................................................... 104
Figure 6. Photo of eroded and saline land ........................................... 105
Figure 7. Aerial shot over part of the irrigation area, with the Ord River in the background. ................................................................. 184
Figure 8. Proposed model of the connections of layers and the generation of Paradox. ........................................................................ 273
Figure 9. Model of Newbrough’s (1995) Third Position akin to the Gemeinschaft oriented community. ........................................... 279
Figure 10. Model of erosion of the Gemeinschaft Community. .................. 281
Figure 11. Model of the Gesellschaft Society. ....................................... 282
List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Avon Catchment Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEIA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Social and Economic Impact Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOC</td>
<td>Barometers of Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALM</td>
<td>Conservation and Land Management (Department of)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLA</td>
<td>Causal Layered Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMA</td>
<td>Catchment Management Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWA</td>
<td>Country Women’s Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCD</td>
<td>Department of Community Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEC</td>
<td>Department of Environment and Conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoA</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoAF</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture and Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoIR</td>
<td>Department of Industry and Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td>Global Positioning System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KDC</td>
<td>Kimberley Development Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLC</td>
<td>Kimberley Land Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDB</td>
<td>Murray Darling Basin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MG</td>
<td>Miriuwung and Gajerrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIS</td>
<td>Managed Investment Schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRM</td>
<td>Natural Resource Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORIA</td>
<td>Ord River Irrigation Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETA</td>
<td>People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSPCA</td>
<td>Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDC</td>
<td>Regional Development Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I have never let my schooling interfere with my education”

Mark Twain
Part One Underpinnings and Direction

Part One Underpinnings and Direction lays the foundation of the thesis. It begins with the Prologue which gives an in-depth rationale for the thesis, and accounts in detail the direction and aim of each Chapter. Following the Prologue, Chapter One Conceptualising the Country Side, presents the necessary background and historical development of Australia’s land management. Chapter Two Research Paradigm and Chapter Three Ethical Considerations introduce the paradigm and consider ethical challenges explicitly. Hence, Part One conveys the research context and process, leading into Part Two Findings.
In this Prologue a rationale for the inquiry is introduced. The two key aims are presented and their significance as research areas and potential contributions are argued. The first aim was to explore rural farming culture with specific interest in the way that worldview and mythology play in the construction of community life, and further how these contribute to rural change and transformation. The second aim was to critically consider social research. Specifically, identify and adapt an appropriate methodology that allowed for in-depth analysis of complex settings and that was responsive to the emerging research focus and analytical needs of the field of community psychology. Inherent to this thesis are the conceptual and disciplinary risks that were made. Fundamentally this thesis sought to re-define the paradigm of qualitative and contextualist inquiry by considering a taken-for-granted notion in all community research, namely assumptions surrounding the notion of community. Significantly, the aim of this thesis is not to offer an answer to the question ‘what is community’, but to question the assumptions we have when we enter into a discourse with communities and conduct truly contextualist research. This section concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

In 2004 I completed my honours research in which I considered the meaning and rhetoric of the notion of sustainability. The research was qualitative and involved interviewing scientists and dryland farmers from communities in the Wheatbelt, an agricultural region in Western Australia. My interest at onset of the project was quite simple, to learn about how different groups of people conceptualised sustainability. I deconstructed the interview transcripts in a bid to see whether my intuitions were right, that the concept was highly contextual, rhetorical and political. What emerged through these conversations, particularly with the farmers, was far more interesting and complex. The farmers shared with me the intricacies of living in rural communities. They were forthcoming with both their challenges and joys and appeared proud to have the opportunity to share the realities of living
in a region that they argued was commonly miss-portrayed as being in deficit. The scientists were also forthcoming, but in terms of their disciplinary backgrounds and how sustainability as a construct was conceptualised within their field. Farming and scientific community perceptions contrasted greatly, not so much in the obvious sense of how they had contextually dissimilar understandings of sustainability, but rather in the way that they framed and grounded their argument. Most notably, the farming community discussed sustainability in terms of ramifications for their community, whereas scientists, in terms of their science. Given such a difference, I decided to continue my dialogue with farmers and scientists and further develop an understanding of the underpinnings of such worldviews and potential implications of these differences. Critical to this process was learning about the culture of rural towns and within bureaucracy.

This research has two key aims. The first aim is to consider worldviews, values and mythologies in rural agricultural Australia, and, the role that these play in community transformation and change. It is assumed in the methodological stance that will be enunciated, that myths play fundamental roles in the interpretation of culture. The second is to critically consider the social research process, not so to deliver on a series of recommendations, but rather to use the thesis and research process itself as an exemplar of how to approach social research differently. Recommendations would also be contrary to the first aim, whereby there is effort as working against problematising communities. The following brief discussions argue their respective rationales.

Aim One Rationale: The case for exploring worldviews, values and mythologies as they contribute to community persistence, change and transformation

The diversity of rural settings over Australia’s vast landmass has meant that there is not one single tangible construction of ‘rurality’. Lawrence and Gray (2000) give one of the best accounts regarding this complexity, discussing the emergence of urbanized stereotypes of rural Australian agriculture, namely, the ‘cockie’ and the
‘grazier’. The ‘cockie’ construction is of a small-scale hard-working, financially and resource strained grain farmer (Lawrence & Gray). They are construed as being not overly intelligent, simple and dependent on Government handouts for survival. Comparatively the ‘grazier’ is construed as somewhat heroic, operating a large scale stock operation that has been passed down through the generations (Lawrence & Gray). Their perceived wealth means that they are able to employ staff such as a farm manager allowing them the capacity to pursue other interests (Lawrence and Gray). The reality of these stereotyped constructions are critiqued by Lawrence and Gray who criticise the mythology surrounding the heroism and political power of the grazier and its underpinnings in racist colonialism, that Australian agriculture is far more diverse than purely wheat and sheep, that economic and employment pressures are felt across the industry, nor are these pressures exclusive to men (acknowledging the importance of women in agriculture). Significantly, they also critically reflect on the way that those in cities and urban areas conceptualise agriculturalists, specifically an attitudinal shift that once constructed landholders as providers and carers of the land to more recent perceptions of environmental vandals.

With these relatively prominent stereotypes, in more recent times the rural agricultural landscape has had the additional construction of being in crisis and in deficit. The very simple yet residing message coming out of agricultural research and policy is that there are ‘problems’ that require ‘fixing’. With this message comes a series of assumptions regarding perceived needs of communities. Many of the perceived needs come about through external parties such as Government, science or academia misinterpreting or placing value judgements on rural communities’ apparent needs. In particular, with the strong messages of ‘problem’ or ‘deficit’ in agricultural communities there is the somewhat expected assumption that the communities are ready, able or even wanting to change. Interest here is in seeing the interplay between the communities themselves and the governing structures and institutions that are explicitly present to address these perceived issues. It is argued that through considering the interaction of ‘the helpers’ and ‘the helped’ that it is possible to begin to understanding the underpinnings of the perceived
‘deficit’ and the apparent resilience of stereotyped constructions of rural agricultural communities.

The presence of misleading stereotypes and claims of deficit flag an opportunity to explore the interplay of these conventions in more depth, particularly in relation to how these may contribute to the change and transformation of these landscapes, both in terms of their physical tenure and in the implications that emerge both socially and culturally.

Aim Two Rationale: The case for considering research process

In the past I have been involved in research and consultancy projects funded by both business and/or Government. The majority of these projects were based in rural communities and have been interventionist in the sense that it was intended from a research or consultancy perspective that these communities are required to undergo some form of change. Characteristic to all these projects was the assumption that change is what these communities require. What I have struggled with is that the question ‘do they want to change?’ was rarely directly asked. This conveys a great deal regarding how we think about rural communities. Researches or practitioners, have a set of assumptions regarding what it is a community should possess and if they do not possess these characteristics it is assumed that they want to and should change to be in line with our expectations. Similarly there tends to be an assumption of what it is like to be a rural community member. Allowing for the opportunity for community members to reflect on their community life is highly informative and the process of facilitating or encouraging this dialogue often challenging.

A Critical Consideration of the Paradigm of Community Psychology

Pepper’s (1942) World Hypotheses have in the last 20 to 30 years sporadically emerged as a typology of research methodologies and the accompanying
philosophical underpinnings (for instance, see Altman & Rogoff, 1984; Bishop, Sonn, Drew & Contos, 2002; Dokecki, 1992; Payne 1996; Tebes, 2005) and nicely frames the paradigmatic challenges within the discipline of psychology. Pepper argued for four world hypotheses each having its own root metaphor. Mechanism would be most familiar to experimental psychologists as its root metaphor is the machine, cause and effect are its principles and can thus also be identified as positivism. Formism, is interested in individual differences. Organicism has the root metaphor of the organic whole and is exemplified in systems theories. Finally, there is contextualism. Contextualism of American pragmatism has the root metaphor of the ‘act in context’. Pepper points out that these world hypotheses are incommensurable and have differing ontologies and epistemologies. The nature of reality is viewed differently in each world hypothesis. In mechanism it is assumed that only one reality exists, but in contextualism, multiple realities are possible. Contextualism is more in line with social constructionism, and post-modernism and is consistent with many criticisms of psychology with the tendency for over-concern with the individual as the somatic unit (e.g., Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1994; Sarason, 1981, 1996). Altman and Rogoff (1984) used Pepper and Dewey and Bentley (1948) to elaborate these world theories and operationalise methodological approaches. In mechanism they argued that each entity is discrete and separable. In contextualism, which they talk of as transactionalism, they argue that entities are not separable, that the people are not separate from the context and the context is comprised of people and other aspects of the local ecology. In transaction we have a complex context in which actors share common aspects, as well as having some aspects that differentiate them.

Paradigmatically, mechanism by its very nature is an easier hypothesis to work within. It is characterised by its relative reductionism compared to contextualism attempting to make sense of the world according to separate entities and in the binary terms of cause and effect. Comparatively the contextualist hypothesis sees the world as inter-related, inter-dependent, non-linear or binary and inherently complex. Managing complexity often results in reductionism.
Aside from the complexity which comes from genuine contextualism there is the additional barrier to its adoption which is related to the historical development of the discipline of community psychology and psychology more generally. Mechanism and the research approach of cause and effect are scientific and thus appealing to the discipline of psychology. Somewhat paradoxically, community psychology has historically worked hard at developing and securing a scientific image for itself.

Bohan (1990) reflects “psychology’s unquestioned allegiance to the positivist modes is said to present a tacit paradigmatic commitment” (p. 86) and as such, this legacy has tended to infiltrate the way that community psychology has attempted to identify itself. The scientific method does not marry well with contextualism, hence there has been a degree of reluctance in full, genuine, commitment to both contextualist speak and action. The end result is a community psychology that is fractured in theory and practice, where there is theoretical breadth but an absence of theoretical and applied depth. Much of this orientation appears to have emerged out of the scientist-practitioner model. The model had the original intention as a means of clinical psychological training, but discourse of psychology as a science became a dominant discourse in the field (John, 1998). The apparent preoccupation with science is to a degree problematic. John sees this as “Psychologists’ need for epistemic authority” (p. 24) reflecting on the development and implications of the scientist-practitioner model, stating,

A single scientific method, it was maintained, was appropriate for possible areas of psychological inquiry and was the glue that held the psychological enterprise together and linked it to more prestigious sciences. The demand, in the training of practitioners, an emphasis on scientific method (which came to be interpreted almost exclusively in terms of experimental design and inferential statistics), and so enabled academic psychologists, the exponents and self – declared custodians of these procedures, to position themselves as the arbiters of psychological claims of any kind (p. 25).

The development of the disciplines identity was based on attempts at justifying itself as a science, and as such the interpretive inquiry is responsive and defined by
this assertion. The mechanistic approach that has tended to characterise the disciplinary orientation has both epistemically and ontologically geared towards truth claims.

It has been recognised that the limited number of tools commonly adopted within the discipline of community psychology are poor in their capacity at ‘handling’ contextual ‘data’ (Luke, 2005). The issue of depth is critical to this thesis. It is argued that due to the field’s fixation on science and its mythology of prestige, as a discipline, we are reluctant to consider, deconstruct or deliberate on the ‘obvious’. By ‘obvious’ I refer to the taken for granted concepts such as ‘community’, ‘culture’ and ‘rural’. While as such these notions have been studied a great deal, the difference is that the study process has been characterised by an interest in the individual.

Doing so has left a gap in the way that we attempt to understand communities. This gap in rural communities of Australia is seen in the misperception on the part of social and biophysical sciences to fully acknowledge the depth of complexity in communities. The concept of community continues to be adopted discursively, yet the way in which they are studied constructs a community to be the sum of the individuals that live within it (the community) as opposed to there being recognition that we as researchers are also part of the community. This is an example of mechanism.

**Overview of the Thesis Structure**

Rural farming culture in Australia is central to the wellbeing and livelihood of all Australians but tends not to be fully recognised or appreciated as such. ‘Rural’ tends to characterise realms unknown to ‘city people’ and is accompanied by a social construction of rural people, rural communities, and their lifestyle riddled with stereotypes (Lockie & Bourke, 2001). Having lived in these communities and interacted with the community members, learning through this emersion and
through the in-depth interviews has acted as a means of confirmation of the inaccuracy of these stereotypes. As such a traditional literature review is anti-thesis – acting only as a prime as to what to ‘expect’ in communities. The central thesis is that we fall victim of entering into communities with a set of suppositions related to the workings of how communities should be and forget to ask the simple yet critical questions of ‘what are you?’ Hence the literature that has been drawn on in the present study is chosen because the writers and the researchers themselves took risks in what they wrote, for instance posing alternative methodological paradigms, for speaking in the first person, for criticising dominant schools of thought, or, for encouraging thought on process as opposed to necessarily an outcome. For such writers, it is either their alluded to or overt consideration of the process as a researcher, writer or theorist that has acted as inspiration in the direction of this thesis. Part One lays the foundation of the thesis. Chapter One Conceptualising the Countryside considers the evolution of the dynamic understanding of agricultural Australia, capturing an analysis of conceptual shifts within Australia’s agricultural history. In a way, it serves as a post modern interpretation of a literature review in that it claims no truths but invites reflection of suggested phases of responses made by communities to a changing physical and social landscape. This is in line with the thinking of Michael (1992) who argues “that once we take up a post-modern ‘posture’, whether that be as a reader of texts or as a social psychological practitioner, then we have available to us multiple readings/interpretations” (p.74). Character to this history is the complexity not only in life generally but how rural communities have responded to external pressures, uncontrollable influences such as the weather and how they have managed their at times negative social construction.

This issue of complexity has meant that there is necessity in considering the most suitable methodology that embraces the complexity as opposed to shying away from it. Chapter Two Research Paradigm considers the methodology. Central to the methodological development has been to understand the social construction and paradigmatic development of the discipline of psychology and community psychology. Community psychology has endeavoured to negotiate its position as
contextualist. For instance, the more traditional conventions of the researcher-participant relationship are reassessed.

The focus on psychological practice and history naturally leads to considering the role that the researcher plays in employing the contextualist and post-structuralist methodology. The researcher-participant relationship is but one example of the necessary new way of thinking given the critical post modern stance on current and future research paradigms. Thus, the previous chapter on research ethics considers ethical issues exclusively. The interest here is in capturing particular ethical sensitivities and offering ways in which they were managed. Importantly, this chapter does not serve as the ‘be-all’ and ‘end-all’ of challenges associated with a truly contextualist approach, rather it begins a necessary discourse of considering ethics critically.

With ethics fresh in mind, Part Two considers the research findings exclusively. Chapter Four Findings presents the results of the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), (the interpretive methodology employed). In this Chapter, a narrative, given from my perspective as the researcher engaging in community life is also presented. This is an important first step in the analytical process as it serves as a reminder of the necessity in recognising the researcher as part of the research process. Each region is considered in depth, allowing for a distinct feel of the issues, complexities and strengths of rural life and culture in these regions. The layers of the analysis make for an in-depth deconstruction and help in identifying paradoxical situations.

Part Three of the thesis summarises the analysis and interpretation. Chapter Five Paradox and the Unconscious serves to reconstruct the analysis by making explicit some of the alluded-to paradoxes that emerged in the reporting of findings in Chapter Four. Paradoxical tensions are identified and are discussed explicitly. Chapter Five sketches a theory as to how paradox is central, not only in understanding the tensions in rural culture but also culture more generally.

These tensions provided the critical understanding required for Chapter Six The
Changing Nature of Communities which reflects on Newbrough’s (1995) thoughts regarding the ‘Third Position’. In the Third Position Newbrough uses the metaphors of the French Revolutionary rhetoric of liberty, fraternity and equality. He argues for a process of community change that involves adjustments to all of these three aspects. This process is sharply contrasted against a dualistic approach in which balance is conceptually easier, but less realistic. Rural community culture is considered in terms of liberty, fraternity and equality with specific interest directed to Tönnies (1957) notions of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft across both research settings and in reference to Australia’s agricultural history, which will be described in full later on.

As this Prologue has positioned the motivation, development and aims of this thesis, the Antilog concludes by considering the future of contextualist research. An emphasis is made on considering the research process and the need for a continued dialogue on issues such as ethics.

This thesis is progressive in that my criticism of the scientific method and traditional conventional research paradigms has naturally led to a ‘different’ way of conceptualising and conducting research. As reflected by John (1998),

Psychologists’ persistence in pursuing epistemic authority by trying vainly to shoehorn psychological practice into a preconceived, ill-fitting glass slipper is like creation scientists’ attempting to reconcile biological diversity with the Genesis account. An alternative would be for psychologists to work towards a fuller understanding and explication of psychological practice as it is presently constituted and as it possibly might be constituted, and a more adequate appreciation of epistemological constraints and possibilities within which we must operate (p. 29).

It is such a perspective that has prompted a critical shake up of the assumptions that are taken to the interface between researchers and communities. Rather than deconstruct a previous process, a risk is taken in that this research process has
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

acted as a trial. The role between researcher and participant has been questioned, underlying assumptions regarding ethics research have been challenged, and a futurist methodology based on depth as opposed to breadth has been adopted in an attempt to be truly contextualist.
Chapter One

1. Conceptualising the Countryside

In this chapter, Conceptualising the Countryside, the ways in which the Australian agricultural landscape has been constructed through various governance models and further, the social responses to such models are identified and discussed. Particular attention is made to the histories of the two study areas, the Wheatbelt of Western Australia (WA) and Kununurra in WA’s far north. The land management regime that characterised periods of Australia’s rural agriculture are raised and three phases are identified. While the governance structures are discussed, of significance to Chapter 1 is the social response to these structures and how governance has influenced rural agricultural culture. These three phases of rural agricultural transition include, Indigenous Land Management, Colonialisn Productionist Phase, and, Neo-Liberalism (which is the current phase and focus of discussion). Each phase conveys the evolving way in which Australians have connected both physically and emotionally with the agricultural landscape which in turn has shaped the land management paradigm. The rhetoric of the current phase and the implications of its adoption are also discussed. The process of composing the introduction was analytical and drew on desktop documentary and media analysis and is inherently contextualist.

1.1. Phases of Land Management

1.1.1. Indigenous Land Management – Fire Stick Farming

Prior to white settlement/invasion of Australia, Indigenous communities adopted their own means of landscape management and harvest through the use of fire (Jones, 1969). In part, claims by Sir Major Mitchell, an early explorer, contributed to racist mythology surrounding the use of fire (Fensham, 2008). Mitchell claimed that the use of fire by Indigenous people had lead to a vastly different Australian landscape, whereby a thickening of woody vegetation would have been apparent
had fire management not occurred (Fensham). Mitchell went further to suggest that had the landscape not been burnt Australia’s aesthetic would be akin to the forests of America or New Zealand (Fensham). As such, in response to these claims, research considering the role and ecological implications of fire management has been conducted (Bird, Bird, Codding, Parker & Jones, 2008; Fensham; Murphy & Bowman, 2007; Petty & Bowman, 2007).

Fire has been used by Indigenous people in Australia for cleaning land or for making tracks of animals visible for hunting (Bird et al., 2008). The fire practices result in a mosaic, whereby more mature habitat are secured acting to prevent extinction of both flora and fauna species (Bird et al.). In line with the suppositions of Major Mitchell, some have hypothesised that woodland vegetation has thickened after the cessation of burning practice and the introduction of European pasture management. These claims were refuted where research into structural changes in vegetation type revealed that landscape and vegetation density has remained stable (Fensham, 2008). This however is not the case in areas that had experienced broad scale land clearing for western agriculture (Fensham). Indeed fire use is recognised as being an immediate disturbance to slow growing vegetation; this disturbance promotes biodiversity (Bird et al). Rather, what has been recorded as more damaging is the cessation of the fire regime, which results in a gradual cascade of extinctions, which was identified as to have occurred with European settlement (Bird et al.).

Typically, the use of firestick burning had been simplified by non-Indigenous science, not only in terms of the knowledge that informs the practice but also due to its cultural significance (Yibarbuk et al., 2001). The act of burning transcends ‘farming’ or ‘land management’; as “a signal of co-ownership and obligation and an expression of one’s commitment to upholding the Yulupirti, the law handed down from the Jukurrpa, or ‘Dreamtime’. The mosaic that develops as a result of repeated burning is a symbol of its use” (Bird, Bird, Codding, Packer & Jones, 2008, no page). Thus Indigenous land management has greater meaning than agricultural production, it produces landscapes that are reflections of the dreamtime.
With European colonisation, Indigenous practices, including fire burning, in some areas either were dramatically disturbed or were forcibly ceased as a consequence of the xenophobic and overtly racist policy, attitudes and practices of early settlers, (Garvey, 2007). The cessation of the particular practice does little to capture the degree of the devastation that has come out of European settlement, particularly in terms of the continued detriment to Indigenous communities. In an environmental sense, since European settlement, the landscape has dramatically changed with the development of towns and cities, transport and infrastructure and of course agricultural districts. Noteworthy is Indigenous involvement and influence in contemporary farming practices (Gott, 2005), whereby Indigenous communities have had a significant role to play as participants in colonial farming activities, for instance the establishment of the farming regime, or as agriculturalists themselves. Notably absent from the research findings, was a contemporary appreciation on part of participants regarding such roles. This is captured in Chapter 4 Findings, with particular reference made to the way in which racism plays out in the research settings, for instance in the context of this discussion, a failure to acknowledge Indigenous involvement in current agricultural practice and similarly Indigenous engagement in natural resource management.

1.1.2. Colonialist Productionist Phase

The Colonialist Phase of Australia’s burgeoning relationship with the countryside is steeped in frontierism. Quinn (2000) comments on the persistently Eurocentric nature of Australians’ current land management, commenting that colonialist ‘patterns of land use reflected traditional ideas of boundaries fixed in place and tenures fixed in time’ (p. 243). Bradsen (2000) notes early settlers descriptions of Australia’s landscape as parklike. This alludes to a misinterpretation on behalf of the settler as to Australia’s land tenure where again there was the desire to make the new country in the shadow of the mother country. This mentality remains pertinent to the way our natural resources, particularly within agriculture, are managed. As reflected on by Bradsen, historically there has been a reluctance to adapt land
management to suit Australia’s biophysical conditions where instead a romantic vision of European settlement, development and farming has remained the dominant paradigm to agricultural practice. There was and continues to be a misperceived ‘adaptability’ of the Australian landscape to resemble European practices and significantly, the European lifestyle. Furthermore, the interpretation by early settlers of the Australian natural environment tended to be devalued and there was an accompanying expectation that miscalculated the capacity for the natural landscape to regenerate (Quinn, 2000). Forcing the realities of Australia’s physical landscape to meet European expectations during settlement, leads us to our current degraded state of the landscape.

There were some unique decisions that have since lead to some foreboding natural resource issues and are embedded in our colonialisr history. Australia’s land use was under a ‘Leasehold Land Tenure’ where the overarching paradigm was one of development but based in a precedent of mutual obligation (Bradsen, 2000). Indigenous people were not recognised by the settlers as possessing nor did they recognise them as having any rights to the land. Australia’s land was deemed ‘Crown Land’ and perceived as vacant which effectively extinguished any rights of Indigenous land ownership. Squatting was common and given the vast land mass it was unrealistic and impossible to enforce or monitor people’s movements. Consequently, in an attempt to govern land usage, legislation was introduced that set parameters that stipulated the purpose of land and the time frame for usage namely limited but renewable. The consequence under this tenure was that a significant amount of land became occupied, almost for occupancies sake, and the application of this legislation at a broad scale resulted in the excessive and relatively unplanned broad acre cultivation of the landscape. During this phase of Australia’s non-Indigenous settlement, while the overarching emphasis was on the development of the nation, it was done so in a context of mutual obligation and common good. From about the 1860s there was growing recognition of degradation to the soil due to land clearing and farming practices and with this, came a wave of attempts to manage the observed impact. In response, programs were developed in a bid to rectify environmental damage. Interestingly, such early programs were
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

based on obligatory social and community processes, whereby landholders were forced to participate in positive land management practices to reverse agricultural impacts to the environment. Doing so was seen to be of community benefit (Bradsen, 2000).

Bradsen (2000) emphasises that the notion of obligation on the part of the landholder was fundamental to the governance paradigm and emphasised in the discourse of legislation. There was however a marked shift away from the notion of a 'common good' and the obligatory relationship. This was seen in the 1930s with the soil erosion crisis and shifted the way that development operated as a paradigm in Australia. Australia changed its model from one that was based on the collective to an approach modelled on programs in the United States, whose interest was on the individual. Bradsen writes that,

fostering an individualistic, obligation-free ethos in the use and management of all land, not only hindered the development of the sense of obligation of freehold land, it weakened the sense of obligation already existing under the tenure system, (p.278.)

An individualistic approach to land management that hopes to foster a sense of obligation through voluntary stewardship is near impossible, and unrealistic given current economic and environmental challenges that have fostered an ethos within agricultural settings of entrepreneurship and capitalism within a broader social context of uncertainty. Disappointingly, neither this history nor the very early recognition of land degradation, tends to be acknowledged in more recent accounts of land management gone wrong. Instead there appears to be a decided amnesic response (Dovers, 2000).

The Wheatbelt has tended not to recall their colonialist history and instead dismiss the reality of settlement and the impact that this had on the Indigenous people in the region. This, of course, does not dismiss the impact that white settlement/invasion had on Indigenous people in the area, rather it is used to
highlight the dissipating impact of history and how often it is easier to ‘forget’ and reconstruct history than to acknowledge the consequence and harms that came out of European settlement (Garvey, 2007).

The non-Indigenous settlement of Kununurra occurred in relatively recent times, during the 1960s and thus non-Indigenous settlement is still in living memory. The history of Kununurra is complex and can be told from many perspectives; for those who settled during the early days (1960s) of the Ord River Irrigation Area (ORIA) the time tends to be reflected on favourably. While the period was not without its hardships and battles (particularly the failure of cotton during the 1970s) the orientation was pro development, and there was excitement and unity. There was a strong sense of community amongst the irrigators who sought to make the region home and saw its economic potential. The geographical isolation and harshness of the environment further helped bond the community, the majority of which had come from the eastern states of Australia or migrated from overseas.

This colonialist vision and activity was to the direct expense of the Miriuwung and Gajerrong (MG)\(^1\) people, original landholders of the region. During the 1960s and 1970s no Acts were in place that considered the rights of Aboriginal people in Australia. The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* and *Native Title Act 1993* were the first of their kind. Instead, Aboriginal people were ‘protected’ by the native Welfare Department where “during the 1960s their traditional connection to the land was denied under a racially discriminatory legislative and administrative regime in which Aboriginal people were governed without their consent” (Kimberley Land Council, KLC, 2004, p.1). Indigenous people were not consulted about the development of the region. Instead they were forcibly removed from their land to make way for Stage One of the irrigation area. In the 1960s the lower Ord River was dammed which formed Lake Kununurra. Lake Argyle was created a decade later and covers 980 million square metres.

\(^1\) MG is a commonly used abbreviation adopted by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to refer to the two main language groups located in and around Kununurra.
The reality is that the alienated area is far greater than those given in the statistics as, “Native title has been extinguished not only on the land inundated by the lake, but also on an even greater area of land to the south east of the lake because of the land tenure regime created in the establishment of the lake. The lake has had the effect of extinguishing native title on more that 3000 square kilometres of land” (KLC, 2004, p. 2). Furthermore, the development of the irrigation area has further forcibly removed people from their land. It is not simply that the MG people lost their land, but the now constant running of the Ord River provides a continual reminder of their loss – of cultural practices associated with their country, seasonal access to country, and denied access to land for food and medicines. The construction of the dams has possibly resulted in the greatest degree of loss not only through the demolition of sites, but through the definitive extinguishment of Indigenous people’s capacity to traditionally engage with the area (Storey & Trayler, 2006).

The entire project was conceived and conducted with no consideration of the rights of the MG people. Today, the impacts of forced removal of MG people from country continue. These impacts extend beyond that comparable by Western experiences of devastation and trauma. Argyle and the construction of the Diversion Dam, the irrigation systems and the associated infrastructure can be equated with the impact of a major disaster such as a Cyclone Tracy (which devastated Darwin in 1974) or a massive flood. Disasters of this scale equally result in devastation, dislocation, loss and psychological trauma. These impacts require immediate rehabilitation, compensation and the rebuilding of infrastructure and housing. Those dispossessed by events of this scale such as a major disaster eventually return home to the area they belong. In the case of Ord 1, (the original non-Indigenous settlement and development phase) however, the flood did not subside and the affected Indigenous people and their descendents did not return to their homeland. At the same time, they did not receive the aid and assistance generally provided for a major disaster. The trauma suffered by Indigenous people under these circumstances exceeds the disaster analogy. It is more deeply felt and is manifest in problems in successive generations (KLC, 2004, p. 3). Storey and Trayler (2006) note
the impacts of inundation in areas that were commonly travelled by the Indigenous people – particularly the areas between Carlton Hill Station, Ivanhoe Station and Argyle Station.

The impacts of the dispossession are wide-spread and are seen in the health problems from lack of traditional food and a dependence of cheap innutritious alternatives. For instance, studies made of the floodplain and biographic data has confirmed the area’s use by Indigenous people for food (Storey & Trayler, 2006). Surveys of the lower Ord have also confirmed the use of the area by Indigenous people. At the lower Ord Ramsar site alone, there have been 18 recorded Indigenous sites (Storey & Trayler). Through overcrowding and affiliated social problems due to the relocation of MG people to culturally inappropriate housing and there has been a growing dependence on the non-Indigenous economic system.

The establishment of the town of Kununurra further dislocated and alienated Aboriginal people from their country (KLC, 2004). The discrepancy between the support and service provision to non-Aboriginal people in the town emphasises the racist paradigm in which Australia operates. Consequently, misunderstanding and racism is prevalent within the town as non-Indigenous value systems are the dominant norm and are seen to operate within bureaucratic systems.

The expansion of the irrigation scheme east of Kununurra has been a contentious issue over the last 25 years. The proposed development has been coined Ord 2, making the second broad scale development of the region for the purpose of irrigation. Traditional owners have expressed that no negotiations will be entered into regarding the development of Ord 2 until issues arisen from Ord 1 have been addressed. The Government has agreed to these requests and the KLC has been acting on behalf of traditional landholders to ensure that issues are considered. The Aboriginal Social and Economic Impact Assessment (ASEIA), produced by the Council, is an extensive and thoroughly compiled report that gives detail of the impact of Ord 1 on the MG people, and serves as a review of the previous research
that has been conducted that considers the needs and gives recommendations to addressing the needs of Aboriginal people. While this has been prepared for the Government, there has been no assurance by the Government that recommendations given by the Council will be listened to, or influence future decision making in the region.

A feature of this Phase, particularly within the Wheatbelt settlement history is the importance that family farming has in the development of the agricultural sector. Family farming draws on collectivity and history whereby business life and family life are integrated (Hennon & Hildenbrand, 2005).

1.1.3. Neo-Liberalism

During the 1970s there was growing awareness of Australia’s land degradation with particular attention directed towards agricultural regions, for instance concerns regarding salinity, loss of biodiversity, and erosion. This phase, which effectively continues today is characterised by collective level efforts at addressing agricultural issues and significantly, coincides with broader changes to Australia’s governance paradigm, namely neo-liberalism. During the mid to late 1980s rapid changes were made to Australia’s economy and played out in rural areas through deregulation, the cessation of subsidies, cuts to public spending, collective bargaining power and the capitalisation of farms (Higgins, Dibden & Cocklin, 2008; Martin & Ritchie, 1999). Capitalisation resulting in a reduction to the number of farms, collective marketing, and withdrawal of services to rural communities came in response to the regime and as surmised by Martin and Ritchie, “These changes to the rural sector represent fundamentally different ways of valuing rural environments” (p.118). A crisis-consensus rhetoric is strategically critical to the neo-liberalist environmental movement. In light of the fiscal constraints espoused by the Government, posing a collective obligation to tend to land degradation issues provided a setting in which self-governance of a national issue could become the responsibility of communities at the local level, hence “Within the crisis-consensus rhetoric, environmental problems are brought to the fore, but are constituted as community owned
problems and a shared crisis which can be solved through a new consensus” (Martin & Ritchie, p.130).

Under the neo-liberalist paradigm, a series of governmental programs have been introduced which have aimed to respond to the observed environmental issues facing Australia, the first being the National Soil Conservation Program in the early 1980s, followed by the National Landcare Program in the 1990s, the National Heritage Trust, and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality at the turn of the century and finally to the current plan, Caring for Our Country. Large scale governmental programs have been the key agent for attempting to facilitate change within rural agricultural settings, the success of these programs has been criticised however, particularly in terms of the historically poor accounting and subsequently marginal evidence to capture the program’s effectiveness (Hajkowicz, 2009).

The National Landcare Program was introduced by the Australian Government in 1989 as the key mechanism to facilitate this change and was highly influential to regional thinking. The decade of Landcare (for the duration of the 1990s) consisted of several components; over 4,000 Landcare groups across Australia², Landcare Australia Limited (which facilitated partnerships), Commonwealth and State Government Funding programs, the Australia Landcare Council (community based advisory organisation), and the National Landcare Facilitator project (consisting of rural extension officers) (Scarsbrick, 2003).

The Program and its components created an environment in which the rural communities could conceptualise change. The extension officers were generally locally employed who had the highly beneficial local knowledge base. During this phase there is an overwhelming sense of modernisation and globalisation impacting on land management and the way that the family farm operates. Reviews of the effectiveness of the program are mixed. In terms of the biophysical benefit, the general consensus within the literature is scathing. What should be considered in

² 40% of participants in the groups were farmers, studies suggest that a further 35% of farmers in the community that were not formally associated with the program were still influenced by the Program
these reviews however is that the capacity for broad scale change within the catchment takes time and for activities such as revegetation projects ten years is an unrealistic time frame in which to gauge change. From the perspective of the psycho-social benefit, the Program was highly successful. The adoption of sustainable farming methods was recorded as higher for farmers who were a part of a Landcare group (Scarsbrick, 2003). In effect, the program introduced Australia to its first taste of Natural Resource Management (NRM) marking a time whereby there was recognition of the need the to consider resource use ‘sustainably’ and incorporate systems approaches (Bellamy, Walker, McDonald & Syme, 2001).

The ethic that emerged through this movement was based on notions of community participation and change although under the neo-liberalist regime at the time, has were and remains to be a series of critics, for instance,

On the surface, these new environmental reforms and programs in Australia indicate a more democratic approach to rural environmental governance and an active concern by the state for the quality of rural environments. This establishes a degree of legitimacy for the state by projecting an active, democratic and caring approach to a problem of substantial social concern. However, implementation seeks to displace and devolve governance to depoliticised sites of the local. In accordance with neo-liberal ideology, the depoliticised nature of these institutional sites of governance means that the state of rural environment is very much dependent of the (questionable) efficacy of the deregulated economic environment to internalise environmental costs (Martin & Ritchie, 1999, pp. 130-131).

Others have also flagged the inherent contradictions of the paradigm, significantly, that there is a move to partnerships between Governments and communities as governments move away from roles of service provision, and, that the participatory models that have been introduced to engage the community are also privatised (Lane, Wills, Vanclay & Lucas, 2008). This thesis similarly questions the integrity of the decision to engage in such social mobilization, which essentially has since come
out of necessity. With the increasing removal of essential services, staff and infrastructure, the onus is on the part of the remaining community to fulfil the national environmental needs at a voluntary capacity (Carr, 2002; Curtis, 1998; Curtis, 2000). The emphasis that the neo-liberal paradigm plays into personal responsibility, has been considered extensively in the literature and the implications associated with bestowing such responsibilities on individuals and small communities has been criticised (Wallington & Lawrence, 2008; Herbert-Cheshire, 2003; Herbert-Cheshire & Higgins, 2004; Higgens & Lockie, 2002).

Despite this, the program contributed to a general movement where farmers participating in Landcare groups became their own agents of change. In some communities, farmers would identify specific issues, create trials and submit funding proposals to support their science. ‘Science’ became a normalised paradigm for farmers whereby they were not only informed by scientific practice (such as findings informing activities on their farms) but also as participants in other research activities. The Program in this sense created a new skill set for farmers. Again, despite these perceived benefits within the communities, some have argued that the formation of community level organisations was an act of absolution on the part of Government (Carr, 2002).

Central to this phase was the assertion that through collective effort sustainability was possible. At this point there is a high degree of complexity, whereby social and biophysical processes and aims become blurred. There is the assertion that social processes have the capacity to facilitate an outcome of sustainability – which draws on a myriad of parameters (e.g. social, environmental and economic- the emphasis essentially defined by the definition employed) and yet the parameters typically adopted to appraise the effectiveness of the activities such as Landcare were biophysical. During this phase, there was also an onus on stewardship, a notion which implies a sense of obligation to care for and nurture the natural environment. In part, this assumed environmental ethic, as motivation to participate created an image of Landcare as emotionally driven and thus unscientifically rigorous.
When considering the influence of neo-liberalism within the case study areas, the history of natural resource management in the Wheatbelt has been characterised by short term funding rounds. Comparatively, Kununurra is yet to undertake any form of resource management program that is specific to the region. As a comparatively young irrigation community, very little has arisen that poses a significant natural resource threat to the day-to-day running of the irrigation area. Consequently there has been no investment in formalised natural resource programs. Nor has there been any formalised attempt of introducing preventative strategies or programs. The discrepancy only highlights that the current paradigm operates in a reactionary sense rather than preventative and demonstrates the overarching paradigm of natural resource management, not only in Australia but also world wide. There is a reluctance to invest in processes that are preventative in nature due to an overwhelming sense of needing to invest in causes that are currently impacting on communities and environments. This is inherently related to capitalism. Essentially, managing issues that are not yet at hand and investing funds in these processes appear counter intuitive to dealing with issues that are currently in the fore. This paradigm is not exclusive to NRM – the apparent reluctance can also be seen in Australia’s sketchy history of attempts of preventative health and mental health.

In terms of what we have or have not learnt in NRM, Braden (2000) argues that in a behavioural sense, for instance, on farm or catchment management changes in accordance with new scientific understandings. At a surface level this may appear to be the easiest means of change, but for behavioural change, particularly within the farming community, it often must be accompanied or be pre-empted by attitudinal change which Braden identifies as the second space that change can occur.

Overwhelmingly, Australian agricultural practice has been dominated by the family farming enterprises (Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2005). This is particularly pertinent in some of the more established rural communities that have had an extensive history of farming since European settlement. Over time, what has become increasingly evident is a pressure for the family farm to reorientate towards a business
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

enterprise model (Halpin & Guilfoyle; Hennon & Hildenbrand, 2005; Machum, 2005; Rossier, 2005; Vesala & Peura, 2005). This contrasts greatly to the family farming orientation that emerged during the Colonialist Productionist Phase and is indicative of the impacts of the current paradigm of neo-liberalism.

From an emphasis on the collective and family during the colonialism, neo-liberalism is a phase where management tends to rest on the initiative of the individual. The introduction of Catchment Management Authorities reoriented the relationship between farmers and Government and for the majority of communities in the Wheatbelt dissolved their Landcare groups and formalised community oriented engagement in land management. The current phase is steered towards the individual with the aim of catchment scale benefit and rests on the assumption that “moving towards a sustainable community may be achieved through local citizens empowering themselves to take responsibility and action for their own ‘backyards’” (Cuthill, 2002, p.79).

Gore’s (2005) An Inconvenient Truth, and the debate regarding climate change sparked the beginnings of a critical consciousness regarding human impact on the natural environment (Gelbspan, 2004; Flannery, 2005; Hamilton, 2007). These examples of deeply emotional and reflective events occurred within an increasingly capitalist climate. Machum (2005) reflects on the capitalist state of affairs and hypothesises what farming should look like within this paradigm,

Modern industrial farming would follow the path of all business – it would rely on leading edge technology, farm size would grow, hired labour would replace family labour, and specialisation would lead to the most cost-efficient operations. The small farms dotting the rural countryside would become distant memory. In their place, a few highly efficient large farms would produce the world’s foodstuffs (p. 377).
What has emerged is a new management regime whereby farming communities are positioned to fight for resources and survival, and effectively against each other. Policy and economic pressures are forcing farmers to,

consider their family farms to be agricultural enterprises managed according to principles of economic efficiency. Furthermore, they must fulfil certain ecological criteria. Because of these transformations, many farming families must consider their situations and farming practices and devise a new orientation to farming (Rossier, 2005, p. 399).

The changes from broader structural and institutional forces appear to be contributing to a mindset that rural agricultural areas are characterised by notions of community – wholesomeness, humility, connectedness, values and ethics, whereas the institutional pressures are fundamentally societal. Under this paradigm of management, it is often the case that “opportunities for cooperation are constrained as often community groups are competing with each other for scarce resources” (Cuthill, 2002, p. 83). Furthermore, the bureaucratic and funding processes can act to restrict participation and innovation (Cuthill). A typical example of this is through the funding programs which are made available to communities through Catchment Management Authorities, the statutory groups that were introduced as a means to govern land management. The funding programs are competitive whereby farmers submit formal applications in a bid to secure funding to employ new sustainable technologies or practices on their farm. What was once conducted at a collective level is now placed on the individual, the consequence being not all members of the community necessarily receiving support. With the growing pressures in terms of monetary and human resources, the funding rounds are increasingly providing for some, the only means of introducing new or sustainable practices into their land management. Some have acknowledged that “programs that rely on individual action where there is no obligation to act will not be effective” (Bradsen, 2000, p.282).
Neo-liberalism has introduced new challenges within agricultural communities who are now met with an almost contradictory governance paradigm. The complexity of this paradigm is seen in the contrary values that it espouses, namely an emphasis on community level responsibility within a broader context of privatisation, fiscal pressure and Government withdrawal.

1.2. Ramifications
What has emerged over the last 20 to 30 years, from about the time of the Conservationist phase, is a bid to undo the wrongs that have occurred as a result of previous land management. The discipline speaks of science, bureaucracy and academia has moved into the realm of social sciences. For instance, theoretically there has been an adoption of principles from sociology, anthropology, social and community psychology. Some of the key theoretical interests have revolved around notions of community, sense of community, empowerment, social justice, participation and change which acts as a response to a growing recognition of natural resource issues as inherently social (Browne, Bishop, Bellamy & Dzidic, 2004). It demonstrates an effort to incorporate social and cultural values into the landscape, the success of such endeavours is however questionable (Jackson, 2006).

This thesis does not aim to promote the appropriate or condemn the inappropriate utility of psychosocial principles. Rather, the argument is that these terms have been applied on an assumed basis of need. That, generally, those who enter into a community in either a preventative or management sense as a professional or expert tend to automatically assume the adoption of these principles as mechanisms in which ‘problems’ can be ‘solved’. In fact, this tendency tells more about the world view of the intervener than it does of the needs of the community at hand. Reser and Bentrupperbaumer (2005) comment,

There is growing awareness and concern that the language being used in the environmental arena is evidencing increasing strain and slippage and frustrating rather than fostering effective communication and
interdisciplinarity between natural and social scientists, between management, government and the research community in general and with respect to meaningful communication with the public and various ‘partner’ or stakeholder groups (p. 125).

Here, the tension that emerges due to rhetoric is highlighted.

1.2.1. **Tönnies Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft**

Tönnies (1957) posed that there are fundamental characteristics of community life and society life. His descriptions are not put forth as a dichotomous construction of the possibilities of social settings, rather his theorising of society and community offer rich descriptions of the possible lived experience in each setting. He offers typologies of what characterises social and community life, highlighting their differences, whilst acknowledging the relationship between the two. Specifically, there is the Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society) (Tönnies, 1957). Tönnies argues that there has been a change in the nature of communities where traditional conceptualisation characterised by communal bonds, morality and sense of membership has shifted to a new society. Society is characterised by modernist principles, where living and membership is individualised. Essentially, we have moved from the paradigm of the volkstum (the people) to the statsum (the state). Here there is decreased importance in traditions, customs and mores. In the development of a city, “individuals or families are separated entities, and their common locale is only an accidental or deliberately chosen place to live” (p. 4).

Elements of community life decay. In the city, it is claimed that only the ‘upper’ or cultured groups are truly active. They set the standard for ‘lower’ groups. They obey to supersede, to imitate, and to gain social power and independence.

Tönnies argues that there are remnants of the Gemeinschaft remaining in Gesellschaft settings, and appear as valued customs and gestures, for instance, offering tea or coffee to visitors. Behaviours and interactions are seen as normalized traditions, suggest their presence in times gone, and allude to the past behaviours.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

of the Gemeinschaft or community. However, this poses an interesting paradox in the manner that the Gesellschaft or society construes value in their interaction. Interestingly, there tends to be little, if any acknowledgement of the source of these traditions. We paradoxically recognise gift giving as a tradition but find explanation and gratitude for such gestures in the present tense, with rare recognition of the Gemeinschaft. It seems that we forget our past despite the value we place in it. This calls to question whether we value the past or value the favourable outcomes of holding ‘traditions’, such as being perceived as generous or courteous. Consequently, the Gemeinschaft is characterised and has the capacity to possess ‘genuine’ values. Comparatively, the Gesellschaft struggles with maintaining the memory of traditions, and has difficulty in creating or negotiating a new set of values.

Tönnies describes a similar paradox is posed at the interface between traditional experts (usually from the Gesellschaft setting) and the non-traditional expert (typically from the Gemeinschaft settings). At this interface, there is no recognition of differences between the groups and assume mutual understanding, mutual discourse and mutual perceptions.

Powerful to Tönnies’ theorising is the way in which the descriptions capture the experience of the settings as opposed to a static portrayal. Deeper, more sensitive, and more personal influences such as worldview and values are captured and central to his explanation of the settings. He recognises that it is the dynamic of people that ‘create’ and are simultaneously contained by the community and/or society as opposed to a static and misguided interpretation of people existing within a community and/or a society.

1.2.2. Empowerment

The application of empowerment either in research or applied settings are many, including and not limited to volunteerism, self help, primary prevention,
management, reform and community development (Perkins, 1995). The notion of empowerment essentially came into fruition by Solomon in 1976 who recommended that empowerment be the approach employed when working with African American communities. This recommendation helped redefine social work practices. Almost a decade later, Rappaport (1984) reflected “we don’t know what empowerment is, but like obscenity, we know it when we see it” (p. 2). His confession points to one of the critical strengths and weaknesses of the notion – strength in that it is a valued ideology, weakness in that its ambiguity means it can be misunderstood and runs the risk of misuse – intentional or otherwise. This has the capacity to impede its theoretical development. It is generally recognised that a sense of being empowered is highly contextual, dynamic and fluctuate (Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman, 1990, 1995; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz & Chekoway, 1992; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1998).

As the conceptualisation of empowerment has become more blurred, similarly at times it has grown to be more rhetorical (Cuthill, 2002; Perkins, 2001; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Within policy arenas conservatives see empowerment as “private volunteerism that reduce the role and size of the Government, while Liberals see them as a way of reviving public support” (Perkins, 2001, p. 766). Other assumptions include; a sense of empowerment through partnership and shared vision (Mitchell, 2005) and that through empowerment communities are more equipped to deal with future change (Coakes, 1998).

Environmental empowerment tends to be characterised by improvements to social support, increased social cohesion, and the capacity for community development – all elements that are typical to empowerment in a more general sense (Perkins, 2001) However, with natural resource settings empowerment is a commonly bandied term. Within Australia is it accompanied with the expectation of community volunteerism. Edelstein (1988) gave an example of Government response to environmental threats, arguing that the response can actually disempower communities. Specifically he reflected on the paradox of double–bind situations, whereby environmental situations may be disabling for the community
but not to the extent that Government is able to provide a form of definitive action. An example in the Australian context is immediate action on part of Government for cyclone or fire relief, but not for dryland salinity.

Rappaport (1995) comments in a special edition on empowerment of the American Journal of Community Psychology,

> For many people, particularly those who lack social, political, or economic power, the community neighbourhood, the community, neighbourhood or cultural narratives that are available are either negative, narrow, “written” by others for them, or all of the above. People who seek either personal or community change often find that it is very difficult to sustain change without the support of a collectivity that provides a new communal narrative around which they can sustain changes in their own personal story. Associated with such narratives are cognitive, emotional, and behavioural consequences that involve social support, role opportunities, new identities, and possible selves (p.796).

Here Rappaport (1995) points to the importance of myth, through his theoretical exploration of the use of personal and collective narratives. Mythology is introduced fully in Chapter Two where it serves a critical role as part of the analytical deconstruction tool.

### 1.2.3. Participation in Natural Resource Management

Theories of participation play an important role when considering Australia’s history of natural resource management (NRM). Increasingly there is commentary that critiques the various approaches that have employed participatory theory. Much of the criticism has stemmed from a critical stance that questions the appropriate adoption of participatory models in natural resource settings (for instance, see Arnstein, 1969; Browne, Bishop, Bellamy & Dzidic, 2004; Buchy, Ross & Proctor, 2000; Cornwall, 1996; Pretty, 1995; Ross, Buchy & Proctor, 2002). Often
participatory theories assume that a greater level of participation is beneficial, that participation is a transfer of power as opposed to renegotiating and defying current power structures and that it may be the case that people’s role in a participatory process is defined and non-negotiable (Buchy & Race, 2001). The notion of participation has tended to carry with it a sense of positivity, that in some way by facilitating or engaging in a participatory process it is the key to combating the challenges of complex scenarios, this is far from the case. Participation requires far more critical reasoning, particularly in a social climate where the meaning and implications of its use has over time somewhat eroded. Buchy and Race argue, when considering participation in NRM it is necessary to be clear whether participation is “a means to an end or an end in itself” (p. 294), whereby participation is introduced instrumentally for purposes of reaching a particular end point, or transformative in the sense that participation is part of a larger process towards social change (Nelson & Wright, 1995). When participation is transformative, there are a range of additional considerations that need to be made (Buchy & Race). The process involved in this type of participation is often overlooked, not only in terms of the expectations of those participating, but also in a logistical sense in regard to social capital (Putnam, 2000) and financial constraints (Buchy & Race).

Volunteerism has almost become synonymous with participation in NRM in Australia. Typically, while those in authoritative or governance positions may conceptualise rural community involvement as contributing to empowerment, for those involved it may not necessarily be the case, due commonly to difficulties in renegotiating power within and between the relationships (Gooch, 2004).

### 1.2.4. Social Change

Social change is important when considering participation in NRM in Australia given that it is often an assumed outcome of a participatory process. There are however, good and less good models of change. One of the more inspiring interpretations of change relates to Sarason’s (1996) notion of the barometers of change (BOC). Social
change is seen not as an entity but as a marker of what happened before and what happened after. Barometers in this sense are not concerned with the observable or pragmatic indicators of change such as unemployment or crime rates but concerns internal processes regarding how people think and feel, their values and worldviews which come in response to what is happening in the world, and which simultaneously shape what is happening in the world (Sarason). He reflects on changes to the education system post World War II, noting that there were pragmatic changes in the sense that the student population grew, different funding sources, new fields and the like. He notes however,

those were obvious changes, but the consequence of those changes transformed the culture of these sites: their attitudes, outlooks, behavioural and programmatic regularities, allegiances, personal relationships, and a sense of community and institutional purpose...It was not a transformation only within the university but a transactional (bidirectional) process in which the inside and the outside were changing each other (p. 9).

Significantly, Sarason (1996) understands change as something that does not take place in a social vault, away from the rest of the world, rather the transaction grounds change in context. Sarason also understands that change takes time, again using an example to articulate this argument, he reflects that change is not like an earth quake that surprises people as a single event, rather it reflects a gradual process. He comments that

What is pervasively fascinating about social change is that we are always playing catch-up ball, that is, using what we have learned from the past to understand the present, which the past has shaped in ways to which our barometers are insensitive. We are then surprised when we are jolted into the awareness that our accustomed ways of seeing our world did not prepare us for changes we are now glimpsing (p. 23).
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

This observation by Sarason (1996) is significant and ties nicely with the phases of Agricultural land management in Australia. Considering regions that are currently experiencing the impacts of land degradation brought about through farming, these regions are often posed as points or examples in which other farming regions can learn from. On paper this is a nice aim but in reality it tends to be rather idealised as it is often in hindsight that we notice change has occurred.

1.3. Interpretation

1.3.1. Paradox

The common usage of the term paradox concerns self-contradictions or false proposition. As such paradox can relate to the generally simple day-to-day contradictions of everyday life, for instance, claiming personal value systems relating to environmental conservation and yet engaging in limited levels of recycling or driving a fuel inefficient car. We attempt to relieve such contradictions in the hope of absolving the tensions, for instance, we may refuse the use of plastic shopping bags while continuing to drive our fuel inefficient cars. In the context of this research, paradox is considered more closely in terms of its deeper psychological character. Smith and Berg (1997) conceptualise paradoxes as situations where people are embedded in groups or communities but due to their roles or demands are unable to resolve issues. Within Smith and Berg’s framework, there is recognition that there is a tendency for theories on group dynamics to overlook this topic. In response, “This leads us to the question, what framework would enable the topic of conflict in groups to be productively understood. We turn to paradox as a guiding conceptualisation” (Smith & Berg, p. 1). They recognise that group life is characterised by tensions that are difficult to manage. Significant to Smith and Bergs’ theorising is the notion of ‘stuckness’.

1.3.1.1. Psychological Stuckness

Stuckness refers to “the repetitive, and often unconscious tensions that prevent a group from even doing the work of problem solving on scarce resources or compromising about conflicting needs” (Smith & Berg, 1997, p. 207). Smith and
Berg are critical of the conventional ways in which problem resolution is caught in rhetorical notions of ‘working through’ problems and instead focus their attention on the paralysis that can occur when groups attempt to negotiate the process of ‘working through’. They recognise that,

The experience of stuckness in groups is a consequence of the various ways that groups and their members cope with paradox and specifically with their attempts to change the paradoxical circumstances. Faced with what appear to be mutually exclusive subgroups, beliefs, wishes, fears, or emotions, group members often try to undo or redesign this world of opposites. Attempting to undo the paradoxical circumstances often has the effect of further entrenching the oppositional forces and paralysing the group (pp. 210-211).

The natural emotional response to the paralysis is a sense of helplessness, conflict, or distress, with an expected response of wanting to alleviate these feelings and interactions (Smith & Berg). Therefore, by its very nature, attempting to resolve paradoxical situations is complex and circulatory. Consequently there is reluctance on the part of the group to “fully explore the painful and distressing aspects of the groups psychological world for fear of the consequence of what might be discovered” (p.212). Attempts by groups to alleviate paradoxical contradictions can include sacrificing their personal emotional response to an issue by attempting to negotiate an emotional middle ground. Doing so occurs at the cost of the group’s vitality as the extremes in experience are removed (Smith & Berg). Groups can also position these contradictory extremes against each other in a bid to determine which extreme is victorious. Or, temporarily put aside their differences in a bid to relieve associated anxieties related with conflict (Smith & Berg). Each of these efforts result in stuckness as they create a situation whereby the contradictions attempt to be averaged out or forced out of immediate consciousness and fails to actually address the issue at hand. Psychological stuckness may be important when considering challenges experienced within natural resource settings as it offers a potential alternative to considering natural resources issues. Considering stuckness
redirects natural resource issues as being a social or interpersonal problem as opposed to purely environmental.

1.3.1.2. Movement

Counter to stuckness is the notion of movement (Smith & Berg, 1997). Movement in a paradoxical sense refers to the process that occurs when living within a paradoxical situation (Smith & Berg). Smith & Berg reflect that through movement in the paradoxical situation you are able to begin to understand the contradictions. In this case the experience of stuckness is an example of motion which is circular and contradictory as opposed to movement which is “exploring new psychological or emotional ground in the life of the group” (p. 216). For this to occur, it requires the reclaiming of emotions and genuine exploration of the contradictions by acknowledging that the contradictions exist and collectively determining mechanisms to address them.

1.3.2. Deficit Model

The discourse surrounding rural Australia is framed in terms of deficiency. Foucault (1977) argues that no discourse or narrative is void of a power influence. In this case, rural communities have historically been disempowered through research, programs or interventions which attempt to empower communities through processes aimed at self betterment (Hook, 2007). When self betterment is diagnosed as necessary by those outside the community, this result can be disempowering. For instance, there is the growing perception of the need to create a new farming system, namely one that sets to mimic the natural system (Pannell, n.d.).

It can be argued research that has considered that social psychological impacts/relationships etc. associated with the science and management of farmlands generally all tend to be characterised by a form of deficit model that:
there is something wrong with the community and community life
there is fault in their farming practices
farmers are behind with the times
what is important is a modern and globalised future, contrary to community life, and no place for tradition
science is right.

Commonly farmers are socially constructed as being barriers to the change process, for instance, Pannell (n.d.) comments, “in a democracy it is not a society’s power to directly select a sustainable integrated farming system, because it is not possible to simply order farmers to adopt the chosen system. Rather we are constrained by the effectiveness of the various tools that can be used to encourage adoption” (no page). This thinking introduces a dichotomous mindset where innovation is positioned against inaction and whereby the farmer is typically socially constructed as being akin to the later style of farmer and perceived as a barrier to their own sustainability. Farmers that are willing to adhere to scientific suggestion are constructed as innovative, young and/ or new to farming, for instance,

They [farmers] are likely to come to it (new ways of farming) with scepticism, uncertainty, ignorance, prejudices and preconceptions and with an existing farming system that may or may not be operating as they would wish, but is at least operating (no page).

Dovers (2000) comments on the ‘ad-hocery’ of policy that attempts to manage Australia’s natural resources. The implications of such a process are such that research learnings are not necessarily implemented and fail to inform future practices. An example is given in the way that Australia has attempted to manage its water resources. Water entertains different meanings and functions across social and cultural groups. In the Kimberley in WA’s far North, the meaning and consequential engagement with water has resulted in community conflict (e.g. dispossession of Indigenous land, regional planning etc.). Conceptualisation and deconstruction of this conflict often fails to appreciate or recognise the complexity
of its underpinnings. Water allocation issues are inherently racist and embedded within a colonialist paradigm of the superiority of white people (Bishop 2007; Garvey 2001; Garvey, Dudgeon & Kearins, 2000; Green, 2007). This worldview of ‘whiteness’ (Foley 1998; Frankenberg 1993, 2001; Moreton-Robinson, 2006) is where the majority take for granted privileges denied to minority groups. It allows for Governmental neglect of sectors of the broader community and “...the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage.” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 236).

At face value, when we consider rural communities in Australia they tend to be framed in terms of deficit – places that are suffering from drought and that require financial assistance or intervention.

Farmers and rural communities more generally are positioned as the ‘other’ and through the research process are disempowered. The tendency has been to critique and question the role of farmers, how communities operate and rationalise how improvements can be made. What is not questioned are our processes as scientists/researchers/Government. Hence rural research is typically a research practice on communities or for communities as opposed to a process with communities.
Chapter Two

2. Research Paradigm

Traditional individualist approaches of psychology (Billig, 2007; Hayes, 2002) are insufficient in developing a complete understanding of all the issues that impact on farmers. The traditional orientation within the field of psychology is one that focuses on the issues, challenges and strengths experienced by the individual. This approach while still informative fails to identify and acknowledge the collective understandings and structural issues, thus while there may be breadth in understanding, there may not be the depth. This Chapter considers the Research Paradigm and the way in which depth can act as a feature of the analytical process, namely through the post structuralist approach of Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) (Inayatullah, 2004). The research is inherently post-modernist, contextualist and employs grounded theory. This paradigm introduces new issues for considering the researcher – participant relationship and is discussed in detail. Similarly the paradigm and way in which research relationships are constructed introduces new ways of considering the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.1. Foundational Underpinnings

The following is an overview of the ontological and ideological position of the research.

2.1.1. Grounded Theory

The research adopts grounded theory as a means of providing an analytical structure supportive of in-depth analysis and the generation of theory. Grounded theory as an analytical approach emerged during the 1960s, changing the way in which research as a practice was conceptualised. The approach provided a means of iterative theory generation that appreciated data analysis as occurring alongside data collection. Doing so makes for a dynamic and reflective research process and a
research design that is responsive to discoveries. The grounded theory approach is characterised by researcher emersion, for instance through the use of intensive interview and regular engagement in the field (Creswell, 1998). Emersion within the research setting provides an additional information source for instance, providing an opportunity for reflection on and validation of the research findings. The approach is such that theory is ‘grounded’ from experience, and emerges through “a plausible relationship among concepts and sets of concepts” (Creswell, p. 56). Through this method, theory can be generalized from the data or theory can be developed from pre-existing theory. This process of grounding occurs through new data being conceptualized in terms of pre-existing theory. Doing so allows for elaboration and development of the pre-existing theory in light of the current findings. In that way previous research can also be considered and then be developed theoretically. As with this research, a myriad of resources can and should be utilized to develop the theory, for instance, field interviews, observation, the use of photography, narratives or documentary analysis. Doing so also acts as a means of data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Adopting grounded theory as a method is not a process of acquiring and reporting knowledge. Its defining attribute is the interpretation of the data, and further, that the researcher takes responsibility for this process. The ultimate aim of grounded theory is theory development and is based on substantiative theorising. Critical to this process is the interplay between the act of collecting research and the process of interpretation whereby “grounded theories connect this multiplicity of perspective with patterns and processes of action/interaction that in turn are linked with carefully specified conditions and consequences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 173). The methodology appreciates that theory is embedded in time and history and resonates well with a post modernist research position.

2.1.2. Post Modernism

Postmodernity is not a new concept, emerging as a cultural transformation in response to a sentiment of discontent and fear associated with modernity
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

(Huyssen, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1994, Kvale, 1994). The modern narrative of science generating and discovering law, logic, meaning and truth seeking, paradoxically gave way to societal anxieties of the power of science particularly in respect to the harms that science could pose towards society. Consequently, the truth seeking orientation which typified the modernist tradition began to be questioned. Gergen (1994) commented

traditional scientific accounts – long championed for their value neutrality – are saturated with andocentric biases. Such biases are detected in the biases that scientists use to organize their findings, their interpretation of factual data, their topics of study, the methods used for research, and indeed, their conception of knowledge (p. 21).

This aversive response to science and certainty can be seen in some rural and agricultural communities in Australia, and positioning the research as post modernist can aid in understanding community reaction.

Post modernism is reflexive and dynamic and posits that there are multiple realities and further, that these views regarding the nature of reality are socially constructed. Language is seen as being fragmented and performative, therefore providing critical insight into the nature of the world. Significantly, post modernism attempts to change the way that we think about things rather than enacting change, as seen in the “critique of the 19th century enlightenment and early 20th century emphasis on technology, rationality, reasons, universals, science and the positivist, scientific method” (Creswell, 1998, p.79). Through deconstruction it is possible to bring forth concealed hierarchies, inconsistencies and contradictions. The position also accepts the meta narrative, the “universals that hold true regardless of the social conditions” (Creswell, p.79), as it does the social construction of ‘the other’.

Within community psychology, however, methodology still tends to fall into the position of truth warranting and at the individual level. This appears particularly
oxymoronic when considering community psychology which has been argued to have emerged out of post modernism (Newbrough, 1995). Through deconstruction the affirmative postmodernist epistemology that emerges considered four conventions, namely, foundationlessness, fragmentariness, constructivism and neopragmatism. Gergen (1994) draws attention to the growing profile of alternative methodologies. This however need not be lamented, but should be perceived favourably as an indication of the discipline of psychology challenging itself to come to terms with cultural and social transformations (Gergen).

While intellectually there has been an attempt to embrace post modernism within the discipline of community psychology, the commitment to post modernity in action has been somewhat languishing. This in part appears to stem from the historical underpinnings of psychology and its modernist past. Australia’s discipline of psychology and, community psychology more specifically, has fought to be perceived as a science. The modern era made for a safe environment in which the discipline could explore this notion. Paradigmatically, the positivistic truth seeking ways of modernity were conducive for the discipline to dabble with these constructs and consider its identity as a science. For psychology this translated to having a subject, the attitude that there are universalities, that research is outcome driven and value free, and empirical (Gergen, 1994). The empiricists’ orientation of order and procedure has indoctrinated the way in which psychology operated as a discipline – the questions asked, research practices, even the relationships and interventions with clients. To some degree, this has remained intact, despite discourse appearing in contempt of modernity and embedded within post modernist language.

As Kvale (1994) comments,

The science of psychology was founded on a conception of individual subjects with internal souls and later internal psychic apparatuses. In a post-modern age, man is decentred; the individual subject is dissolved into linguistic structures and ensembles of relations. A question arises as to the
status of psychology as the science of the individual when the individual has been dethroned from the centre of the world (p.40).

It seems only natural then, that there is a degree of reluctance to move from the disciplines empirical roots to embrace thinking that appears antithetical to disciplinary efforts of scientific validation. Even within the circles that are more forgiving of there being thought outside empiricism (most commonly within the disciplines of community, cross cultural, feminist and critical psychologies) it became apparent through this thesis that methodologies continue to be reluctant to fully align themselves with the conventions of post modernity.

Polkinghorne (1994) reflects on the simultaneous emergence of post modernism and the psychology of practice, not as processes that have deliberately supported the emergence of the other, but rather, that the psychology of practice emerged naturally and in accordance with post modernist principles,

Postmodernism and the psychology of practice have been separate neither having much direct influence on the other. Postmodernism is a reflection of a general feeling of the miscarriage of the modernist project. Postmodern ideas have found expression in cultural productions and philosophic treatises. The psychology of practice is a response to the desire to serve people in mental distress in the most beneficial way. The psychology of practice is expressed in the various performances of skilled practitioners and their communications about what they have found to be helpful therapeutic interventions. Although these two movements have developed independently, they have come to similar understandings about the characteristics of the human realm and about epistemology. The psychology of practice, although not self-consciously postmodern, demonstrates the effectiveness of a discipline using post modern principles (p.162).

It is somewhat alarming then, that while practice has taken on postmodernist values through subconscious means, this has not occurred within the disciplines
research efforts. These processes have tended to be void in academia where the effort remains, even within community psychology, to employ reductionistic and modernist research practices within its study of community and communities. It appears counterintuitive that psychological research has not also emerged steeped in postmodernism as has been the case with psychologist–client interaction. In line with Polkinghorne’s (1994) position, it would be hoped that within community psychology in particular that the psychology of research, too, is in accordance with post modern science. With community psychology values which claim to be embedded in notions of justice, empowerment, cultural sensitivity and awareness, postmodernity as the underlying epistemology for psychological research practice presents itself as natural and fitting, and implies an ethic in the motivation behind psychology as a discipline (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). A modernist, truth seeking position presents itself as oxymoronic. Searching for generalisable truths within communities removes the joy in working with communities – these are complex, uncertain and exciting spaces, conceptualizing them in wearing modernist lenses risks reductionism and linearity. Strong parallels can be drawn between Polkinghorne’s epistemology of practice and the epistemology of community psychology research. The evolving paradigm that has emerged is the basis of this thesis.

2.1.3. Contextualism

As introduced in the Prologue, Peppers (1942) Four World Hypotheses give an account of the various ways in which knowledge is corroborated, namely, formism, mechanism, organicism and the topic of this discussion, contextualism. The Four World Hypotheses are summarised in the following Table 1 by Dokecki (1996) who considered the hypotheses in terms of how they relate to the discipline of community to psychology;

| Table 1. Dokecki’s interpretation of Pepper’s Four World Hypotheses as they relate to psychology |
|---|---|
| **Scope of Enquiry** | **Quantitative (impersonal)** | **Qualitative (personal)** |
| 45 |
Particular attention in Dokecki’s (1996) theorising is the role of Mechanism and Contextualism in the direction that community psychology currently and should aspire. He compared the approaches of qualitative and quantitative methods to macro and micro levels of analysis. He rationalised that the place that community psychology should operate is in the domain of contextualism, moving towards an approach that focuses on worldview analysis, which captures the ‘personal’ at the macro level. Somewhat paradoxically, community psychology has tended to conduct its research more mechanistically, attempting to conceptualise issues at a micro level through quantitative methods for instance through the use of experimental and functional studies (Dokecki). As discussed in the introduction, the qualities of mechanism are appealing to the discipline as it has struggled with constructing a scientific identity, hence, while there may be contextualist ‘speak’ it the disciplinary research tends to resemble mechanism.

Building on the argument for the adoption of a contextualist episteme, the contextualist hypothesis marries well with post modernism and provides a safe exploratory space for the community psychologist (or social scientist more generally) to position their work. Garfinkle (1967) poses contextualism to be the most suitable for the behavioural sciences. The flexibility and richness that can be developed from a contextualist analysis enables complexity in research to be acknowledged as opposed to stifled or reduced to ‘data’.

Burnstein (1992) in his paper entitled, *The Resurgence of Pragmatism* warns of the dilemma that many post modernists may face in beginning to dichotomise research and lapse into binary thinking. He poses pragmatism (contextualism) as a means of becoming comfortable with the discomfort that tends to accompany uncertainty.
and ambiguity – characteristics of post modernism. Contextualism (or pragmatism) posits that all inquiry and knowledge is open to criticism. Knowledge, instead of being positioned to stand the test of time is acceptable of fallibility and open to change (Payne, 1996). Contextualism is “the act with and in the setting” (Payne, p.189) and recognises the forever changing and complex nature of the world. Events and social movements are associated and linked, from this meaning is gained from appreciating these interconnections as opposed to the act (e.g. event or social movement) in isolation. Pepper (1942) argues that the search for knowledge is a process that begins with claims embedded in common sense or ‘dubitanda’ meaning claims to be doubted. The process of learning is therefore exactly that, a process, in which through cognitive refinement, common sense claims can be developed (Payne). Pepper posits that there are two forms of knowledge confirmation, namely structural corroboration and multiplicative corroboration. Pragmatists/contextualists conceptualise corroboration as being structural as opposed to positivists deeming multiplicative as being the sole means of confident cognitive refinement. Payne nicely summarises Peppers questioning of the positivists understanding of knowledge refinement, stating,

> a person which is to propose that data are the only reliable form of knowledge must have a hypothesis as to why this position is held. The grounds for any such argument could not be based on data, by only on some hypothesis about the world. Thus we arrive at structural corroboration and world hypothesis (p.182).

### 2.2. Deconstruction Tool: Causal Layered Analysis

#### 2.2.1. The Case for a ‘New’ Deconstruction Framework

While community psychology’s rhetoric reflects dealing with varying levels of analysis and intervention, this approach is still languishing. A number of meta-analyses have indicated that the individual orientation of clinical psychology is still strong in community psychology, furthermore, attempts that reconceptualise
theory and practice at other levels beyond the individual, has not been very pronounced (Martin, Lounsbury & Davison, 2004; Speer, Dey, Griggs, Gibson, Lubin, & Hughey, 1992). This research was inherently interested at exploring the deeper, more fundamental issues of worldview, values and mythology. Accordingly there was a need to identify an alternative methodology that catered for exploring such complexity. Traditionally, social psychological analysis of community has been steeped in a similar paradigm of contextualism and post modernist critique – much like this research. The means of deconstruction however while rich in breadth have lacked depth, in response an alternative methodology, namely Causal Layered Analysis CLA (Inayatullah, 2004), a futurist methodology was employed. Given the post modern ontology, a framework for deconstructing data that aligned itself with the underpinnings of post modernity was critical. Of particular importance was that the deconstructive approach provided the flexibility to abate from purely deconstructing the individual, permitting the research process to explore the deeper more complex relationships and interactions of the individual, the group, and the context simultaneously as opposed to separate disconnected entities. Adopting a deconstructive approach capable of handling the many layers of complexity was particularly significant to the development of this thesis.

CLA is used in futures research, but it also provides an integrative framework for deconstructing qualitative data (Inayatullah, 2004). The approach is similar to the ecological perspective of community psychology or the nested systems of Bronfenbrenner (1979) as it is used to examine data at multiples levels (litany, social/structural, worldview and myth). Similarly, the use of levels in analysis is similar to Reiff’s (1968) call for community psychology to look at the person, family, groups, organizations, communities and societies, which is standard fare in community psychological textbooks. The CLA analysis also addresses community psychologists’ call for more worldview analysis (e.g., Bishop, Sonn, Drew & Contos, 2002; Dokecki, 1996; Sarason, 1981) and the use of myths has similarities to Rappaport’s (1993,1995) work on narratives.
The use of CLA as an analytical framework in this thesis is threefold. The first, and of lesser importance, is to recommend CLA as a useful tool for community psychologists. The second is that CLA can be used metaphorically to add a vertical dimension to understanding community and society. The myth and worldview analyses of CLA make it different to approaches such as those advocated by Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005), and by Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2007). What characterize both of these approaches are abstract and rational analyses of social systems. In saying that, the intention is not to create ‘straw persons’ in this argument, but what CLA introduces are emotional aspects of community life. Methods such as CLA provide insight into aspects of social functioning that is an essential part of any analysis of social and community life. Finally, CLA is one approach to understanding how we can deconstruct the complexity of rural community life. The techniques of analysis at varying levels are not new and comparable methods have been outlined such as conditional matrices and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). With similar theoretical parallels to a range of community psychological theory, the approach marks a welcome synthesis of positions. As Bourke (2001) reflects “Awareness of context and construction is a step forward towards changing the way we understand, respond to and address social problems. The common theme, of course, is that each needs to be reconstructed in order for them to be addressed more successfully” (p.90). Similarly, grappling with multidisciplinary issues like rural sustainability requires a method of exploration that enables us to systematically unpack the complexity.

2.2.2. The Layers

The top level, Litany is the agreed upon unquestioned and overt ‘reality’. The Litany includes social and environmental events and actions that are there for all to see and require little or no analysis. At the Social Structural Level, the social and institutional factors that influence social interactions are identified. The data of the Litany are questioned at this Level. However, “the language of questioning does not contest the paradigm within which the issue is framed, but remains obedient to it” (Inayatullah, 2004, p.12) and in this way, the two Levels become paradoxically
reinforcing. This is significant as paradox is sustained and reinforced discursively.
Two other Levels are Discourse/Worldviews and Myth/Metaphor. These latter two levels are seen as the more fundamental social understandings and meaning that are given to social phenomena. Discourse/worldview draws on the deeper linguistic and cultural discourses that “do more than cause or mediate the issue, but constitute it” (Inayatullah, p.12). They are fundamental cultural understandings that give meaning to the world around us. Myth/Metaphor are the deeper, often preconscious held ideologies, and discursive assumptions of an issue. The generation of myth is critical to understanding the complexity of rural community life in Australia. Inayatullah (2004) argued that social change comes through changing underlying Worldviews and Myth/Metaphors as he saw it that when people tend to conceptualise and attempt to solve problems at the Litany and Social Structural Levels it would result in failure.

While these levels are arbitrary divisions of seamless social action and interaction, they do provide useful tools for understanding people’s discourses. While CLA was designed for futures research it has been used for social research (e.g., Wildman, 2004). Critical to the analysis is the researcher analysing up and down the causal layered levels. This makes for a more coherent and deeper story from the data. Significantly, while the methods name implies linearity and causality between the layers, this is not the intention of the approach. The focus is on the interaction and complexity within and between the layers of analysis.

CLA as a deconstruction method provides a flexible framework for in-depth analysis (Inayatullah, 2004). CLA is a post-structuralist futurist methodology, which uniquely considers the ‘vertical’ as opposed to the horizontal. The methodology’s focus is in identifying the depth of scenarios, problems or settings as opposed to their breadth (Inayatullah). Exploring the depth aids in the process of understandings of our past, current and potentially the drivers of our future. This analytical method poses a different paradigm for conceptualising in depth the complexity of study scenarios. Scenarios are analysed according to four different yet interconnected layers. The
layers force the researcher to consider the research scenarios according to different parameters or foci. Doing so encourages a process that attempts to get to the root of the research scenario. This particular paradigm sees it as being related to issues of mythology, metaphor, worldview and discourse. This is not to suggest that the analysis is purely aimed at unveiling the deeper levels of analysis or that it marks these layers as the interpretive pinnacle, rather, it is in line with the episteme that sees the less candid facets of our being, such as our worldview or the mythologies or stories that are ingrained in our cultures and communities, as being central to understanding culture. The other layers of the analysis are equally as critical in the sense that they can be conceptualised as not only windows to the deeper levels, but also aid to identify the social structures and day to day realities that are often so entrenched that they fail to be explicitly recognised, nor their relevance appreciated. This analytical method encourages the researcher to tease apart seemingly simple problems, processes of settings with the aims of understanding and appreciating their complexity (Inayatullah, 2004).

While the language of CLA is somewhat different from that of community psychology, its underpinnings are similar as are the layers. Thus in referring to a post-structuralist perspective Inayatullah (2004) reflected,

the move to poststructuralism ... should not be at the expense of data–orientation or meaning–oriented research and activism. Indeed, data is seen in the context of meanings, within the context of epistemes (or knowledge parameters that structure meanings; for example, class, gender, the interstate system), and myths and metaphors that organize the deep beliefs, the traumas and transcendence that over time define identity — what it means to be. CLA does not argue for excluding the top level of the iceberg ... or bottom–of–the–sea analysis; rather, all levels are required and needed for fulfilling — valid and transformative — research. Moreover, in this loop of data–meaning–episteme–myth, reconstruction is not lost. Action is embedded in epistemology (p. 2).
This method then, offers the opportunity to observe farming communities in a holistic fashion by deconstructing discourse at different ecological levels, and then reconstructing the analysis. The process has much of the characteristics of the ‘participant conceptualiser’ (Elias, 1994; Smith, 1983) in that it allows the observation of actions and community life from the joint perspective of a participant in the community and also as an observer. It recognises the need to work in the community, rather than on the community, yet retaining an analytic stance. CLA is a method that allows the operationalising of participant conceptualising as it provides a framework for decoding culture, but still retaining contact with the culture.

CLA as data analytic technique has been used in a myriad of settings, for instance an analysis of traffic jams in Bangkok (Inayatullah, 2004). The issues were analysed at four levels. At the first level there was the obvious problem of too many vehicles. At a social/structural level, it was suggested that engineering solutions might be found to better regulate traffic flows or build new roads. At the worldview level it was recognized that industrialization, colonialism had lead to centralization, while the dominant myths were the ‘West is best’ and that ‘bigger is better’. Long term solutions related to what it meant to be Thai and a re-visioning of Thai cultural identity. The medium term solution that was suggested was to encourage a return to valuing farming as a means of decentralizing. A short term solution was to develop public transport such as had been done in Singapore.

Another example of CLA’s utility is in research by Wildman (2004) who used the CLA methodology to analyse archival data. He looked at the 339 recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. He noted that the rates of death in custody had not fallen in years since the report release in 1990. His analysis showed that the Commission did not look at the underlying myths and worldviews and found that the lack of concern about Aboriginal deaths (reflecting the colonial oppression of Aboriginal people), the lack of awareness that there were
systemic failures and lack of innovation in the prisons systems has allowed the rates of death in custody to continue unabated.

2.2.3. Adoption of Causal Layered Analysis
It is useful to compare the analytical process of conducting a CLA to that of using a microscope, with each of the layers serving as a different lens that contribute to the collective interpretation of the data being analysed. The actual analytical procedures are akin to any qualitative analysis, where for instance transcript data is analysed by extensive interpretation of the data through reading and coding (marking and taking note of what is occurring in the data). The coding in a CLA is according to the different layers or lens, where the researcher or analyst frames their interpretation according to the character of the lens. Thus, the analytical process is such that the same data is considered, but from the perspective of four different lenses (layers). Doing so aims to make for a ‘deeper’ and more holistic interpretation of the data, much like a microscope where lenses of different strength are adopted to look at the same article but according to different intensities. Each lens/layer reveals a different piece of information about the article being considered. The significance of having multiple lenses/layers is that each provide information regarding the article of interest where no one lens is superior to the other and where the power of the approach comes from the collective story gained from interpretation of the one article according to all of the levels. Once the analysis is completed, the interest then is in pulling together all of the lenses to gather a more holistic understanding of the data. The process of coding and pulling together helps in identifying what occurs on the surface level, what people say and how they understand it, and also what underpins what is it they say and feel, due to influences such as worldview and community mythologies. What makes CLA so useful is that it acts as a structure for pulling together multiple analytical methods, where typically analysis may only focus on one of these.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

As mentioned, each of the layers in a CLA have a specific interpretive interests which tend to relate to other, more familiar analytical methods. These analytical similarities have been summarised in the following table (Table 2);

**Table 2. Comparisons between causal layers and the direction of other analytical methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal layer</th>
<th>Analysis causal layer is akin to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Litany</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Structural</td>
<td>Bronfenbrenners (1979) Ecological Nested System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldview/ Discourse</td>
<td>Discourse Analysis (e.g. Burr, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth Metaphor</td>
<td>Metaphor Analysis (e.g. Lakoff &amp; Johnsonn, 1980)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Noteworthy is the nature of the Worldview/Discourse Level where the analysis of discourse is not geared in favour of a semiotic interpretation of text, rather, its interest is in the meaning that people hold in their discourse.

The first layer/lens is the Litany. The litany considers the surface level issues and is akin to conducting a thematic analysis whereby you look for common or irregular themes.

The second layer/lens is the social structural. At the social structural level interest is in identifying social processes, interactions, structures or relationships. Essentially, the focus is in identifying the context in which people live and is akin to other analyses or models such as Bronfenbrenners (1979) Ecological Systems which is interested explicitly in indentifying specific practices or processes that make the world that people live in.

The third layer/lens is the worldview/discourse level. This lens/layer focuses at identifying two factors, the language and the discourse that people employ when talking about a particular issue or their world more generally, and building on this, how what they say and how they say it helps depict their perspective or worldview. Worldview relates to peoples value systems or belief systems that shape how they...
see things and response to things. Their worldview in turn is shaped and responsive to what happens around them. Analysis using this lens is akin to conducting a discourse analysis which looks at identifying what it is that people say and what it appears to mean to them.

The fourth layer/lens is the myth/metaphor level. This layer is interested in identifying metaphors and stories about the topic of analysis. Conducting the analysis at this level is akin to conducting a metaphor analysis, by looking for and coding instances where metaphors are used in the transcript, or for symbols in the language or the stories that are relayed by participants in the transcripts (Lakoff & Johnsonn, 1980).

2.2.4. Conceptual Considerations

The term causal is potentially misleading in that it implies that the connection of the layers imply causality, rather the method itself should be considered a metaphor, Inayatullah (2004) reflects,

Freud and Jung wrote as if they were providing descriptions that accurately reflected inner workings of the psyche; Rogers as if he were describing the actual operations of a substantial self; and Skinner, as if the mechanisms of learning he presented were precise descriptions of real human dynamics. Within postmodern epistemology, these systems are reinterpreted as models or metaphors that can serve as heuristic devices or as possible cognitive templates for organizing client experience (p. 155).

In this thesis, rather than following the processes of the CLA as a literally causal and explanatory tool (within a modernist framework CLA runs the risk of being interpreted as such) the levels are presented as metaphors themselves. Each of the levels can be thought of as providing an analytical framework, each with its own paradigm. Significantly, these levels are not discrete; rather they interplay to tell a holistic story of the issues and themes that emerge through the analysis. It is...
through considering each of the levels paradigms and how they relate to each other that a holistic and complex analysis can be conducted. Inayatullah (2004) also recommends the use of what he has termed a deconstruction toolbox. That approach lays out a series of conceptual questions that can be used to structure the analytical process. The tool box consists of deconstruction, genealogy (considering the history of paradigms), distance (process which allows for critique of the present), alternative pasts and futures (recognising the fundamental influence that the past has on the future) and reordering knowledge (considering the stages that make up history) (Inayatullah). The Tool Box while informative appears to make the process of conducting the CLA reductionistic. The value of conducting the CLA is in the way that it prompts the research to consider a particular issue or setting according to alternative frames of reference, moving from the overt through to more subconscious levels of worldview and mythology which underpin every action. Adopting the Tool Box forces the analysis to be outcome driven (answering specific questions) as opposed to process driven (responsive to the data and the findings that emerge through the analysis). Focussing on the analytical process makes for an analysis that is responsive to the findings that emerge, the analytical process becomes iterative and self perpetuating in the sense that it is the data and the findings that drive the formation of future questions and future analysis. The CLA holds no preconceptions regarding what will emerge (as opposed to the Deconstruction Tool Box) rather it suggests frames of reference, in terms of the layers which act as conceptual prompts, focussing on analytical depth as opposed to breadth.

Another assumption of this methodology is that the research is grounded through a process whereby the community determines the nature of the questions being addressed through consultation in a scoping phase. It is also assumed that contexts will vary and that description of the context must be part of the research process. Generalisability is not assumed to be found in abstracted social phenomena, but in the interplay of social phenomena and the context which the social phenomena are part of.
2.3. Reconceptualising the Researcher – Participant Relationship

In response to Huygens (1995) reflection that “we became a discipline guided by convention rather than any explicit connection between our theory and our practice” (p.6) it is time for community psychology to critically consider this disjuncture. The emerging research paradigm builds on the claims of several theorists who have critically considered the role of what loosely could be termed the practitioner. Note that characteristic of each of these positions to be discussed is an avoidance of dichotomy. This structure implies and attempts to absolve the risk of a power hierarchy which can result from dualism. The generative theorist posed by Gergen (1978) described the theorist whose interest is in developing the public good through theory development. The inquiry itself focused on a set of chosen values that underpinned the process. Schön’s (1983, 1987) reflective practitioner considered the relationship between the use and generation of knowledge. He argued beyond the positivist position of “technical rationality” (Dokecki, 1992, p. 27) recognising the value and imperative of not only knowledge informing practice but practice in turn informing knowledge. This is to a degree a challenging position, positioning an acceptability in the interplay between two concepts, knowledge and practice, that were until then generally conceptualised as dichotomous, and unidirectional in influence. Dokecki (1992) posed a post-positivist science for psychology based on the notion of generative-reflective practice. A fitting arena in which this can be considered is in terms of the relationships that develop within the qualitative interview setting. More specifically, a new research domain is emerging which plays on a new research relationship between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘actor’ (participant) and builds on the theorizing of Bishop, Sonn, Drew and Contos (2002) who proposed a research paradigm for community psychology in Australia who posit the research process as,

a reflective interactive-generative one similar to Dokecki’s, 1992, “reflective generative practice” in which the conceptual domain is used to inform reflection upon the substantiative domain, and the substantiative domain is
used to reflect upon the conceptual domain. In this process, epistemology and concepts are developed incrementally (p. 498).

Significantly, this new process considers theory and iteratively conceptualizes it in the tacit knowledge domain. Tacit knowledge is described well by Altheide and Johnson, (1994) as including:

what actors know, take for granted, and leave unexplicated in specific situation things that may have been “learned” in formal or semi-formal sense at some early time, both substantiatively and procedurally. Tacit knowledge may also include deep structures from the emotional memory of past generations, enabling responses and actions deeply ingrained in human emotional and physical survival (p. 492).

Similarly to Bishop et al.s. process of “epistemological and theoretical evolution through reflecting on small emergent realizations” (p. 498) it is the setting which this process takes place and the transition and blurred roles that make this evolving practice different. Namely, this emerging practice occurs when the conceptual emersion that takes place is not only experienced by the researcher but also by the participant engaged in the research process. Both the researcher and the participant take place in an iterative cycle between the tacit and substantive domains. While discourse may cross between theoretical and tacit, deconstruction of the issue or topic takes place within the tacit knowledge domain. During this process, the boundary between researcher and participant become blurred as both elaborate and hypothesise about the topic of discussion. Power hierarchies dissolve and a new relationship emerges. While the interaction may allude to a collaborative relationship emerging, the relationship operates at a slightly different level. The interaction is mutually empowering and based in mutual trust which makes for mutual deconstruction. Reiff (1968) speaks of the participant conceptualiser where “the researcher immerses him or herself in the substantive domain yet attempts to retain some aspect of the detached observer” (p. 498). The emerging research paradigm opts to move the researcher-participant interaction into a space where
both shift between the theoretical and substantiative domains. In unison, researcher and participant have the capacity to utilize their tacit knowledge as in unison they deconstruct the subject matter. This new space resembles Polkinghorne’s (1994) ‘psychology of practice’, where it is argued “it was the actual interactions between practitioners and clients that provided the data on which the knowledge of practice was built” (p. 146). This process of participant-researcher interaction that Polkinghorne describes was further developed in this process. The outcome being that through the process of conducting the interview, researcher and participant co-exist and exit the relationship mutually informed. Through recognizing the small differences in each others tacit knowledge, and in their theoretical knowledge, both parties have the capacity to shape each other.

This differs from the participant observer model in that the researcher is also the observed. An example of the new paradigm is best modelled in the interaction between the researcher and the actor when the traditional roles transcended typical power and conceptual hierarchies. The following is a deconstruction of an interview which demonstrates the bi-reflective nature of the interaction between actors (or researcher and participant in traditional discourse). The interview was with a Landcare catchment manager and our conversation had developed into an in-depth and critical discussion about our own processes and experiences. I was particularly interested in hearing about her thoughts on participation and collaboration. Over the course of the interview her perception of what constituted collaboration shifted as she became increasingly critical of her conceptualization. Initially collaboration was deemed:

Participant: it’s win win sort of stuff, its different groups of people or individuals or whatever that come together hopefully to collaborate on a vision or an outcome that they want and obviously it has to, you all have to be going in the same direction but, and there has to be something in it for each person.

And,
Participant: I think collaboration obviously has to be a coming together of whatever to pursue a common goal that all not just achieve what they want but that works somehow. I don’t know how to say it but you know it doesn’t necessarily have to be OK – these entities in it and all in the end got what they wanted. I would hope that it was the old group mentality that you know more heads more capacity to come to better things and that, and it should also be, yeah, egos at the door or you know pet research thing at the door and a true coming together to achieve it, its probably the way I feel, um, yeah that is probably as far as I’d get, you know, I have never really (pauses and contemplates).

Researcher: Never really experienced it?

Participant: I actually experienced it because I work with a couple of other colleagues.

At this point, the participant is beginning to shift her definition to become inclusive of herself in the context of the definition. She acknowledges that while she has participated in collaborative relationships previously, she has yet to deconstruct what this has meant. Acknowledging this absence of deconstruction, she reflected further on times she has experienced what she believes is collaboration, commenting;

Participant: ... everybody, all sorts of different people and all these farmers and we got to this site, we dug, back hoed this and we actually said, ‘right, sit under the shade of a tree’ and we did open slather, anybody could brain storm into what we should do with this paddock and this project and now, talking to you, this is my definition of collaboration, because we all had our hats on, sunscreen, we had all come from all these things, we were all at different levels, we had a probably fifty percent farming groups there. I am actually getting tingles because I can actually feel now that that’s my definition of collaboration, so no egos, no nothing and all went up there got documented and then the farmer who owned that block was
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

there that day as well, um, and we have implemented it actually...there you go, actually thank you, now I know, sorry, I am just.

Here, the actor has ‘fine-tuned’ her conceptualisation of collaboration through a process of deconstructing her tacit and experiential knowledge. The interaction between ‘researcher’ and participant begins to shift.

Researcher: I am so glad that, I guess you got a sense of resolve, or actualization about this.

Participant: yeah, well I did because you know like I said I have never actually sat still and really considered collaboration before, so bingo!...I just never thought of it, but that is actually my definition of collaboration because there was a whole range of, you know, everyone gets hung up that you have got to be technical, you know scientific based and everything else and yeah it was great and no kidding the confidence that it gave that farmer was, was outstanding and in fact now he is actually a champion of saltland pastures...so now I am actually, now I am back to my own little things because, because that’s collaboration and that actually is capacity building that we have all gone ‘what the hell is this? What does it all mean?’ So if I add to my sense of achievements that’s a biggie, sorry. TAPE TURNED OFF

For a brief moment, she is overwhelmed by her realization and begins to cry. I gesture to turn off the tape and she nods. We sit for a few moments, both overcome by the conversation. Here, she has entered into an in-depth critical deconstruction of collaboration. She drew on personal experience in a manner that was based on how collaboration felt and actualized, contrasting with her initial static definition. On her prompt I turn on the tape recorder as she comments that it is important that our conversation is recorded. She has drawn on her rich tacit knowledge to conclude on her conceptualization of collaboration. Following this realization, she announces the beneficial impact of her deconstruction of her tacit knowledge,
Participant: It actually, really, yeah I might have actually achieved what I set out to do five or six years ago! (She laughs) So that’s really good. I will go home now and just feel a bit happy within myself for a couple of days!”

The conventional notion of participant and researcher is blurred, as the research process can also be a process of discovery for the participant involved in the researchers’ inquiry. This contrasts to the traditional research paradigm where the researcher is the sole acquirer of knowledge. Thus, the emerging ‘researcher’ ‘participant’ participatory relationship permits a setting where the ‘participant’ is also ‘researcher’. This new participatory space encourages the deconstruction of the participants personal truths which has the propensity to result in moments of epiphany made possible through a process of iterative reflection. Schöns (1983, 1987) notion of ‘reflection-on-action’ is a fitting example of the cognitive processes that are encouraged through the emerging deconstructive researcher – participant interaction. ‘Reflection-on-action’ is a process of the individual becoming aware that there may be a better cognitive fit for their current process of understanding.

As a serendipitous and coincidental triangulation of this emerging position, particularly in reference to the beneficial impact that epiphany through tacit knowledge deconstruction can posit, I give the following account. I was concerned about the impact that the interview may have had on my participant and when I returned to Perth I spoke in confidence to my supervisor and another PhD student about this issue. I did not use names, and I refrained from giving any identifying information, but my description of the events of the afternoon was detailed and rich. We came to the conclusion that I would email and keep contact to gauge whether my impact was beneficial or detrimental. A few months later, the peer that I spoke to sent me an email. Her house mate had attended a forum on community participation and raved for some time about one particular speaker. A woman from a Wheatbelt town that was heavily involved in Landcare gave her take on true collaboration. She described how people from all walks of life – politicians, bureaucrats, landholders, and land managers met at a community members farm
and had a hands on discussion about an issue they had on the property. Everyone sat under the shade of a tree and passed sunscreen around and chatted, and shared and reflected. My peer, realising this speaker was previously my participant, commented that I should be reassured that my participant was fine, if anything the interview process had been of benefit to her.

What is somewhat disappointing is that there is a notable absence in methodological literature regarding the fundamental processes of qualitative methods, which is essentially the act of listening. Nor is there any critical reflection or deconstruction of the relationship between participant and researcher within the research setting. This in not to pose fault at the individual (participant) but rather calls to question the nature of our social processes and the possible failure to value reflective processes. Had she reflected in action she may have had the ‘epiphany – in - practice’ rather than an ‘epiphany – on- practice’.

2.4. **Issues of Research Trustworthiness**

Given the post modernist research paradigm posed, there is similar need to reconceptualise the way in which the credibility of the research process and its findings are assessed. Traditionally, research is considered in terms of its reliability and validity, but these parameters are not contextually appropriate for the nature of this research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer an alternative paradigm in line with this research ontology. Specifically, their paradigm is naturalistic and the ultimate aim is in assuring trustworthiness of the research. Akin to this paradigm is a new set of contextually appropriate terms which offer a slightly different take on the more traditional means of research assessment criteria, these are summarised as follows in Table 3;
Table 3. Comparisons of positivist and naturalist terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positivist Paradigm Terms</th>
<th>Naturalistic Paradigm Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal Validity</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Validity</td>
<td>Transferability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Dependability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Conformability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Credibility is concerned with exactly that, ensuring that the research process and findings result in credible outcomes. There are several strategies that are deemed as aiding to ensure credibility of the research. These include, but are not limited to; prolonged engagement in the research setting, persistent observation, triangulation of data, and the use of multiple investigators (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With transferability it is recognised that research is conducted in time and space, and is in line with the conventions of contextualism. The inquirer “can provide only a rich description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 316). Dependability addresses the assumption of universals and reflects the extent to which findings will be reproducible across contexts. In a contextual and social constructed world, the issue of dependability is of lesser concern.

“[Dependability] is a requirement if generalisability is our goal, but is not if we have other reasons for doing research.” (Willis, 2007, p. 218). Confirmability, which works beyond the positivist position of assuring objectivity of science, recognises the influence that the researcher has in the research process while also appreciating the need for assuring the findings are a suitable reflection of ‘reality’. Credibility can be assured through several methods, including triangulation of data, and keeping a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba). Similarly there are practices which are suggested as a means ensuring the trustworthiness of each of these which is adapted from Lincoln and Guba (see Table 4).
Table 4. Means of assessing Trustworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Critique</th>
<th>Means of Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Credibility      | - Field immersion through prolonged engagement and observation.  
|                   | - Triangulation of data and process through analysis via multiple means.  
|                   | - Peer debriefing and intensive supervision as a forum for collective deconstruction.  
|                   | - Analysis of ‘negative’ cases through examining cases that are contrary to the central emerging argument. Negative cases act to attempt to refute the emergent theory.  
|                   | - Referential adequacy.  
|                   | - Member checks through discussion and confirmation of data interpretation with participants.  
|                   | - Research Audit.  |
| Transferability  | - Thick description where vivid and detailed accounts of process are given to supplement ‘pure’ data sources.  |
| Confirmability   | - Research Audit.  |

2.5. Method

The research was mixed methodology, including a desk top documentary analysis, observation through immersion in the communities and reflective in-depth intensive interviews. Collectively, these research practices allowed for a more holistic interpretation and analysis. The following is an overview of these data collection processes that where applied in both of the research settings.

2.5.1. Archival Analysis

An archival analysis was conducted prior to the commencement of intensive interviews and observation through field activities and emersion in the community.
Newspaper articles, policy documents and scientific reports were analysed to inform the themes that served to prompt the interview development of the deliberative sample.

2.5.2. Observation and Immersion

First hand interaction with people outside of the interview setting is recognised as a highly valuable means of developing a more comprehensive understanding of issues and a more holistic research process (Gallant, 2008; Tedlock, 2000; Pellat, 2003). Immersion in the community enabled the opportunity to observe the more subtle social idiosyncrasies, customs and traditions of the towns and regions visited. Observation and engagement in social settings proved to be a critical component of the research, made only possible by living in the communities ranging from seven days to a month in duration. Small field trips were made to Whealtbelt towns on 3 occasions, resulting in a total duration in the region for 6 weeks. All field trips and additional Perth based and telephone interviews were carried out in 2006.

Interviews were with dryland farmers, Government and non-Government departments and organisations and scientists. Two field trips were made to Kununurra. Trip 1 was carried out with my primary supervisor. The trip was 6 days in duration and aimed at scoping themes and issues within the community. Interviews were conducted with irrigators, Government and non-Government department and organisations, and scientists. Trip 2 was carried out independently two months later. The trip was 4 weeks in duration. All interviews and field trips were conducted in 2007. The geographic domains of the research locations are illustrated in Figure 1.
Immersion and observation within the community was purposive. It provided the opportunity to observe and deconstruct distinctive social processes that are embedded in the culture of the community. These social idioms and customs are
not necessarily raised or expressed explicitly within the interview setting as they may require a more natural context for them to emerge. Alternatively these customs can also be so ingrained that people are unaware of their convention. In Kununurra my personal experience saw that 4 weeks was the maximum length of continued stay possible without becoming too heavily ingrained in the social fabric. This was marked by non-malicious rumours circulating in town about me namely general curiosities regarding a ‘new face’ in town. Similarly for the Wheatbelt, the maximum continued length of time possible in the towns was 2 weeks, in this context it was marked by strong community protection of my livelihood as an independent female traveller. Naturally these maximum stays are a consequence of the context, size and dynamic of towns of residence. Becoming embroiled in the community runs the risk that I too, am blinded through ‘embeddedness’ and this was monitored carefully. Journal writing and personal reflection along with in-depth supervision was critical. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this risk of becoming too embedded within a community “going native” (p. 307) which can come as an affect of over rapport.

The observation itself was through active participation in the communities. Active participation is characterised by actively seeking “to do what other people are doing, not merely to gain acceptance, but to more fully learn the cultural rules for behaviour” (Spradley, 1981, p. 60).

### 2.5.3. Intensive Interviews

The primary means of data collection was through individual and small group (two to four participants) qualitative interviews. During the interviews, the actor was invited and encouraged to ask questions of the research, of themselves and of the researcher. The interview setting became one that was mutually reflective and collaborative and fundamentally, the interview process and research became the product of the interaction rather than the inquiry (please refer to the above discussion on the emerging actor – researcher participatory research paradigm).
As opposed to specific pre-determined questions, interviews were unstructured where themes served as prompts for discussion. These thematic prompts included however were not limed to the topics of; rural change, sustainability, family and agricultural history, hopes and aspirations, community/agricultural challenges and opportunities. These thematic prompts were initially developed and informed from desktop documentary analysis of grey and white literature, and an analysis of media. Over time, these prompts evolved in response to learnings from previous interviews that shaped the content of sequential interviews. Based on these thematic prompts, questions tended to be open ended which provided opportunity for detailed discussion of the participants’ response (Charmaz, 2006). The interview approach was therefore iterative and responsive to the emerging theory. Through this method, what emerges is an extension of Bishop, Drew, Sonn and Contos (2001) iterative generative reflective practice. All interviews were conversational in nature which made for a relaxed and responsive interview setting and rapport was consistently quick to develop. The interview style was intensive. Intensive interviews are characterised by,

eliciting each participant’s interpretation of his or her experience the interviewer seeks to understand the topic and the interview participant…the interviewer is there to listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond. Hence, in this conversation the participant does most of the talking (Charmaz, pp. 27-28).

Significant to the character of intensive interviews is the type of interaction that is facilitated by the interviewer. As opposed to more traditional interview styles whereby verbal (e.g. ‘yes I see’) or non-verbal (e.g. nodding) communication from the interviewer implies an understanding of the topic being discussed, in the intensive interview, the interviewer encourages deeper exploration of their utterances (Charmaz, 2006). It provided the opportunity for the participant themselves to best convey or correct how they articulate their perceptions, feelings or expressions. Building on this, it is encouraged that the researcher also actively seek clarification of what they hear and interpret during the interview (Charmaz;
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Lofland & Lofland, 1984). The interview is not ‘normal’ conversation, it is reactive, energetic and deeply thoughtful and depends on the immediate analytical and interpretive skills of the interviewer. Table 5, developed from Charmaz (2006), provides a brief comparison between the intensive interview and the conventional conversational interview. It should be noted, that the success of the interview it heavily dependent on the non-judgemental, encouraging and respectful manner of the researcher, and rests on rapport.
Table 5. Comparison of conventional conversational interviews to intensive interviews based on Charmaz (2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventions of conventional conversational interviews</th>
<th>Conventions of the intensive interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpret what is uttered by the participant as data</td>
<td>Enquire more deeply to learn more from what is uttered from the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wait for natural pause or break in the conversation</td>
<td>Stop conversation mid flow to explore particular aspects of interest and propensity to change the impact of the interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation generally does not occur at the time of the interview</td>
<td>Ask for more detail or explanation and explore the participants responses during the interview as validation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally a reluctance to explore further based on fears of intrusion</td>
<td>Enquire about feelings and emotions that surround the topic of conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to keep to the structure of the interview survey or guide</td>
<td>Refer back to previous utterances in the conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to commit to the questions of the interview survey or guide</td>
<td>Change the topic of discussion in response to the conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency to remain emotionally removed from the interview and interviewee</td>
<td>Emotionally invest in the interview through validation of the interviewee's endeavours (e.g. humanity, achievement, effort)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency for interview survey or guide to be strictly adhered to</td>
<td>Observation used to shape the content and direction of the interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect the participant and express gratitude</td>
<td>Respect the participant and express gratitude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The value in this type of interview style is also seen in the positive impact it has on the participant. The structure of the interview positions the participant as the expert, their role is to aid the researcher in accurately interpreting their stories, views and emotions (Charmaz, 2006). They have the capacity to tell, share in whatever way they feel best conveys their interests (e.g. a tour of the farm or region, engaged in farming activities, over breakfast) all conducted in an environment which is safe and familiar.

Duration of interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to just over 5 hours. The variation in interview length was a function of participant availability and also the nature of the interview. For instance, some participants suggested the interview be conducted over the course of their working day allowing me to experience first hand what they do, others provided a tour of their community and farming area.
2.5.4. Parameters for Participation

Participants were current or previous residents of a central Wheatbelt town or the town of Kununurra. Their occupation could include: family or corporate farmer or manager, catchment manager (volunteer, non-Government organization or formal state catchment authority), Government or non-Government authority or volunteer organization that dealt with community or physical environment support or sustainability. The criteria was purposively broad to encourage participation from a range of perspectives on community sustainability. Participants were sourced through snowballing methods, which proved to be highly successful. Initial contacts were made through State Government Departmental staff, Landcare and voluntary organizations. These initial contacts gave referrals in confidence. These referrals were subsequently contacted and invited to participate in the research. Informed consent was given verbally post discussion of participatory issues. The majority of participants were familiar with interview and research processes, either by conducting research themselves, or previously having been a participant. This was in part due to the occupations of participants (e.g. some were Government departmental staff) or had participated in other research due to a high prevalence of research (mainly biophysical) in the regions. Discussing ethical issues such as consent and confidentiality was to the majority of participants an expected procedural nuance.

In the Wheatbelt, 52 people participated in the research (see Table 6), totalling 41 interviews. The numbers are not equal as in some interviews multiple family members, or departmental staff were present. In Kununurra, 35 people participated, totalling 38 interviews. This was in part due to some people participating on multiple occasions, providing accounts and descriptions at different times or year, from different roles or perspectives or offering comment on additional topics. Only twice were multiple family members present during interviews, which in itself conveys an interesting difference in the demography and social climate of farming between Kununurra and the Wheatbelt towns. For the
entire project the refusal rate was two. Both refusals were from Kununurra. The reasons provided were due to busy farming schedules and a language barrier where English was not their first language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Number of refusals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheatbelt</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kununurra</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.5.5. Issue of Anonymity and Confidentiality in Small Towns Western Australia (WA) is a unique setting to conduct research due mainly to its remoteness. The implications of this are many, ranging from budgetary restraints to issues of anonymity and confidentiality. This issue is prevalent for all rural research settings but is complicated in WA due to a ‘regionality’ that emerges in some rural areas in response to isolation (geographic or conceptual) from city or regional centres. There is a powerful interconnectedness within regions. For instance, it was not uncommon for participants to have heard from other community members who I had spoken to and who I was going to speak to in town, to the extent that some were aware of my itinerary from social interaction with others in town.

Prior to commencement of the interview, there is a responsibility of the researcher to acknowledge their awareness of this complexity with the participant, and to pose mechanisms in which possible anxieties regarding potential breaches of confidentiality could be managed. Hence, the management employed in this research was that anonymity was assured, however the interview content could not be guaranteed to be in confidence. This was due to the necessary iterative design of the project and the interconnectedness and close network of the communities which were sampled. A concerted effort is made to remove information that may lead to the identification of the participant, pseudonyms are used on occasion. It was felt that these parameters set realistic expectations regarding anonymity and confidentiality in research engagement, the grounded research process and thesis
composition. Participants were aware of these parameters and given a participant information sheet that gave a brief overview of the research. Separate interview sheets were constructed in each research setting (Wheatbelt and Kununurra) due to differences in the research settings and subsequent research focus. Consent within qualitative research practices, particularly those that adopt unstructured interviews have received considerable criticism, the central argument being that the expectation of consent is unreasonable given the nature of interaction as emergent and reactionary. Consequently, it is unreasonable to request consent to a process which is largely unknown (Price, 1996) or that seeking consent runs the risk of being perceived as legalistic and thus confronting (Rossiter, Walsh-Bowers & Prilleltensky, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In light of these issues associated with traditional practices of seeking consent and the nuances that come with conducting qualitative methods, process consent was adopted. Process consent is responsive to the reflexive nature of the qualitative interview, offering consent to be a process as opposed to a means to an ends (Smythe & Murray, 2000) whereby consent is negotiated throughout the research duration, compared to solely the interview (Grafanaki, 1996; McLeod, 1996; Munhall, 1989). Doing so also captures the participants continued involvement post interview, for instance in terms of their interview transcripts, notes, observations or analysis made by the researcher. Process consent therefore also enables the participant to clarify, or withdraw from the research post interview.
Chapter Three

3. Ethical Considerations

Chapter Three, Ethical Considerations aims to consider in more depth some of the challenges of conducting research in rural communities. Further, as introduced in Chapter Two Research Paradigm, conducting ethical qualitative methods requires additional thought. There are five tenets of the more traditional ethical research paradigm that were ill-fitting with this research. The first being the assumption of the objective researcher, second the assumption of espoused theories of ethics, third the assumption of participant as data, fourth the assumption of one-off consent and fifth the assumption that ethical obligations cease at the end of the formalised research process. These assumptions are questioned and solutions to these challenges posed.

3.1. Problematic Assumptions

Increasingly the social sciences are critically considering the inner workings of how the discipline conducts its qualitative methods (Elliott, 2005). Different paradigms of qualitative research are being distinguished and appreciated as opposed to a Unitarian qualitative approach in which qualitative methods have been dichotomised against its quantitative cousin. For instance, there is a distinction between qualitative researchers who perceive the interview as a resource as opposed to the interview process itself as also conceptualised as part of the enquiry (Hammersley, 2003; Harris, 2003). This is an important distinction and alludes to the aim of this Chapter, that being considering the research process whereby the researcher is also part of the inquiry and learning process. One of the central arguments of this thesis calls for ‘the researcher’ to critically explore their role in the research process, further developing the position that no research practice is

---

3 This research received ethical approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee
objective. The complexity of conducting ethical research is heightened with qualitative methods due to the at times deeply interpersonal process of discovery between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘participant’ or ‘actor’. Due to this relationship, it becomes difficult to conceptualise the participant as data, nor does it make sense to provide a static offer of consent given the dynamism that emerges in the qualitative interview. Navigating ethical research is complex and during the process there were times that questions emerged regarding how best to practice as a researcher. Particular questions emerged out of five ethical assumptions summarised in Table 7.

Table 7. Summary of problematic assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>Critical response to assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The assumption of the objective researcher</td>
<td>It is possible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assumption of espoused theories of ethics</td>
<td>Espoused theories of ethics as opposed to theories of use? There is an apparent distinction between ethics ‘on paper’ and how to practice ethically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assumption of participant as data</td>
<td>Are participants’ data? How does the western research paradigm operate within Indigenous Australian culture: Do I have the right to ‘research’ Indigenous communities – particularly as a white female in her mid 20s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assumption of one-off consent</td>
<td>As the qualitative interview is dynamic, how does the participant know from onset what they are consenting to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assumption that ethics is obliged until the end of the formalised research process</td>
<td>What responsibilities does the researcher have with the research findings? What responsibilities does the researcher have to research participants, and for the wider community in which they are members?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 This was a particularly complex issue given the histories and impacts of European settlement are contextually critical in developing an understanding of the regional social culture. However this thesis is not exploring race and ethnicity explicitly.
3.1.1. The Assumption of the Objective Researcher

Particularly within positivist research frameworks, including disciplines within psychology, there is the assumption that the researcher is an objective entity to the research process. Diaz (2002) criticises this claim,

From a positivist perspective it is not possible to explain ‘scientifically’ (with objectivity) the origin of the questions that motivated the research. These basic questions appear as a product of a creative, mysterious, idiosyncratic thought process. As this process cannot be reduced to the rules of the scientific method and as it includes slippery elements as intuition and emotionality it is ignored altogether (p. 254).

Critical to this argument is the perception that the outcome of the research is separate from the research process. Ignoring the research journey forces a wedge between the participant and the researcher. Doing so supposes that the researcher has come about the findings independently, which effectively discredits the role of the participant and the reality that without their participation there would be no research, nor product. Furthermore, a positivist position is one that claims power over the participant, creating a research setting that conforms and reproduces dominant power structures (Diaz, 2002). Given this assertion, there is a critical need to identify the role of the researcher as an active participant in the researcher process, not only in terms of the pragmatic issues of conducting a study, but also in terms of s/he being an active participator in the creation of data. For example, as part of the role of the researcher engagement needs to be fully understood, whereby, the individual contexts of both the participant and the researcher are recognised and a new context is created through the interaction between the participant and the researcher. The assumption of the objective researcher is further challenged by the nature of the interviews. Informal intensive interviews make for a unique interview experience on the part of both the researcher and the participant. The interaction in an intensive interview fosters engagement that is
fundamentally different in the level of personal revelation and disclosure which occurs during a standard interview.

In many instances, the researcher is a relative outsider from the community in which they are engaged in research. The anonymity of the researcher contributes to a different type of interaction; most notably conversation is more free flowing and uninhibited. Hook (2007) speaks of the dynamics of listening drawing parallels between the listening of a medical practitioner with that of a psychotherapist. Importantly, the link is made in how the dynamics of both interactions results in a ‘confessional’ rapport where disclosure is candid;

The first category of psychotherapeutic power identified in the analysis, perhaps unexpectedly, was listening. Although apparently a passive and facilitative process, and while no doubt therapeutically operative, the results of the study suggested that therapeutic listening might be considered an exertive behaviour, indeed a purposeful and goal directed form of action performed by the therapist. The performance of therapeutic listening functioned as a form of inspection, a means of observing, assessing, monitoring; an auditory surveillance designed to elicit and sustain patient disclosure. Such performances seemed instrumental not only in eliciting compromising personal expositions, but in encouraging a confessional mode of exposition. Furthermore, like the doctor’s gaze, that yields knowledge and prescription of intervention on the basis of visual analysis (an imposition of discourse through the act of perception), so the attentive ear of psychotherapist brought with it a series of psychological knowledge’s and interpretations, an evaluative or diagnostic frame of intelligibility (the imposition of discourse through the act of listening) (p. 20).

This researcher – participant dynamic that emerged in the current research is akin to what Hook describes above. In this research the assumption is developed by acknowledging that interaction between researcher and participant is intertwined
and mutually dependant. The success of the interaction rests on the ‘blurred’ lines of the conversation in which the researcher is completely embedded.

Where this argument shifts from being a critique regarding the role of the researcher to one concerning ethical practice is in how this re-conceptualisation of the researcher impacts on the participant. More specifically, how research ethics guidelines are based on the assumption of the researcher as removed and objective, to, the researcher being a part of the research process. Ethical engagement with participants should acknowledge the development of the interview context between the participant and the researcher, and that it is the development of this mutual context that disclosure on part of the participant occurs more freely. Consequently, there is a responsibility on part of the researcher to acknowledge and respect that during an intensive interview there is heightened disclosure, and with that additional responsibilities associated with care of the participant and interpretation and reporting of interview content.

3.1.2. The Assumption of Espoused Theories of Ethics

Reflecting on ethics theory in the literature, particularly within the social sciences, there are central tenets which typify espoused ethical conduct within research settings and what the role and responsibilities are of the researcher. Typically, espoused theories of ethical research translate into a series of procedures that are deemed to act to ‘protect’ the participant (Smythe & Murray, 2000). These include and are not limited to the following:

- The researcher submitting an ethics proposal which is appraised critically by an external ethics board. The board can choose to approve or reject the research according to a series of ethical parameters.
- The expectation that participants give informed consent. The typical process being where the participant signs a document acknowledging that they (the participant) understand the research, their role in the research and their associated rights.
That deception is avoided and that necessary information is provided to the participant which makes for informed consent.

That there be consideration made to the participation of particular groups of people, which include and are not limited to; Indigenous people, non-English speaking participants, children, and people with physical or intellectual disabilities. These rules acknowledge the needs of such groups and aim to ensure the research acts to protect the rights of these groups of people involved in the research.

Confidentiality and privacy issues.

That conflicts of interests are attended to (Smythe & Murray).

While these can be debated, that is not the intention of this discussion on ethics. Rather, it is highlighting that when considering ethical practice, it is more worthwhile to consider ethics as a reflexive process as opposed to a set of standard parameters that are regimentally adhered to. Considering ethics reflexively, means that the parameters of the research can be determined by the researcher and the participant as opposed to by the researcher for the participant. Doing so also removes the paternalism which can be associated with protecting the participant as the power of determining how the research be conducted is negotiated as opposed to perceived as standard practice. The negotiation process need not be a formalised process in itself, rather, a discussion that commences the interview. The researcher shares with the participant the necessaries that occur with all interviews e.g. research background and intended purpose and how the researcher would like to use what he or she learns from the interview. The participant can comment or question these. So far this is standard practice. The exception being that informed consent is verbal where participants have the power over what is recorded. During several of my interviews the participant requested that the recording device be switched off and they had the power as to whether the device would be switched back on (in all cases it was).

Within psychology more generally, research ethics is considered in an intellectual way. There is however, a subtle yet pertinent distinction that needs to be made
between written expectations regarding the manner that research be conducted ethically (espoused theories) and the way that we actually act ethically (theories of use). What became particularly important in this research process were more the theories of use and the act of responding to participants needs. Theories of use, because they evolve through ‘doing’ become ‘natural’ and subconscious, are consequently very difficult to articulate. It relates to an intuitive and empathic decision making process. Although it goes beyond intuition, it is worth noting that intuition is something that tends not to be appreciated, but in reality, this tacit knowledge (Schön, 1983) is critical. Espoused theory of ethics also fails to truly capture the importance of mutual respect. This extends beyond the immediate research environment (e.g., the act of the interview for example) and to how knowledge is used by the researcher.

Possibly the most encouraging writing in the field of community psychology regarding ethics has been Prilleltensky (1990) who argued that as a discipline psychology has a moral obligation that extends its position on ethics beyond the individual to society and societal processes. He reflects that the focus of ethics is “primarily on the obligations towards the individual client in expense of proactive moral behaviour towards society at large” (p. 310). This basic premise should form the basis of ethical practice, and makes headway to the apparent gap in our ethical research practice. Hence what appears to be absent in the disciplines thinking is acknowledgement that community ethics are different from individual (or client based) ethics. The difference being that within community research we are dealing with complex and interwoven social spheres. While understand the role of community still becomes a critical component of individual research or therapy, (e.g. through considering contextual factors of the individual), with community research ethics needs to be conceptualised differently. Currently, the ethics approach adopted for community psychology is based on an individualistic framework. This marks a critical gap in the way that ethics is conceptualised and employed. The set of assumptions between individual and community based approaches are fundamentally different and so too should the ethical expectations surrounding the practices.
According to the traditional approach, there is a power differentiation between researcher/practitioner and subject/client. The most ethical and effective means of research in a community setting is with communities as opposed to on or for communities. The process of genuine engagement and partnership with communities in a research setting is the most beneficial. According to the more traditional approach of conducting research it is also the most risky as it places the researcher in a position of equal or lesser power than the traditional researcher-subject relationships would make for.

For the current research, it proved to be important to spend time living in the communities, not only for the purposes of observation, but also because the gesture was valued by those who I engaged with during the research. During interviews there was an alluded to sense that research within communities has the propensity to be fleeting and temporary act in time, with no real investment on part of the researcher. My willingness to stay in town, attend local activities, buy local produce, I later realised was perceived as an act of respect towards the community. Guerin and Guerin (2008) reflect

People living in urban areas often have more contact with strangers and are forced to deal with strangers on a regular basis. Although people in remote Australia certainly have experience in dealing with strangers, they are perhaps still used to forming stronger and more trusting relationships. This is why building relationships is so important for researchers and service providers in remote regions, since the manner of interacting is just as important as how people speak and behave (p.77).

Here Guerin and Guerin acknowledge that the social culture of communities is critical to the way that research is conducted. It is the responsibility of the researcher to adapt to the culture of the community in which they are engaging.
3.1.3. The Assumption of Participant as Data

A particularly pervasive assumption is that the participant is a data source (Smyth & Murray, 2000). Smythe and Murray argue that while for some this social construction of the participant is seen to be a dehumanising process, they see it fit that the focus of this construction be regarding the appropriate treatment of people in the research process. Namely, respecting and promoting principles of autonomy, and appreciating them as valued individuals (Smythe & Murray). This is common sense, but calls on the reflection and empathy of the researcher in order for these principles to be enacted.

An example of considering the assumption of participant as data was raised in relation to the participation of Indigenous people in the research. At the onset of this research, I was aware, but naïve of the extent of the oppression of Indigenous people in the Kimberley. I recall conversations with more senior researchers that ‘Indigenous issues’ was a topic that would naturally be a part of my project. It was said in passing that there are key people in the community that I would have to make contact with to learn about Indigenous culture and how it was ‘impacted’ on by non-Indigenous people. During my first visit to Kununurra, one of the most memorable interviews I had was with a non-Indigenous woman. The conversation completely changed the original and expected orientation of the research process. The following is an excerpt from the interview where she reflects on the impact of white people on Indigenous people.

Basically MG\textsuperscript{5} people, when the Ord irrigation scheme was established the MG people were not acknowledged, were not consulted, not compensated in any way shape or form. And going back before that when I first came here, I had to do some research which lead me to read a book by Bruce Shaw – The Land of the Pelican Dreaming – and it was about the first, pastoral settlers coming here and the atrocities that happened to MG people and the chap who told the story to Bruce Shaw – who is an anthropologist who used to be in Derby – he remembers all the

\textsuperscript{5} Miriuwung and Gajerrong traditional owners.
adult men being herded up and as a 5 year old hearing them all shot around the tree, and this happened in this neck of the woods, and a lot more like that. The Forrest River massacre, different People, but, when I first came out here, I gave a lift to a lady when I was coming to town, and she told me how her father, she watched her father being shot in the back by a police man because he wanted her mother and that is someone who only recently died, and that is how recent that history is. The last massacres took place in the ’30s in Fitzroy and atrocities have still happened since then. And then with the establishment you had that insult and then with the development of the irrigation area there are people that we relate to regularly who lived in that country at the bottom of Lake Argyle which is now drowned in the old homestead area and they, the lake started filling more quickly than they anticipated, the planners were anticipating, so they had to get off their Country with minimal notice less than a days notice, a day or two days I think it was, and those are people that are in their 50s now. And we can’t begin to think what that’s like, how you would feel. So you see this, you know Kununurra is basically, in an early settler period, its exhibiting all the processes of settlement, and that is what we are living in reality and you are conscious of it. Can we turn the tape off for a minute? TAPE TURNED OFF.

She gave me my first introduction to the ‘issues’. Prior to this my exposure to ‘the issues’ were told in a static sense, what happened as opposed to what continues to happen. Hence, what is important in her portrayal of events is how there are continual ramifications which extend beyond time and space. Knowledge and awareness of this severely challenged the processes that I had anticipated I would employ. I became aware that asking Indigenous people to tell me, a privileged white female in her 20s, about their lives in Kununurra would only act to reinforce the power that non-Indigenous people have over Indigenous people. Reflecting on this, I recognised that it would be inappropriate for me to engage in a formal interview process with Indigenous people. I did not want to be a part of a process that would

---

6 The participant requests that the tape be turned off at this time which is exemplar of negotiating the boundaries of the interview while also instilling power in her role as a participant. This excerpt is also exemplar of the heightened disclosure which can occur during an intensive interview.
call upon Indigenous people to retell to a white girl what it is like to be Indigenous and in the midst of experiencing white invasion. I began to recognise that the traditional research paradigm was patronising, hurtful and reinforcing of a damaging power differentiation. At the same time however, I felt it was necessary to articulate the history of Kununurra and compelled to relay the atrocities and ramification of settlement so that it would result in some form of awareness-raising for the reader. I was also made aware that representatives from the Indigenous community were becoming increasingly called upon for research purposes and this was in itself damaging due to burn-out and a concern regarding the misuse of Indigenous knowledge.

With these factors in mind, I decided rather to have in-depth interviews with non-Indigenous people who had a history of engagement at various levels with Indigenous people. I had hoped that this process would not lead to me causing harm and hurt to Indigenous people by asking them to tell me about their lives. While some may argue that there is a marked absence of Indigenous contribution or representation in this thesis, I ethically feel it is not my right to explore this as a subset of a greater thesis on rural communities, and stand by this decision. Had the project been explicitly to consider Indigenous culture, the nature of the project – aims, research paradigm – would have been fundamentally different and adjusted to be culturally appropriate. Garvey (2007) acknowledges that Indigenous people are the most researched people for the least community gain. Bishop (2007) raises some of the considerations for non-Indigenous researchers conducting research with Indigenous people. Specific concern is related to the way in which the historically positivistic research tradition within social science disciplines has resulted in “the perception that the researcher was afforded a higher status than the person on whom the research was carried out...Racism not only affects people in general it also affects the nature and outcome of the research” (pp. 72-73). It would have been ignorant for this process to firstly engage with Indigenous people in the research process directly, particularly given the aims of the research as considering farming cultural in rural communities as opposed to purely considering the experiences of Indigenous people within the same context. Engagement would
have been tokenistic at best. Further, given Garvey’s recognition of the unethical over-researching of Indigenous people these insights have contributed to supporting my decision not to explicitly engage Indigenous people in the research as research participants.

This complexity is nicely deconstructed by Huygens (1995) who stated,

Acknowledging that Indigenous people have special rights and authority in a colonised country challenges white supremacy views at their core and meets with great resistance. It is highly challenging to undo any cultures beliefs about supremacy, or to undo the notion that the present capitalist patriarchy is in the form of advanced civilisation. The dominant group needs to learn that not all cultures are based on a deep—seated belief in the normality of domination and competition and that a culture based on different values will not necessarily treat us in the same way other systems have treated them. Psychologists have a vital role to play in legitimising alternative beliefs about what is normal for humans. Having moved from our supremacist beliefs we need to renegotiate our relationships with Indigenous people and with every other oppressed group and change the policies and structures in our institutions accordingly (p. 9).

Huygens (1995) captures how whiteness can impact on the legitimacy of the research process, calling researchers to question their role and whether despite good intentions the research process itself has the capacity to oppress.

The situation is such that, as researchers, there is a need to consider the role of participants, not as a data source but as humans. It is based on somewhat discretionary tactics of thinking in depth about the implications that being a participant has, particularly in terms of how researchers construct not only their role as a researcher but also the role of the participant.
3.1.4. The Assumption of One-Off Consent

Consent within qualitative interview settings is complex. Much of the complexity relates to the challenge of seeking consent at the commencement of formal interaction with the participant when the direction, content and process of the interview is relatively unknown. This is particularly the case during intensive interviews whereby disclosure can be heightened. The relatively unknown capacity of the interview comes from the value in conducting in-depth interviews which encourage the participant to steer the direction of the interview and relies on the adaptive, reflective and on-the-spot analytical skills of the researcher. It is suggested that Process Consent provides a more realistic ethical framework in which to operate (Grafanaki, 1996; McLeod, 1996; Munhall, 1989; Rossiter, Walsh-Bowers & Prilleltensky, 1996; Smythe & Murray, 2000). This form of consent is based on the premise of the participant negotiating the parameters of consent during the course of the research, which extends their rights as a participant beyond their role as a participant in the interview setting and through to how their involvement shapes the research process (e.g. the analysis, interpretation and use of their interview transcript.)

“Off the record” – was a phrase adopted during interviews where participants could articulate if they did not wish for what was being discussed to be included in the research or the analysis. In response I make no quotes or direct reference to the conversation had that were deemed by the participant as “off the record“. This approach was used quite frequently and seemed to provide participants with the power to direct and have control over their disclosure. During several of the interviews, participants requested that the recording device be switched off at certain stages.

3.1.5. The Assumption that Ethics is Obliged Until the End of the Formalised Research Process

The research process naturally results in the development of research outcomes or learnings, which introduces responsibilities on part of the researcher regarding the
appropriate use of such knowledge. Rather than appropriate use being defined by the research, the use of learnings should be negotiated with the participants. Consequently, with this research I intend to re-engage with participants who were particularly influential in the formation of the thesis’s central findings to determine an appropriate use of the knowledge generated. As reflected by Huygens (1988), “most of us would name ourselves as the author of a book or article on empowerment of someone else. As a profession we are quite careless of the benefits of such a publication” (p. 4). It is such benefit as a researcher, such as the capacity to publish that need to be carefully considered to avoid exploitation of the participants. Prilleltensky (1990) a strong advocate of Friere’s (1972, 1975) notions of conscientization, supports its adoption within the field, arguing that we have an ethical imperative to do so. Conscientization is a “process whereby people attain an insightful awareness of the socio-economic, political and cultural circumstances which affect their lives as well as their potential capacity to transform their social reality” (Prilleltensky, p. 311). It is the act of people becoming aware of their circumstances which is critical, and marks a change to the traditional way in which research in the field is conducted. Prilleltensky reflects on the capacity of the researcher to denunciate and annunciate. Currently, the field of psychology consists of fine denunciators, apt at the capacity to consider ideology critically in terms of how it impacts on peoples livelihoods. The challenge now within the discipline is to develop competencies of annunciation, where researchers “advance the social ideals conducive to the good life” (Prilleltensky; Friere, 1972). Doing so, researchers become conscious of the ramifications of their research.

3.2. Concluding Comments

The intention of this chapter is to flag some of the ethical considerations that were pertinent to this particular research process. Examples were used to indicate the types of dilemmas that can emerge. These issues, particularly in relation to how the researcher conceptualises her/himself as part of the process is a critical underpinning in terms of how the rest of the research process will develop.
Part Two Findings

Part Two Findings includes the primary body of the research analysis. It is considered in terms of the two research settings, namely the Wheatbelt and Kununurra. The section puts into action the research underpinnings that were discussed in Part One and aims to convey an in-depth and holistic analysis of the complexities and strengths of these settings. Part Two Findings lays the foundation for Part Three Interpretation.
Chapter Four

4. Findings in Space and Time

Chapter Four Findings in Space and Time summarises the findings of the research which aimed to consider rural worldview, values, mythologies and culture as they contribute to the physical and social transformation of Australia’s agricultural communities. The Chapter begins with an overview of its structure and then considers the Wheatbelt and Kununurra exclusively, making for an in depth analysis of the two settings. As argued through this thesis, a genuinely contextualist approach appreciates that the research outcomes are a product of space, time and the interpretation of the researcher, which all exist within time and space. The preoccupation with ensuring this is a truly contextualist approach has meant that there has been endeavours made to ensure that the interpretation has not fallen victim to mechanism, resorting to disassociating participants from their context. In addition to supporting the contextualist position, narratives from the perspective of the research open each section of the findings. While also informative, it gives insight in my context as the researcher in this analytical process.

4.1. Overview of the Structure of Findings

Chapter Four is structured according to the two research settings. In Setting One the Wheatbelt is considered, followed by Setting Two, Kununurra. Both parts follow the same structure; each begins with the demography of the region followed by the researcher narrative. Personal narratives were constructed as an additional way of articulating each community’s culture. It aimed to capture learnings that came out of observation and immersion in the communities, particularly moments that did not necessarily occur within the interview setting, but captured subtleties in community life. Narratives are a written piece that gives an account of a series of events, providing the reader with not only details of the happenings but in part an interpretation of their significance to the argument that the narrative intends to convey (Elliot, 2005). Central to narratives are their chronology, they are meaningful
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

and purposeful (Elliott). Labov and Waletsky (1997) argue that a fully formed narrative consists of six central components. The narrative must be summarised, providing a context for the reader, oriented in time and space, and convey the series of events which are then evaluated by means of conveying the significance of the events (Labov & Waletsky). The evaluation is often argued to be the most significant element of the narrative as it provides commentary and analysis surrounding the narration (Linde, 1993; Polanyi, 1985). A resolution is given which begins to tie the story together, a coda closes the narrative taking the reader back to the present (Labov & Waletsky).

Traditionally within the social sciences narratives are constructed via the researcher narrating the events of their participants. In this case, a narrative approach has been conducted to consider the field research activities from the perspective of the researcher. The beauty of the narrative is that it

> can perhaps be understood as a device which facilitates empathy since it provides a form of communication in which an individual can externalise his or her feelings and indicate which element of those experiences are most significant (Elliott, 2005, p. 4).

This was important to the analytical process and as also discussed in Chapter Three Ethical Considerations, the construction of narratives allowed for structured reflection on the part of the researcher. Thus the narrative is written in first person and for both of the research regions, the Western Australian Wheatbelt and Kununurra, which will be introduced shortly.

Months of field work provided conceptually rich data to analyse. In addition to this plethora there were moments that were not necessarily captured ‘on-tape’ particularly due to living in the communities and participating in community life. During these times it was possible to notice aspects of community life, such as the dynamic of people’s interaction, idiosyncrasies, custom and myth that are so fundamental and ingrained into the everyday happenings within the community.
that the community members themselves tend to be oblivious to them. These moments tended to occur outside of the interview setting when people were going about their everyday lives. Living in the communities provided the opportunity to experience some of the moments which give great insight into the culture of a community. These subtleties in how people lead their lives often lead to ‘epiphanies’, and are a story in themselves which have greatly influenced the direction of my research and grounded theory. Hence, the aim of the narratives are two-fold, firstly capture the ‘data’ that was not on tape that was collected through social and cultural emersion within the community and provide vital insights into the culture of the communities. Secondly, the narratives serve the purpose of humanising research, where the stories act as a reminder of the broader social context of the communities.

The narratives are followed by the findings from the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) of interview transcripts. The term causal can be misleading -it does not imply causality in or between the layers. Causal instead should be thought of in terms of implying that the method of analysis forces the analyst to consider the data according to different levels of complexity, causing or resulting in a more holistic and deeper level of enquiry. The findings of the CLA are presented as tables that capture the interpretation of the data according to the causal layers. It was decided that tablature would be the most effective means of presenting the range and complexity of issues. This analysis is considered according to participant group. For the Wheatbelt, this is ‘Farmers’ and ‘Government, Scientific and Community Organisation’. For Kununurra this is ‘Irrigators’ and ‘Government, Scientific and Community Organisation’. Beneath each of these participant groups, each layer of the CLA is considered exclusively.

The key messages that emerged out of this interpretation are then discussed at length. The intention is to consider in depth the experiences of the groups, not purely as a process of finding similarity and difference in their experience, but rather to begin to understand how they cultures of these groups come together. Quotations are given to support and give depth to the analysis.
Setting One – Wheatbelt

4.2. Demographics

The Wheatbelt of Western Australia (see Figure 1 Research locations) is primarily known as the States major dryland agricultural region. It extends east past the outer low lying hill suburbs of Perth (the States capital) through to the outskirts of the Goldfields and slightly north of Perth into some coastal communities. Dryland agriculture is characterised by crop and stock which are watered and fed by rainfall, hence are dependent on the wet winters of the mild Mediterranean climate to ensure farming success. Wheat and sheep production are historically the primary produce. Over time the region has responded to shifts in both Government policy and trends in the agricultural sector (Tonts, 2007) and a drying climate. As summarised by Tonts “Between the 1971 and the 1997 agricultural censuses, the total number of farms in the region fell from 1,382 to 878, while average farm sizes increased from 1,498 hectares to 2,346 hectares. As a result, the agricultural labour force fell by 36 per cent, from 3,049 in 1971 to 1,950 in 2001” (pp. 243-244). Overwhelming these figures demonstrate huge shifts in the demographic and ultimately the social dynamic of these communities. Despite these trends, what has remained relatively constant is the family farming orientation, as opposed to a strict corporate practice. This however is being challenged by the demographic changes of the communities as farmers renegotiate how to manage larger properties with fewer workers (who were traditionally successors in the family). Interestingly, as the more marginal country which tends to be located further east become less populated, communities on the urban fringes are experiencing population growth with ‘tree-changers’, particularly retirees, moving from the city and suburbs to the country seeking hobby scale lots.
4.3. Researcher Narrative

In line with the conventions of Grounded Theory, it is argued that there is the need to include in this thesis the researchers’ reactions to the research process. The narrative itself marks moments that were influential to the research process for the researcher and consequently the content of the narrative is at times personal. Hence, while the content may be highly influential to the experience of the researcher, for the reader the content may read as relatively abstract. For instance in the Wheatbelt, the narrative includes reflections on the experience of rain in town and how the downfall shaped the communities lives, more specifically, the rains changed farming activities and introduced levels of excitement within the community. The positivity and optimism that coincided with the rains highlighted the negative impact that long term drought has within the region.

The escarpment or ‘Scarp, as it is colloquially known is a natural wall consisting of picturesque hills, vegetation and settlements that marks the barrier between Perth and the eastern agricultural region of Western Australia (WA). For me, it is unforged territory and whilst driving during the summer months of 2006 I contemplate this. As I pass through the scenic and highly populated towns adjacent to the highway on the Perth side of the escarpment, gradually the hills and forest wane and are replaced by flats and sparse clusters of trees amidst cleared farmlands. There are the occasional sheep, and the degree of ground cover varies, but is generally sparse. The colours change from green hues to yellows and golds. Similarly, the values attached to the hills change from being perceived as beautiful and scenic to a hindrance. For farmers, hills are too rocky for stock, impossible for crops to grow and machinery to manoeuvre. Travelling down Great Eastern Highway, gradually the hills wane and there is a dotted pathway of towns. The distance between them once accounting for a day’s travel by horse and cart, now, with the car and dwindling population numbers, towns have gradually been falling off the map, replaced with larger service centres. Even within these smaller towns that are managing to survive, many of the essential services have been centralised. Services deemed ‘non-essential’ such as emergency services, local scale natural resource management and other support services are generally run by locals at a voluntary
capacity. It is not uncommon for there to be a core group of individuals within a community leading a myriad of community run organisations, or, for these individuals to suffer from burnout. Yet even those towns clutching at survival, the pride, perseverance and presence is strong and warming to an outsider. The speed along the highway drops from 110km and gradually down to 50km. Signs welcome passers-by into their towns, awards for Tidy Towns, Rural Towns Programs, signage for Lions or when the next football match is, are marked like badges of achievement, as indicators of a community (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Photo of Rural Towns Program signage positioned outside a town on Great Eastern Highway.

I pulled through the gate to my first interview. It was about 10km out of Northam, one of the Wheatbelt centres located an hour over the scarp from Perth. On their driveway lay a hose that looked like it was used to water their garden, I drove over it and hoped it was appropriate for me to do so. I did not think of this again until during the interview when the participant commented that they had a lot of problems using their telephone and the internet, reflecting it was really hard for their kids, “the internet is such an important tool for them for school” she said. They still had an exposed copper wire for their phone that ran from their letterbox over the lawn and driveway to their house. Whenever there was a storm, they
would be cut off. There was no broadband, no wireless, and regularly no phone line. It was then that I realised that the ‘hose’ I drove over was actually their link out of this town. She debated whether if this happened in a capital city like Perth if it would get fixed promptly, but upon reflection she quickly corrected herself and suggested that this would not even occur in Perth, that reliable telecommunication services are a given. There were complexities in the country that city people would not even be aware of; from telecommunication troubles to access to doctors or electricians, or, having enough kids in the school to be able to keep it open. How shops keep closing and people keep leaving. How when it doesn’t rain for months or years you can’t grow crops and you don’t have an income. That makes paying off your debts hard if not impossible.

Even an hour out of Perth did not provide her children with a wealth of opportunities. Northam however was fortunate in the sense that there were Government departments in town, a police station, hospital, multiple schools, churches, a shopping centre with chain-stores, services including the Regional Development Commission (RDC), and mental health support services. There were arts and cultural centres, a greater range of employment opportunities, and the Avon Catchment Council (ACC), the natural resource management authority for the Avon Region. The further east in the catchment, the greater degree of resentment I heard in peoples voices. Government departments were a blessing, irrespective of what the service was or its quality of service. Put simply, having a department meant that the State Government thought that it was worthwhile investing in your town, better yet, they knew you existed. At times, there was discontent expressed by participants in towns further east of the Escarpment, that Northam had all of the services. What was particularly frustrating was that Northam was only an hour out of Perth, when there were towns four or five hours away from the city that were lucky to have a school in the district, let alone in the town itself. In the eastern agricultural areas, the next best thing would be for the services to be in the towns of Meriden or Narrogin, but, for some that is still a decent journey. This allocation of resources and regional investment conveys the growing trend of service centralisation. Furthermore, given the close vicinity of Northam from Perth, it
meant that people that worked in the departments need not live in the town; instead they could travel to and from Perth. Doing so meant that they were not investing in the town, or the catchment, like other community members who resided there were. As the service provision in each of the towns was so inconsistent, a culture emerged that was very much, if it broke fix it yourself. Bureaucracy was generally perceived as a hindrance to a town progress, so for many of the towns legalities were commonly overlooked. Alternatively, progress could also come out of useful connections with decision makers in Perth, but not every community was lucky enough to have such links. Many townspeople reflected on various times when either they had personally, or others in the town, had felt that they had been let down by Government process. Jobs lost, groups dissolved, services closed down or centralised to another town. I remember the sadness in the voice of the women who ran a book club. She felt immense guilt that she could no longer facilitate the group due to personal reasons. The closure of her book shop was another blow to the town.

The geographical isolation of rural towns in the Wheatbelt to the major decision making powers in Perth at times proves useful, almost providing a space for community action to go unnoticed. Ironically, it is this same space, and this sense of being unnoticed or forgotten that drives many rural community members to act as their own agents of change. Isolation therefore acts as a hindrance or a blessing depending on the context. For some, it is a process of adaptation, of getting used to or working around the facets of rural community life that are challenging. For others, it is the motivation for activism, for instance constructing an unapproved track between towns. The culture of rural life is vibrant, forward thinking and generally aimed at ensuring that the wellbeing of the collective is at the fore.

For the first time I see what appear to be salinity affected pastures and pull my car over to the roadside. For a moment I pause, dwarfed by the silence, stillness and vast space. No people or cars, the air is warm yet fresh, and clean. My lips curl, it is like tasting or touching something new. In a way it was, the 20 something ‘city slicker’ from Perth had made it over the ‘Scarp’; the proverbial wall that divides the
eastern agricultural region of WA from the State’s capital city, suburbs and coast. I had crossed the physical and mythological barrier of the population, of space, information provision and power. As I paused and took in this realisation I was drawn back into the vastness that surrounded me. The paddock had minimal ground cover and was sparsely inhabited by what looked like salt bush. It had rained a little the last couple of days and because the water table was so high in parts the paddock became waterlogged, creating pools, the clouded sky mirrored in its reflection. It was a surreal, boggy moonscape. Dead native trees were stretched from the ground, splintered and withered like exposed, broken bones (see Figure 3).

I had an interview at eleven o’clock one Saturday at the town Club. Upon entering I noticed posted on the wall rules for patrons and visitors, for instance, acceptable behaviour and dress codes. It was evident prior to entering into the Club that it was valued. However as I pushed open the door I was greeted with silence. The Club immaculate, obviously well cared for over the years, and smelling like a combination of beer on tap and freshly vacuumed carpets. Most noticeably it was empty, and did not make for the interview setting I was anticipating. It was a Saturday, a ‘footy’ (Australian Rules Football) match was bound to be on the ‘telly’
(television) and yet there were no patrons. Eventually a man emerged from the behind the bar, ‘what can I get you, love?’, ‘just a lemonade thanks’, and I proceeded to enquire whether he had seen my participant. He hadn’t and for a while it was just he and I. A patron entered, he was a regular. A little after that, I met my participant. The interview started with an unprovoked reflection on the Clubhouse “it used to be packed on the weekends” he said. I got the sense that this interview location was not decided on by chance. The young people in the town either left or were thinking about leaving the district. That was why there was no one there to serve. For part of the Wheatbelt the issue is not so much about sustainability, rather, survival. The trend had been such that families are leaving some districts as the land becomes increasingly difficult to farm, the profit (if at all) too marginal. Succession planning was becoming more a case of encouraging sons and daughters to head to the city and get an education or trade. The mining boom had become a serious draw card for many of the young locals – excitement, job security, and ‘big bucks’. Paradoxically this outward migration of the young has posed serious issues for the sustainability of rural dryland farming communities. “Young people are our best export” he said. I looked around and I believed him.

The venue had been chosen to illustrate to me the challenges that local people were experiencing. The club was disturbingly desolate. There were no young people to carry on the Clubs legacy. A heady theme throughout the interview and testament in this particular interaction was how generational value systems directly impacted the dynamic and culture of the rural community. The young were tending to seek out exciting, fast paced and immediately gratifying rewards of city life. Meanwhile older generations were seeking to reconnect with the community values of kinship, respect and an appreciation of a slower more reflective pace, which ideologically is synonymous with notions of the country. Such outward migration is proving to be a major concern for many of the towns. Despite this, Wheatbelt population numbers, particularly in areas located in the Avon Belt 7 are only

---

7 The Avon Belt is a stretch of land that sits within approximately 150km on the eastern side of the Darling Scarp. The term is more ideological than definitive and relates to towns such as York, Toodjay, Beverley and increasingly Northam that are close to the city of Perth but possess
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

decreasing slightly with retirees replacing the youth. These migratory patterns raise concerns for the Wheatbelt’s agricultural future. The children of farming families are increasingly seeking opportunities elsewhere, while those who are deciding to move to the Wheatbelt are not of working age, nor do they have interest or a background in farming. Instead, they bring with them a different set of needs, interests and hopes and have the capacity to offer a different skill set to the community as retirees.

He proceeded to tell me his history. He lived at the end of the catchment – the space where geographically all the environmental flows lead. Farm upon farm had decided to employ engineering solutions to manage salinity. The issue emerged in part from generations of land clearing to make way for dryland agriculture. The clearing and continual use of land for raising stock and growing crop has resulted in a highly degraded soil profile, in this case soil with a very high water table that is acidic and hyper saline. The hooves of stock have also compacted the soil. With rain the land easily becomes water logged and the saline acidic soil stifles crop growth and feed for stock. ‘Engineering solutions’ meant that property owners were digging drainage canals across problem paddocks to drain the soil of hyper saline and acidic water. I was told that it was not uncommon for sheep to fall in. They have difficulty climbing out as the incline of the canals from erosion is so deep that they starve and die. As the water is so acidic the carcass is eaten away in about a week. There was no planning or formalised approval process for the canals construction so farmers had been digging up to their neighbours property boundaries. Doing so meant that farmers were on the receiving end of their neighbours (and their neighbours before them) hyper saline and acidic water and they could either sacrifice their paddock and property or build their own channel

stereotyped facets of country life. There is broad acre farming, but also the presence of hobby scale farms that are proving to be appealing to urban city dwellers keen to retire.

\footnote{Salinity is a hydrological process whereby the soil profile becomes increasingly saline. This occurs in part by the clearing of native vegetation. Replaced by shallow rooted species for agricultural purposes, the roots draw the water table upwards, and with that salts and minerals naturally occurring in the profile. Plants – introduced and native species – struggle with saline water and die. In some parts of the Wheatbelt, the salinity is hypersaline and almost as salty as seawater. Due to the minerals in the soil, it is also acidic.}
and contribute to the line. Most did the latter. When you are at the end of the catchment however there is no one to pass the water problem onto and this was the case of my participant whose property was sandwiched between a nature reserve and a catchment worth of channelled acidic hyper saline water. We spoke about the complexity of this particularly as the conflict is hard in small towns where private news quickly becomes everybody’s business. To gather an understanding of the extent of the conflict, I asked him if conflict due to the drainage spilled out into everyday interaction, “could neighbours for instance play a game of darts together?”. He responded that generally they could, and joked that it depended on where they were aiming the darts.

The issue of drainage, both in terms of the mixed perceptions regarding its scientific credibility and the social and relational impacts from unplanned construction is well documented. It is also one of the most extreme examples of community conflict in the Wheatbelt. What tends to be most significant about the conflict is that it defies the overall cultural nature of rural communities. Bolton (2008) in his historical account of the history of Western Australia’s white settlement reflects on the early colonialists vitality at not allowing community conflict to dominate. The physical isolation created an interdependence between community members, whereby good relationships are almost thrust upon them in a bid to make community life bearable. This somewhat resonates in the current experiences of Wheatbelt communities. There will always be conflicts in communities but the interdependent and intertwined nature of the community’s culture makes it easier to just get over it and get on with it. The example of the drainage conflict is particularly complex and represents succinctly the balance between attempting to achieve individual and collective good. Hardin’s (1968) metaphor of the Tragedy of the Commons is the most obvious parallel here. In a bid to ensure personal viability it came at the expense of the broader community – the relationships, the ability to farm ones land. The desperation to have viable farming land in this instance outweighed kinship in an outright sense, however it was reflected during interviews that a camaraderie remains.
These stories were fresh in my mind the day I volunteered to help regenerate a paddock. A husband and wife team I was speaking to did this to generate income in addition to a business they were setting up – growing sandalwood. They were a little bit different to most people I spoke to in the Wheatbelt, the majority had been in the district for generations and farmed wheat and sheep, just like their fathers and grandfathers had. They were different in the sense they had travelled, but always lived ‘rural’ and were very interested in Landcare. I conducted the interview intermittently from the cabin of a tractor, yelling over the noise of the engine as it rattled up and down the paddock towing the tree-planter (see Figure 4). I was participating in revegetation on the property of a man who made part of his living out of running a business digging drainage canals to manage salinity properties in the district.

---

9 ‘Landcare’ was a Federal Government initiative that operated during the 1990s. The program was based on the principles of empowerment and community participation, where local community members were employed to act as Landcare officers whose role was to help facilitate initiatives that would work towards the sustainability of the catchment.
With his machinery he would dig the canals starting from about a metre in depth across the worst saline affected areas of the people’s properties. Dredging the saline water out of the soil profile causes a running stream of hyper saline and acidic water to pass along the channels. Today, I was seeing the canal structures first hand (see Figure 5). The structures themselves can cost tens of thousands of dollars to construct and some farmers report impressive results in the short term.
Revegetation efforts and drainage canal construction are often portrayed as polar approaches to the management of salinity, although some property owners use them in unison, such as the farmer whose property I was planting with trees. He was the friend of those upstream in the catchment and the foe of those downstream who would receive the hyper saline and acidic water drained by their neighbour on their own property. As we planted the trees, up and down the canal, the tractor would pass his sign advertising the drainage business which read, “Drainage Salt Land Reclamation – Watch this Land Transform”. Our team of tree planters were bewildered by the irony particularly given the condition of the property (see Figure 6).
The irony is an exemplar of many of the paradoxes of farming. With farming conditions becoming increasingly perplexing to navigate, seemingly drastic measures are being employed in an attempt to create the best opportunities for profit. The more public contention surrounding drainage is related to anxieties regarding the science behind the practice being misapplied by non-scientists (i.e., farmers) and mixed perceptions regarding the acceptability of it as a land management technique. Furthermore much of the drainage was constructed without any formal approval process. These concerns point to a crucial facet of rural community life, that relating to power. The typical concerns regarding the drainage construction and appropriate disposal of drainage water, relate to scientific and bureaucratic process. Farming community members reflected that science is disgruntled by the inappropriate use of drainage technology, and bureaucracy is angered by the unauthorised capital works construction made by the community. The community action, while resulting in various levels of conflict, is steeped in a desire for better conditions. From the perspective of the farming community, science and bureaucracy posed barriers for the community’s sustainability, and many people reported that the drainage solution came out of a state of
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

desperation. Even some community members that were opposed to drainage as a solution reflected that they were also considering this as an option after seeing its success on neighbouring properties. This example again contributes to understanding the culture of rural communities by conveying a headiness and strength to act as their own agents of change. It also illustrates the learning, innovation and experimentation that occurs at a community level.

Landcare was a particularly important initiative for one of the towns that I visited. It was a popular, but sensitive topic of conversation with the local farmers and community members that were funded by Government as Landcare employees. I learnt very quickly that recently funding for Landcare had been cut for the town, and with it so too locals jobs. At the announcement, some Shires continued to financially support the efforts of their local Landcare groups. A bid in this town for funding to continue was knocked back. Previous employees lamented on the process. The decade of Landcare as it was known operated throughout the 1990s, and while it also ran within urban settings and coastal communities, it was most commonly affiliated with projects operating within rural farming communities. When the funding cut and redundancies were announced the last task for the local manager was to construct an audit and evaluation of the entire sub-catchment they had managed. The compiled research was going to serve as the baseline data for all future initiatives that would now be conducted, not by Landcare, but by the newly formed Catchment Management Authority.

Landcare was a critically important initiative for the community. Commonly Landcare is criticised for not living up to the biophysical aspirations it projected from project onset. There is an inherent connection between farmers and the landscape. They are familiar with the profile of each of their paddocks, its needs and requirements. For some farmers, how they speak about the land is almost spiritual and others the history of the land and how they practice is steeped in family. The decade of Landcare marked a significant chapter in many farming communities. In particular, the initiatives lead to some changes in how people farm,
and shifted the image of farming practice. The program prompted farmers to consider their land management practices and a forum for if they wanted support to change. A different paradigm emerged where farmers became more willing to negotiate change in light of their valued culture of family farming and historical practice. The tragedy of the program was the terms in which it was evaluated. Most commonly it was in biophysical terms, but in reality the initiatives that were employed, such as tree planting, could take decades for any beneficial impacts to be truly gauged in an technical evaluative sense. The critical benefits from the program were social. It employed locals, motivated, energised and connected community members. It was also a period in which conservation was becoming part of popular culture. It was an important stepping stone towards a connection between people and the environment. For a time it shifted the perception that people had of farmers. The social construction of the farmer, in various periods, has positioned those in agriculture as environmental vandals. This is an extreme, yet somewhat persistent conceptualisation of farming that has over time re-emerged. While this value may not necessarily be conveyed overtly, the underpinnings of this message manifest in terms of news reports in popular media where farmers are presented as whinging and pleading for financial aid from drought. This media representation was criticised by farmers during interviews. Such a construction alludes to a supposition that their financial and agricultural woes are self inflicted. Their constructed plight is at times comparable to the social construction of ‘the dole bludger’ or ‘the junky’ – a misperception that the individual had brought on their desperate situation themselves. Landcare created a period in which such myths were questioned and farmers were constructed as being agents; part of an environmental solution.

On one journey to Narembeen I was also accompanied by rain clouds. Unfortunately the rain was too late in the season to be of any benefit and the winds that preceded the rain blew away the top soil and the newly sowed seed. The rains that fell that day had caused a bit of a local stir, the thunder, the puddles, the smell of rain were all welcomed anomalies. There was a sense that the town had been
cleansed and any opportunity to begin to fill rainwater tanks and have greenery grow back was a welcome sight from the endless horizon of yellows and browns. A puddle under foot was more musical than the snapping and crunching of dry barren paddocks. Mud on your clothes more welcoming than dust. I heard that morning that one of the locals windscreen wipers had disintegrated from non-use, so there was a mad dash to the roadhouse to source a new set. Weather and farming go hand in hand but the uncertainty in the Wheatbelt is debilitating. A dry spell lingered into a dry season and then into years of drought.

Weather is synonymous with farming. This example of the extremes of drought conveys how the weather impacts on even the simplest and taken for granted daily activities, in this case, operating a vehicles windscreen wipers. The weather is often accounted as one of, if not the most influential facets of farming life and is central to town and regional culture. Farming and cultural/social activities are indoctrinated by the weather. Perhaps this is in part why religion plays such a significant role in some of the communities where at the very best, farmers can pray in hope of a favourable season.

I arrived for our breakfast interview. They had kindly invited me over to eat and chat one winter’s morning. The previous night had been horrendous. Having stayed at the local pub I got knocks on my door and serenades of ‘Roxanne’ from about midnight. An out-of-towner proved to be an exciting occurrence and I must have been spotted hours earlier having my dinner in the dining hall. It was a frightening experience, being in an isolated town. My mobile phone had no reception and my very simply outfitted room had no telephone. As I helped to set the table I lamented over the evening’s occurrences trying to make light of a sleepless night and barricaded door protecting myself from my over-eager suitors. On arriving at my next interview I was greeted with worried faces and immediately offered a cup of tea. News spread across town that morning, I was kindly informed that the boys had been tracked down and reprimanded. I was then offered a place to stay with them anytime I was in town.
This particular series of events was highly informative, and provided great insight regarding community interactions. The community network was thick and based primarily on friendship, family and kinship ties. To an extent, everyone had at least some faint connection to everyone else in the community. There was a sense of shame associated with me feeling threatened in their town. I felt highly uncomfortable that I had caused somewhat of a local stir, but the community’s reaction indicated that I was a respected and trusted visitor and worthy of protection. What is significant here is the sense of pride, strong community value system and high degree of interconnectedness. Ones actions are not only impacting on yourself, but also your community. Within city settings, it is more likely that your actions will be lost, but they resonate within rural towns, contributing to a culture high in expected moral value.

4.4. Wheatbelt Causal Layered Analysis Summary of Findings

In Table 8 the summaries of the CLA for both the farmers and the Government, scientific and community organisations are presented.
Table 8. Summary of the CLA analyses for the Wheatbelt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Farmer</th>
<th>Government, Scientific and Community Organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Litany</td>
<td>▪ Natural resource management and farming issues (e.g. dust storms, water shortages, drought, uncertainty, salinity, drainage, weed control)</td>
<td>▪ Discipline based biophysical research (e.g. farming systems, water systems, salinity management, catchment management, stock and crop biodiversity, remnant vegetation, soil decomposition, root disease)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Multiple properties</td>
<td>▪ Social research (e.g. regarding farmer decision making and adoption)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Driving to reach others in the district</td>
<td>▪ Drought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Farming systems</td>
<td>▪ Funding based on short termism and terms of Government as opposed to ecological and social systems which take time to change and show any evidence of change (e.g. &quot;we as a Government body act on a twelve month budget&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Land prices</td>
<td>▪ Increasingly fewer staff to service larger areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Scarcity of available land</td>
<td>▪ Once reactive intervention, now working towards specific goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Soil condition/type/fertility</td>
<td>▪ Perception that greater funding and grant access for farmers means that there is greater individual capacity and opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Rainfall</td>
<td>▪ Perception that there is a lack of understanding in the farming community regarding changes to services and the cessation of valued one-to-one engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Farm trials (e.g. chemical/plant varieties). Over time the success or failure of trials introduces new ways of thinking and potential changes to farming practices</td>
<td>▪ Awareness that farmers are likely to miss funding or grant opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Budgets</td>
<td>▪ Tree planting and revegetation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Property size</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Farming issues (e.g. root disease, rust, varietal issues, plant breeding issues, resistant varieties, impacts of frost, micro-nutrients, fertilizer impacts)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Farming planning issues (e.g. sowing times, harvest times, chemical application)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Different quality of essential services (e.g. “I put a jar on the table and they said ‘oh are you selling honey’ and I said ‘no that’s the water you are selling’”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Not having satisfactory telecommunication services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. telephone, internet)</td>
<td>Recognition that interpreted data as opposed to raw data more beneficial to farmers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Community consultation as opposed to community participation</td>
<td>▪ Sense of having to respond fast in an age of technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Presence of research</td>
<td>▪ Dealing with symptoms versus dealing with causes of issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Climate change</td>
<td>▪ Quality assurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Stress on small businesses due to the drought impacts</td>
<td>▪ Genetically modified produce and uncertainty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Government pressures</td>
<td>▪ Research leading to technology change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Genetically modified produce and uncertainty</td>
<td>▪ Climate change – cycles or actual change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Research leading to technology change</td>
<td>▪ Resource production and science used to speed up the production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Sustainability</td>
<td>▪ Research driven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Viability</td>
<td>▪ Tourism as a potential future for the Wheatbelt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Superphosphate use</td>
<td>▪ Drainage systems as salinity management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ No till</td>
<td>▪ Profit margins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Frosts</td>
<td>▪ Bureaucracy and paperwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Increasingly larger machinery</td>
<td>▪ Ethics approval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Bids at progress requiring high levels of volunteerism and external funds and grants</td>
<td>▪ Biodiversity loss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Individualised incentives</td>
<td>▪ Issues need to have a high profile to ensure investment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Historical land clearing</td>
<td>▪ Vested interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Vegetation and revegetation</td>
<td>▪ Large scale and regional research not necessarily directly applicable or targeted to local needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Stress of farming with particular reference to the uncertainties</td>
<td>▪ Recognise that their work may be having limited impact at the local level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Erratic and unpredictable farming seasons</td>
<td>▪ Drought Relief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Occupational health and safety measures impacting on farmers’ capacity to go about their business</td>
<td>▪ Exceptional Circumstances Relief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Record keeping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Social/Structural
- Increasing costs associated with introduced procedures and protocols
- Land care activities as a luxury exercise
- Export market pressures
  - Sense of crisis
  - Change in social processes, whereby catchment management is focused on group interaction and impact as opposed to individual assistance and support
  - Difficulties associated with encouraging change
  - Basin level as opposed to individual catchment level
  - Power of decision makers in Perth or high level governing bodies impacting at a local scale
  - Social and environmental interests and needs are not being determined at the local level
  - Catchment managers have less of a presence in the region
  - Awareness of the growing complexity of roles in NRM (e.g. farmers as land stewards, volunteers, business people “participation in Landcare is it like, yeah, is it volunteering? or is it just part, be seen as part of the farm business?”)
  - Structural changes of departments and farmer groups (e.g. mixed perceptions regarding impacts “Permanence doesn’t seem to be a really big point, I mean I think a couple (departments) have changed their name three or four times and but really what actually changes?”)
- Long family farming history
- Notion of the family farm
- Influence and significance of historical farming practices and traditions
- Technicalities regarding succession and dividing of the family farm to its members (usually men)
- Under represented and value of the role of women in agriculture
- Social pressures and complexities associated with towns having small populations (e.g. multiple roles, privacy)
- Value of farmer groups
- Major environmental impacts and social conflict within and between communities regarding the impacts associated with deep drainage as a management option for dryland salinity
- Threats to rural town sustainability and the trend towards centralised service centres
- The decade of Landcare
- Landcare as a luxury activity
- Information sharing and community networks
- Emergence of farm consultants/advisors
- Change from Department of Agriculture to rural suppliers and agronomists
- Banks having a high degree of influence and power over farming practices based on loan approvals
- Few young farmers in the region
- Importance and value of succession planning
- Complexity associated with natural resource problem solving (e.g. poor understanding of time required for both environmental and social change)
- The anticipation that corporate farming enterprises will dominate production as the family farm will over time become unviable
- Eastern districts smaller farms are being pushed out
- Town viability issues (e.g. “some of those towns find it really hard to have a school or have a local supermarket. If there is not enough people they go broke, when they go broke then the two banks in town they can’t survive so one bank closes down and the post office can’t supply change to an agency and just everything gets run down”)
- Emergence of multi-nationals in the delivery of science
- A sense of isolation from others
- Issues regarding satisfactory education facilities
- Power of private enterprise
- Perception of a powerful network of scientists and researchers
- Burn out associated with volunteerism (e.g. “if you look at any rural community the same people will keep cropping up, in the P&Cs and the groups and

- Field days as the coming together of the community (e.g. “the department is probably not as on ground as we used to be, we are more focusing on research and so we will go along to a field day where we will, can meet farmers of a like mind and discuss the issues there”)
- Disconnection between on-farm success and this being communicated to other farmers, there is a disjunction which impedes further capacity
- Physical distance between towns and in relation to decision making power and catchment management bodies (e.g. further away the less influence and interaction with the communities)
- Emergence of regional service centres
- Social trend in regional areas to relocate west (e.g. towards the coast and capital city of the State)
- Value in science and proof of change
- Multiple roles, issues associated with being regulators as well as advisors and researchers
- Recognising the importance of sport as an activity that brings the community together outside of their farming activities
- Value and necessity in community organizations: Progress Associations, Landcare, volunteer groups, Rotary, Sporting Teams, Shires, Local Councils
- In small towns, the roadhouse serves as a central location
- Competition between Shires regarding provision of services and facilities
<p>|   | Helping to manage sporting groups and whatever”) | Issues associated with employment, aged care, educational facilities, health services and prevention, mental health services and prevention, emergency services (e.g. fire, ambulance and police) |
|   | - Distinction between city and country people particularly in terms of ways of thinking, value systems and customs | - Suicide in rural farming communities |
|   | - A disconnection between cities and rural communities | - External locus of control to state and federal Governments |
|   | - Sense of community strengthens the further east you travel away from the capital city of Perth | - High dependence on volunteerism |
|   | - Wheatbelt issues more about population stressors as opposed to environmental | - Place that religion holds in communities |
|   | - Multi-nationals as arrogant and powerful | - Property boundaries and fences fail to match the ecological character of the catchment (e.g. soil type, tenure, rainfall) |
|   | - Power of consumer groups | - The perception of farmers as complaining about their circumstances |
|   | - Trend towards farm amalgamations | - Mixed levels of empathy towards farmers experiences (e.g. stressors associated with uncertainty and lack of control due to weather or markets) |
|   | - Fewer children in the region placing pressure on schools to stay viable | - Power and decision making capacity of region not evident within the region itself. Power in capital cities such as Perth or Canberra |
|   | - Fewer families placing pressure on the viability of local business | - Mixed levels of farmer representation in groups (e.g. Farmers Federation, farmer groups) |
|   | - Skilled labour shortages | - Major increase in number of private consultants seen to be changing the type and extent of interaction between Government departments and communities |
|   | - Difficulty in accessing shearsers due to a drop in numbers and thus they are asking high prices for their services | - High turnover of young people in Government |
|   | - Avon Arc servicing the tree changers who are getting squeezed out of Perth due to rising living expenses. With them come expectations and needs, particularly due to their age | - The perception of farmers as complaining about their circumstances |
|   | - The internet as a mechanism for connecting people | - Power and decision making capacity of region not evident within the region itself. Power in capital cities such as Perth or Canberra |
|   | - You are a local if you are born there | - Mixed levels of farmer representation in groups (e.g. Farmers Federation, farmer groups) |
|   | - Sense of poor investment of taxpayer money (e.g. “The money goes into all these people that drive | - Major increase in number of private consultants seen to be changing the type and extent of interaction between Government departments and communities |
|   |   | - High turnover of young people in Government |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldview/Discourse</th>
<th>around these subsidized cars that do all these jobs that don’t really do anything”)</th>
<th>departments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmers no-longer turning to Government departments for advice, seeking support and information from someone local (e.g. “the department is getting very much out of touch with farmers...you can walk through the place here, I mean there are, I don’t know, 800 people here, I reckon the vast majority would never have been on a farm, my guess” and “it has probably changed a bit too as more and more country based people who probably don’t spend weekends in the country like we used to. They come to the city on the weekends because their kids are going to school here or they have other things they want to do, they are less involved with weekend activities in the country town... I suspect the advantages of having a Government department in town isn’t like it used to be from a social point of view”)</td>
<td>▪ Continual restructuring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ ▪ Resourcing focused on coastal areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ ▪ Physical distance from decision making powers (e.g. “Geographically isolated from decision making. I mean if they were present working with you day to day I guess there would be a much stronger link”)</td>
<td>▪ ▪ Groups act in a problem solving capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ ▪ Construction of the farmer as an environmental vandal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ ▪ Values in age and experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ ▪ Grass roots as being face-to-face interaction and engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to farming practices (e.g. commercialisation of farming, selling up, “it wasn’t until about 20 years ago that you were required to give a notice of intent to clear (your property) and before that people were obliged under the Conditional Purchase schemes and most blocks that were sold in this area in recent times have been under the Conditional Purchase arrangements where you had to clear by law a certain amount otherwise you had to give that property up. So I think that in the last 20, 25 years you could say you have seen a shift away from development to one of conservation and you don’t make that shift overnight”)</td>
<td>Value in local and criticism directed towards city values, processes and understanding of rural life (e.g. “They have got the population we have got the wheat”, “you wouldn’t like someone coming out and saying your backyards got some trees have to be ripped out or you’re not taking care of your lawn properly we are going to pave it because you use too much water”)</td>
<td>Time frames differ from Government (e.g. “short term I think we are fine, medium term I think we can manage it or develop with it or slow it down, long term I think we are out in the cold. Long term I am saying two hundred years, three hundred years, five hundred years, my great grand kids, they could struggle”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific paradigm</td>
<td>Conflicting group paradigms or ethos in Government and non-Government organisations (e.g. conservation orientation versus production orientation)</td>
<td>Globalisation and age of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement versus production where environmental conservation is seen to be paramount to farming success</td>
<td>Shifts in thinking (e.g. “some major paradigm shifts in peoples thinking. Major, and there wouldn’t be one person who has not been touched by the Landcare terminology or environmental terminology”)</td>
<td>Issues regarding translation of research into practice for farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception that animals are aids on the farm, produce or pests</td>
<td>A sense that you can have an impact in small rural communities, as opposed to the impacts getting lost in the system of cities</td>
<td>“Old school” salinity management (e.g. contour banks, salt bush, crop and stock rotation systems) versus “new school” (e.g. drainage systems).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A historical and traditional link with Australian forests and coastlines. Energy and emphasis is being invested into these areas due to their iconic value. Wheatbelt issues are oriented towards solving problems and are less popular, forests and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opportunities in the city
- Production versus environmentalism (e.g. “nature conservation is important and linking that with peoples values. If you can’t do that you are lost”)
- Perceived value systems of science and Government (e.g. “scientists that are interested in the environment and managers that are interested in environmental conservation tend to just assume that its good” and “I think the scientists actually want to give themselves a scientific reason and they don’t want to liken what they are doing to a belief system”)
- Regional tradition of wheat and sheep “this has always been a very reliable solid agricultural area and it has been based on the old wheat/sheep philosophy”. Practices changed with the introduction of new crop varieties (a product of science and research) and again due to market forces shaping the desirability towards particular crop varieties or stock breeds.
- Conservation once being ‘hands on’ now perceived as being distanced
- If you want something done you do it yourself where there is a sense that local communities miss out despite the presence of Government agencies (e.g. “there seems to be a lot of Chiefs in a lot of different departments that overlap but there doesn’t seem to be a lot of Indians to do the job”)
- Significance of the Decade of Landcare

coastlines are directed towards valuing conservation. Limited, to no conflict in these settings regarding conservation and production. Research not necessarily addressing local issues (e.g. “the science division is largely metropolitan based…well it hasn’t necessarily been driven by management needs or operation needs out in, out in the regions, I guess it has had either an individual research interests of its members that have been driving it or perhaps the requirements of policy division and what they are looking for” and “too much the money goes to academic and department stuff and not enough to, to hit the ground where it will be more effective or made available to the farmer or the landholders who can then project some strategies that work within his framework not someone else’s perceived idea of how it should be”)
- Decade of Landcare contributed to the introduction of a conservation oriented way of thinking about the physical environment
- Skepticism over the effectiveness of drought relief measures
| Power of consumers particularly in relation to changing and rising expectations regarding produce (e.g. “are the sheep happy before they are sent to market? Is this genetically modified? Is this organic? How much protein is in the grains that made this loaf of bread? You feel like the people that make the rules don’t really understand anything about what the job is like”) |  |
| Myth/Metaphor | Wheatbelt as in deficit  
|              | Dust bowl, social and cultural drought brought on by farming (e.g. “youth are our greatest export”)  
|              | Salinity as an illness, like burns on the country  
|              | Wheat production as the ‘backbone’ of areas | Perceived right to control and modify the natural environment associated with the disparate images of the Wheatbelt as a wasteland versus an ecosystem  
|              | Power of science and the scientific paradigm as the mechanism for addressing crisis  
|              | Rivers and waterways as being a physical link between city and country  
|              | Catchment management as a game (e.g. “the goalposts keep changing” which relates to prevalence of change)  
|              | Sandbox metaphor as a mechanism for best practice in problem solving  
|              | The escarpment as a wall between the country and the city with perceived acts to separate the spaces physically, socially, politically, financially and in terms of the distribution of power |
4.5. Causal Layered Analysis – Farmers

4.5.1. Litany

At the Litany level of the analysis, interest was in determining what the surface level issues were for the farming community. The Litany tends to be characterised by the overt and commonly spoken about or experienced facets of community life. Sometimes it is the case that the level is so embedded into the everyday workings of the community’s culture that it is not necessarily articulated as an issue, rather it becomes part of the community’s lived experience. The aim of exploring the Litany with the dryland farming community is to gather an understanding of what the day to day complexities are within the community.

4.5.1.1. Salinity and Drainage

Salinity is one of the key issues that is faced by the farming community, particularly in the eastern agricultural regions of the Wheatbelt. Interestingly, as an issue of discussion it was not the most prevalent matter that concerned the farming community. To them, there was generally more concern expressed towards some of the Social Structural issues that were related to rural community life and their future as a community (these will be discussed in depth at the Social Structural Level of the analysis). Given this, it is fascinating that for Government and scientists issues such as salinity, drainage, soil health and biodiversity were conceptualised as issues paramount for the survival of rural towns. This disparity in worldview will be discussed later when the Wheatbelt farming community and the Government/Scientific community are compared.

Despite this, salinity was a commonly discussed issue and tended to be spoken of in terms of the change that people have seen in the landscape and the impact it has had on their farming practices, for instance,
... [T]he salt you can’t leave in the landscape, you have got to move it out of the landscape because it came from the sea and you have got to put it back into the sea. But you have got to put it back in a sense that its not going to create um problems and what’s actually happening is that because they have allowed the water to accumulate, it has accumulated so much more in the valley floor. The water tables are rising, the salt um accumulates salts. The water table rising has immobilized a lot of salt and a lot of the underground water is getting more and salt affected so you have got to carefully um, um, move out the landscape

Salinity management was also a pertinent discussion point at the Litany Level. In particular, drainage was deconstructed by the community, with discussion drawing on the legitimacy and/or success of the technique to manage or combat salinity. While the biophysical legitimacy and effectiveness of the method has been scrutinised by both the farming and scientific communities, interestingly, more concern was raised regarding the social impacts that drainage management had on the community. The farming community in Narembeen has had a particularly turbulent history of salinity management, the issues raised also closely associated with Social Structural change within the community. In some areas of Narembeen, the drainage canals have been constructed by farmers so that they run from one end of their property to the other. Running from border to border has meant that the neighbouring farmer either receives the drainage water and sacrifices their property, or continues the channel to the next property border. As such, farmers have generally done the latter. One farmer, as previously mentioned, whose property was located at the end of the catchment borders a valued reserve within the community, and has been grappling with how to deal with the most appropriate means of disposal. The approach has lead to a great deal of pressure being placed on catchment relationships.
4.5.1.2. **Landcare and Land Management**

Landcare and land care management practices were pertinent themes for the dryland farmers, and related more specifically to on farm environmental conservation. Interestingly, despite the cessation of the Landcare program (replaced by National Heritage Trust funding regimes) the rhetoric of Landcare has tended to remain in the communities. Landcare introduced a new way of conceptualising farming, making property owners and communities more conscious of the environmental impacts and encouraging change on farms to be considered in terms of long term investments. Most significantly, the program provided the support (financial, social and information provision) to incorporate conservation oriented and sustainable farming practices. Fundamentally, it worked towards encouraging people to consider sustainable land management as intrinsic to everyday farm activities, as opposed to farming purely being production oriented. The program sought to bridge this dichotomy (production versus conservation) and see that through adopting sustainable practices it is possible to improve your production. At the time of the interviews, Landcare was also a relatively heated topic of conversation in some towns where the cessation of the program resulted in loss of local jobs and generally failed up-keep of practices within the community. Without the support of a formalised group and presence of a Landcare coordinator, many community members felt dislocated and unsupported. The social spinoffs of the groups were highly valued by participants and many people expressed grief and remorse at the funding cut. With the cessation of funding and a locally run Landcare group, engaging in land management activities were begging to be disassociated from regular farm decision making and practices. Again, it was related to the social processes surrounding both the institution of Landcare that existed during the 1990s and also the act of land care and how farmers attempt to incorporate this into their farming practices. There was recognition that land care practices should

---

10 Even after the decade of Landcare had ceased, in communities that were no longer serviced by a Landcare Coordinator or ceased to have a formalised group, the language of ‘Landcare’ has remained. There is a slight difference in how the phrase is adopted, to differentiate ‘Landcare’ is used in this thesis in reference to the actual program, and ‘land care’ is used to refer to the informalised acts of land management practice that farmers engage.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

be incorporated into everyday farming practice, however associated costs were perceived as the greatest barrier, for instance,

Participant 1: And care for it better, and the tight costs means it’s hard to, hard to spend money in, especially like land care. You know you talk about that sort of thing salinity it’s really hard to find the money to do it, it’s very hard to find the money. It’s hard to survive let alone find the money to do the land care

Participant 2: It’s the initial outlay and that. It might save you in the future but the initial outlay is expensive and you know the, yeah its pretty hard and the returns from it

Participant 1: And it’s a long term

Participant 2: Not immediate return, it’s a long term thing

Typically land care and land management practices were conceptualised as activities that were in addition to the everyday running of the farm. More specifically, land care activities were identified as being long term investments for the farm. With adoption of land care approaches comes additional costs, not only in terms of the outlay of equipment necessary for the particular land care regime (such as tree planting, hiring or purchasing of equipment, changes to current machinery etc.), but also the number of hours donated in kind to the changes made on the property. These in kind contributions were conceptualised as being the unseen contribution to land care that removed the farmer away from their everyday farming activities which are main revenue raising activities for many of the families. There was also a sense within some of the community that the degree of land degradation is so severe that the investment in land management practices is futile,
So probably the land is going to be dead in another thirty years, forty or fifty years and what is going to happen next is going to be, is going to take longer to get back.

Land care is thus paradoxically complex. Farmers are attempting to make a living from a landscape that is severely degraded which in part has come about due to their farming practices – loss of biodiversity, salinity and erosion, through land clearing, erosion and soil compaction through the rearing of hoofed footed livestock. There is a degree of reluctance within the farming community to engage in activities that would deviate from them maximising their potential for income given the stressors, such as drought and unfavourable markets. While land care activities have the potential to be beneficial in the long term, there are problems associated with investing in activities that do not present an immediate return. Land care as such is falling into a luxury activity as opposed to a way of life.

4.5.2. Social Structural
The social structural level of analysis is interested in considering the social and institutional factors that impact on community life. Specific interest in this analysis is in considering community structure, social processes and relationships.

4.5.2.1. Family Farming Enterprise
In the Wheatbelt communities, farming history typically influenced the decisions that people made on their farms. In particular, there was pressure to adhere by the previous generation’s farming practices. Traditions, ways of doing, or an institutional memory can also be present in other corporate or business settings which also naturally impact on people’s activities, however within farming enterprises it becomes complicated by intimate personal relationships. It is often difficult to disassociate roles, for instance, father and boss, spouse and co-worker, and this becomes particularly complicated where the workplace (the farm) is also
the family home. Roles within the business at times need to be renegotiated, so too the family land,

*I am not quite sure what I am going to do myself. I haven’t made my mind up yet but, at the moment it is just, because we recently split the family farm between my Dad and my Uncle and so now we are going about setting up our own structures and re-developing our own systems and establishing how we want things to be done our way. So I don’t, for the foreseeable future I am definitely going to be farming but it is pretty hard in this area with the price of land to see ourselves wanting to do it in thirty years time.*

Note in the above example how the farm land is being reorganised between members of the one family. This marks a significant event, as with it comes independence that does not always occur within the family operated farm. Generally, it is more the case that the property/ies remain in the hands of one generation to which it is passed to the next, with it the expectation of particular farming practices modelled in light of the previous generation. This tradition means that there is often difficulty in introducing change to farming methods within communities as practices are heavily ingrained and are often emotionally significant. For instance, it might be the case that a particular farming practice was introduced by the grandfather of the current operator. In such cases there is often an emotional investment made in addition to monetary and labour.

The shifting social profile is greatly impacting on people’s farming practices, whereby the increasingly smaller workforce and larger properties makes farming the more difficult. Technologies, such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) (provided they have the finances to do so) have meant that farmers are able to utilise machinery to do the tasks as opposed to employing workers, which had traditionally been the practice. Such practices have been identified by some farmers as resulting in devastation to farm lands, for instance,
Actually I don’t see much future for Landcare really, highly individual, and because now we have got GPS tractor driving. I mean I have seen cases of fences being ripped out, bush pushed down, dams filled in.

Another commented,

I have heard younger farmers making their farms square like GPS do or mapping their paddocks less and that means taking out permanent bushland or um new growth bushland or whatever to be able to do that.

In such instances, the use of technology is often thought as being slightly brazen by older generations in the community who perceive it to be a departure from more traditional approaches. The consequence being that there is the propensity for generational conflict.

Despite the propensity for such conflict, family is highly valued within the communities. As many of the families have been farming in the region for several generations there is a complexity associated with how decisions are made and accordingly how the businesses are operated. There is a reluctance to change the farming practice which can be misperceived as an unwillingness to change in general. In reality the reluctance comes out of a desire to maintain family history and oblige their forbearers. There is a different type of pressure that is associated with working on the family business, and it relates to an anxiety about being the generation that ends the family legacy on the land. The emphasis on family and community values may come across as being romanticised, and to an extent it is, particularly as there is some degree of congruence with the stereotypes of farming communities as harmonious hard working and overly intertwined. The reality is that these families are enterprises that are endeavouring to make a living, their social structure is such that they happen to be family oriented which has the propensity to act as both a hindrance and a support.
4.5.2.2. **Social Construction of Women**

As noted, the culture of farming in the Wheatbelt tends to be family oriented, where the business is operated by family members and practices are passed down generation to generation. Typically the gender roles are based on more traditional notions whereby the women’s roles are conventionally constructed as care givers, mothers and home makers. For instance, there was a great degree of unease associated with women seeking employment opportunities outside of the home,

*See the thing now is that some of the ladies are going for the sky high careers but there is nothing more important, I’m not married myself, but there is nothing more important than a mother looking after that family because that’s just as important as that guy um, um, you know skyscraper career, you (know) what I mean.*

While in the above comment accolade is given to the role that women serve within the home, it is gender bound. These comments support the opportunity for men to engage in various career paths e.g. farmer or businessman, but this was not perceived as feasible for women. At times, the value of women’s contribution in the community was also devalued, for instance, one male farmer discussing the Country Women’s Association (CWA) discredited their contribution alluding to limited capacity in their service provision. He cheapened the CWA by suggesting that even the women from that organisation could perform better than the agencies he criticised,

*You might as well get the CWA then. They would probably talk more sense. To a lot of these people that the agencies build all their bonds around to actually take forward renewal on the future, transformation of all the problems. So that the people that you really want are the people outside that actually give you a result, not the people that go to these meetings that enjoy um cream, scones and cups of tea.*
It was also noted that for women on the family farm, their existence can be particularly isolating. It creates a particularly oppressive environment for women, whereby they are discouraged from not only seeking employment opportunities, but also seeking satisfaction in participating in activities that could coincide with their household duties.

... women you know, unless you have got an interesting role as in, in group, or you do something other than what’s on the farm, then basically a woman can be very isolated, very lonely, yeah very, and very well unfulfilled I guess really.

The closure of a book shop and associated Book Club in one town was met with a great deal of disappointment by many of the women who participated. The Club, that was not gender bound, provided a formalised activity in which members of the community and surrounds could meet and socialise. The majority of the formalised group recreation activities in towns tend to be sporting and do not necessarily meet everyone’s interests.

The traditional perception of the role of women as being home makers poses serious implications for the future of rural towns, with frequent reflection from farmers on the outward migration of young women from the communities. It is generally feared that this trend is also contributing to young men also deciding to go to the city. Meanwhile, generally there is the expectation that it is the son who will carry on the family farming legacy. Women instead are conceptualised as serving a support role as opposed to a key decision making role, a mindset which itself limits the opportunity for future farmers.

4.5.2.3. Drought

Drought was a commonly raised discussion point. At times it was a particularly sensitive issue, with talk of the severe impact it was having on the livelihoods of farming families. For many farmers, the value of their land provided enough equity
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

for them to survive financially, but the longevity of the drought was seen to be having an impact on the day to day operations on the farm, for instance,

... they just don’t have the time and this year is going to be the make or break or a lot of farmers out here without rainfall they are going to go broke this year. They have only kept their head above water over the years because the value of their property has increased greater than their debt. Unfortunately that might sky rocket now so um it could be a bad year and that’s the reason why farmers don’t do a lot of land care. They don’t have the money for it.

Increasing costs were also seen as contributing to the pressures that farmers were experiencing. The tendency was for farmers to sell their properties, resulting in increasingly larger properties, but fewer farming families in the district. The efficiency of this practice was questioned,

Farms getting bigger, people selling out. The other thing their costs are, costs are really tight and I think you are getting tighter and I think in the whole, the whole time that I have been farming the, the costs have been going up and well the returns are getting lower and lower. So margins are smaller and so people are compensating for that by getting, buying new land, but I honestly think that we are actually, if we owned a smaller farm we could farm it better, more efficiently

For some areas, of the Wheatbelt, the land is in a favourable condition, which has meant that some farmers have the capacity to sell their property at staggering prices. One farmer reflects on their luck to farm in a healthy area. This reflection is powerful in that it conveys a central element of farming, namely that even with best practice such as employing sustainable farming methods, to some degree farming comes down to uncontrollable forces such as the tenure of the land and the weather conditions. He comments,
Land is so scarce in this district that when it comes up you can ask a premium for it no matter what the condition of the soil is. I mean our farm, we are very lucky we have got really good soils, really reliable rainfall. So we have also maintained our soil’s fertility and everything. Our next door neighbour’s farm sold for about just under $2000 an acre...The price of land is continually skyrocketing and that was with no infrastructure or capital, well no investment, there was no water, nothing on that site.

The uncontrollable nature of farming has contributed to some of the concerns directed towards the physical and psychological well being of farmers, particular concerns related to the prevalence of depression and risk of suicide within the farming community. Particular reference was made to risks in young farmers, which marks a slight shift from the previous preconceptions regarding mental health issues. Central however are concerns directed towards males, who are less likely to express their emotions or seek emotional support,

And it’s the same with the young blokes too, you know, they can’t see a light. I mean I’m starting to wonder about how many of these boat crashes are not suicide. I don’t know I might be barking up the wrong tree.

Possibly one of the most damaging aspects of drought relates to its uncontrollable nature. Irrespective of farmers efforts to best manage their properties, ultimately they are at the mercy of the weather. This is very much a structural issue as it dictates the way in which the farms operate and ultimately the social dynamic of the town. The impacts of drought however are often portrayed as being mythological – namely the impacts of drought by those outside of a farming or regional setting misconstrue the impacts as being a result of poor land management. This is itself greatly disempowering, and poses one of the greatest challenges for dryland agricultural communities, namely how they are perceived.
4.5.2.4. Centralisation of Towns

Possibly the most pressing issue raised during the interviews related to the changing nature of Wheatbelt community structures, whereby there has been a process of centralisation of towns and services. The growing trend has been for essential services, in particular, banks, schools, health and emergency services to be moved from smaller more remote towns to larger regional service centres. The shift has resulted in vast structural changes in the way that towns operate, where there is increasing pressure on the smaller more regional towns to remain operational. Essentially, the issue relates to town sustainability and the smaller communities run the risk of town closure as more services close and people leave. The situation becomes paradoxical in that there is unwillingness on the part of Government to invest in the smaller towns due mainly to budgetary constraints and poor population numbers. As services close or are removed in part on the direction of the State, there becomes less incentive for community members to stay, which only supports the decision not to invest. One farmer reflects on the issue,

*It’s just, I mean some of those more eastern districts from here where that has already occurred with smaller farms being pushed out. Some of those towns find it very hard you know to have um to have a school or to have a local supermarket. If there’s not enough people then they go broke, when they go broke then the two banks in town they can’t survive so one bank closes down and the post office can’t supply so they change to an agency and just everything gets run down I guess.*

Aside from major services being relocated, smaller taken-for-granted resources are also disappearing, including health services. One farmer reflected on the difficulty in getting her son to the dentist, she had to wait almost five months,

*My son had a check up which was due. Actually we couldn’t get in until August so I rang a week ago and I think mid August is the first one.*
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Noteworthy is how the issues appear to be more apparent in areas located further east. This was a frequent observation, with several farmers hypothesising that the unwillingness to invest further east is due to the distance from Perth, consequently this contributed to a stronger bond in those communities that were less supported, for instance,

*Perhaps, it gets stronger further out you get. Further you get away from Perth. Like in York there was pretty much no community bonds at all. Like yeah, no-one would do stuff like that. Maybe, but yeah I didn’t see too much evidence of community things.*

Associated with this assertion was the sense that these communities had been forgotten due to their location and that a perception that the Government was disinterested in their needs and unwilling to invest in the communities because they were of no perceived direct benefit to Perth. This will be discussed in greater depth regarding the related issue of ‘Escarpmentalism’.

Not only as a consequence of the centralisation, there is also a unique sense of community whereby in order to have the quality of life that they aspire, they self organise at a collective level. Consequently volunteerism is steeped in the rural community culture, for instance,

*They say most country towns, people get together. Like busy bees at schools. Trying to get school [tape inaudible] like all community orientated activities that benefit the whole town most people turn up. You don’t get paid for it but there might be a raffle or something, you know. Yeah, free lunch and drinks provided by a few within the town or you know, a picnic, drink, keg on after you finished you know.*

And,
Yeah well that’s right. I mean even around town the siren goes for the fire, the fire station and there is people, mechanics, electricians, a lot of self employed people as well as um people who are employed by local business, respond to, to that.

It was suggested that the more under resourced the community the greater sense of community, whereby there is greater pressure to ensure the sustainability of the town. There is a strong drive within many of the towns to maintain the local lifestyle and culture with a great deal of resentment directed at threats to this. The centralisation of towns poses one of the greatest structural change for these communities, and in most cases there is very little which they can do to influence the decision making powers in Perth.

4.5.2.5. Escarpmentalism

Consistently, there was a perception of injustice between the treatment of communities in the eastern Wheatbelt compared to more urbanised centres. The frustration was directed most commonly to discrepancies in investment and opportunities for communities between the city of Perth and its urban fringes compared to rural communities.

Many farmers hypothesised that the major difference between city and country related to value systems and culture. There was a sense that the disparity in how people value each other and the environment was fundamentally different. Interestingly, these perceptions regarding community versus city value systems can be defined geographically. The Darling Escarpment which marks a naturally occurring physical divide between what is socially constructed as ‘farming country’ compared to the city and urban fringes. This environmental ‘wall’ not only represents a divide in a physical sense but also symbolises a social, emotional and perceptual distance. Significant to this professed discrepancy amidst the farming community was the perception that there are different values and attitudes that characterise city and country. These attitudinal differences were often seen to be of
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

detriment to the farmers where city peoples stance on issues conflicted with farmers capacity to go about their farming life, for instance, one farmer lamented on the plight of some farmers in the Northern Wheatbelt,

*Oh Look at another example that’s happening at the moment. The RSPCA are going out to people because the sheep are starving out in the northern Wheatbelt. Now look it’s hard, it breaks your heart but if a) you have got no money b) you have got no feed and there is no feed*

Here he demonstrates that what is conceptualised as being a grim reality in farming culture is perceived as being abuse by city people. These differing perceptions tie closely with findings at the Myth/Metaphor Level of the analysis where farmers are constructed as being environmental vandals and poor land and stock managers. This perception fails to recognise the realities of farming life and instead positions the farmer negatively placing blame on them.

There is similar resentment directed at where the major decision making powers reside,

*Yeah and the other thing was they thought that their infrastructure, or their manpower infrastructure, was sparsely spread and [tape inaudible] from Canberra direct to the community. They didn’t have control, they didn’t have a bureaucratic infrastructure to report back you know. So monitoring and evaluation is like their, I suppose their holy grail really so they went regional. They set up all these regional councils and in our case it’s the ACC um and they decided that local Landcare co-ordinators, who traditionally were funded from Canberra, weren’t strategically important any more. So they stopped the funding for all the Landcare co-ordinators around the, around the region and the only ones that are left are those that are funded by the Local Government, by local councils so that they put the onus to funding local co-ordinators onto guys in the community. So they devolved, immediately devolved the funding onus to the community.*
The consequence was a sense of helplessness within the community, whereby the local community is not a part of the decision making process for their region. The farmer later adds to his earlier comments, stating,

*Anyway I don’t think any of us really expected anything different, the money was never going to go to the community, to the farmers.*

Another reflected,

*Bureaucratic paperwork comes straight to mind. They seem to focus on what I can see the Avon Arc; Toodyay, Beverley, Brookton, York and don’t even come out. I mean because we have tried to get them into this drainage problem sort of saying you know the problem is coming your way. You have got, you have got to [be] aware of it. You have got to start thinking of solutions and they, they, it hasn’t got here yet so let’s not worry about it too much.*

These perceptions have also resulted in a sense of resentment directed towards city people. An example was given regarding the disposal of drainage water from the Eastern Wheatbelt through the catchment to the Swan River which passes through the highly populated and affluent city suburbs. There was frustration regarding the disparity between what country people’s painful experience of drainage water killing ecosystems and a perceived intolerance that city people would demonstrate if it affected their enjoyment of the natural environment, for instance,

*And it’s killing everything in the creek. Its working its way down and killing everything in its path so it’s really. I mean it, if someone dug a drain say now in Perth and dropped it into the Swan River with something like that there would be all hell to pay.*
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

His reflections also allude to the perceived power differential between city and country people, where city people are thought to have the power and capacity to object to the local waterways being contaminated. Comparatively country people feel restricted in their options.

The issue of ‘Escarpmentalism’ indicates the social divide between city and country people. Interestingly, those interviewed were strong in their convictions of identifying themselves as country people, and not like city people. There was a strong sense of pride in how they constructed themselves as farmers and regional people. The ‘Scarp has historically posed a significant barrier both physically and symbolically. The injustice that is felt in terms of allocation of funding and the removal of services only reiterates the perception of being undervalued by the city.

4.5.2.6. Complexities of Small Towns

The social dynamics in small rural communities have their intricacies, much of it related to navigating the social interconnections and multiple roles that people serve. For instance,

*Well you are running across people as social individuals as well as professionals so and you can’t, I mean there is advantages in that, some very good advantages but there are also disadvantages.*

And,

*It has its downside living in rural communities and working.*

Part of the downside as referred above relates to the complexity of living and working in rural communities. For some, the complexity related to the farm being the place of employment, which meant that their working and family lives were intertwined. Role definition is particularly complex, resulting in a high level of trust.
needed between community members, for instance when confidentiality is needed. Due to the small population numbers and interdependence of community members on each other, rumours and gossip are a reality of rural life. The low population numbers have also introduced some challenges socially, for instance,

So you know you have got another problem, like Narembeen. They can’t get a footy team out there because Friday night all the young blokes go to Perth. There are no girls out there. So yeah, you know and that’s the problem, a big social problem in the Wheatbelt.

As the Wheatbelt population ages, it is also causing concern for the future of farming in the region. There are questions arising as to where the next generation of farmers will be sourced, with many current generation farmers discouraging their children from continuing the families farming legacy. Another issue relates to the associated impacts of loss of farming knowledge within the community. One farmer reflected on this problem,

Because people don’t use it straight off and so they forget about it. Like one of the biggest problems with Landcare and, and well anything, any organisation today ninety-nine per cent of the people running them are my age or older. The problem with that is that there are no young ones learning what we have already learnt. Now when we go the young ones will say well we better keep that going but they won’t know what we have known and they will make all the same mistakes again. You know there is research being done now that was done forty years ago. All they have to do is pull it out of the drawer and there it is and that, we are making those mistakes over and over again. Hopefully now because things are starting to get put into digital form one of the things that researchers have got to do now is go and pull all that out before they start.

The changing social structure of the community, particularly in regard to small population numbers and the challenges associated with few youth in the
community has not only changed the way the communities operate and interact but has also called into question their long term survival. This is not to question the strong desire that was expressed by participants to remain in the communities, nor is it that those people leave the country because they are not passionate about family or their community, rather it appears the case the poor provision of services are dissatisfying not only their wants but their needs and it is the under resourcing of the region is essentially pushing them out.

4.5.2.7. Paradoxical Problem Solving

In the Wheatbelt there is a strong push for environmental problems, predominantly those that have come in part through farming activities, to be addressed. The emphasis, particularly from Government and research agencies is towards sustainable land management practices. The general nature of these programs is based on a model of providing support – financial, advice, training, or a combination – to encourage farmers to change their current practices to ones that are of less detriment to the physical environment, and ultimately aids in the long term sustainability of their farms. This general approach has posed some interesting implications, while the sentiment is favourable, the capacity for farmers to be able to apply these changes is questionable, for instance,

And we were fortunate really that we were ready to do it at the time, and I think part of our brief was to um, to be an example to local farmers that they could follow. But in reality they couldn’t follow because they didn’t have the money.

The paradox historically has tended to go unrecognised and consequently the solution posed is to restructure, as reflected by one farmer,

It’s been an ad hoc thing up until now and it really hasn’t worked. All the work that has been done out there hasn’t really got a result. Now that was the reason that the Avon Catchment Council and other councils were brought into being by the Federal Council...
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Government. They could see that the ad hoc approach wasn’t working and money was being wasted on that and so we now have to do an across the board approach. So when we do a project everything has got to be included in that project to try and make it work and I believe that’s the best move in land care in forty years at least.

Another reflected,

... they are stupid. Now you have got a duplication process but you haven’t changed the essential nature of human beings at all. And you haven’t recognized the problems to do with the nature of human beings not to do necessarily with the structure per se. I am not saying structures are never important I don’t believe that but I am just saying their importance is grossly over emphasized.

Here, his frustrations pointed towards the assumption that by changing how the structure operates you have the propensity to change their behaviour. He was on the cusp of recognising a paradox in that the problems in which the program is attempting to identify, are not the issues that they should be trying to solve. Another farmer articulates the problem, identifying the challenges within the Wheatbelt as relating to social process – how trying to encourage change within a setting where the human resources are just not there is nonsensical, he reflects,

Well [it] doesn’t and it’s only for twelve months so in Landcare it could take twenty years, funding is for twelve months. One of the big problems that we are going to face is that the staff have only got a two year tenure and then they have got to move on. Yet people don’t want that. You know if you are going [to] buy a house and bring up kids you have got to have a secure job and there is no guarantee of that unfortunately.

One of the major flaws in regional land care problem solving relates to how support is provided. Typically, farmers apply for funding support to undergo land care activities whereby they submit a grant application that in turn is judged by the
funding body. During the period of interviews, the ACC acted as brokers for National Heritage Trust 2 funding. Consequently, the process is favourable to the individuals or groups that have a successful bid, and has the propensity to lead to enmity from those that were not successful. For instance, one farmer reflected on this dilemma,

*The other thing you have got to remember too, you know a lot of farmers from out of the area. This sort of thing there was an animosity within the community about. Oh they are getting all this for that and they are getting you know a lot of money thrown at them and they can do this fencing and they can do that whereas we had half our property in it and half not. The old man’s original block across the road, that wasn’t part of it so we can do this bit, you can, you can, after a while once you have done a lot of the projects if you felt you needed to use it out of the catchment group you could use some funding out of the catchment group but we had a lot of friends and neighbours that are across the road that weren’t involved.*

Essentially, the bidding process placed farmer against farmer. Considering this in light of the broader culture of the Wheatbelt – small, socially interwoven communities, the majority of which had been experiencing a great deal of grief associated with the impacts of drought and salinity hence to a degree, considering the approach i context appears counterintuitive. The support process by its very nature disturbs the social fabric of these communities and unrealistically expects there to be a differentiation between community/social/reational life and business/farming/ enterprise life. This is an impossibility. It becomes not only a distributive justice issue, in terms of who receives the funding, but also a procedural issue. These processes add to paradox whereby the issues of the Wheatbelt are related to social process such as numbers of people, community security and investment. The processes effectively positions farmer against farmer and only further threatens the fragile social dynamic.

Another issue relates to how the resources are distributed. The Wheatbelt is very community oriented, and there is strong frustration directed to social processes or
individuals that take advantage or threaten their community. Many farmers reflected on the detrimental impact of departmental staff that ‘fly in and fly out’ of their community. One farmer described interaction with experts from Canberra “to do the hit and run as we call it”. Other farmers lamented on this typical process,

But I think, I think that’s the trouble between a farmer and a lot of other jobs. I mean, I mean people nowadays have five or six jobs before they retire. A farmer, I mean a farmer is used to. I mean you have got to go through bad years. I mean you can’t just say we’ll sell today and then we will buy next year you know its got to look a long term project and we tend to. And the thing is a person comes from the Ag Dept, comes down gets to know the people, gets to understand how the committee is thinking and then they are off and then you have to start all over again.

And, Anyway and the farmer came out and one of the other guys, another farmer, was saying, ‘gee I think we did a lot, that we gave them enough’, like we were OK. And this other guy said, ‘yeah don’t worry about it they always get more out of us than we get out of them’. And yeah, it is interesting, because even my group has identified that as an issue working with all sorts of researchers or [tape inaudible] it’s been, yeah it tends to be very sort of one way. And the difficulty, I’ve actually said to groups, like [tape inaudible] come in on our terms and we want research information that comes out to us to be usable, we need to be able to put it into practice. It is quite an involved group, one of the ones that I work with. OK.

These issues relate to a strong urge to feel valued by the people that enter into their community, and a sense that the investment is genuine. There are also some more pragmatic benefits from securing people in the community, But really I mean there is funding available. You have just got to be good at accessing it I think and, and for us in this district that falls down because we don’t
have a co-ordinator to actually help us. They say you can ring people and you can contact them and they will help you with it but that’s one thing. It’s another someone coming around and saying I will write it for you.

Several farmers reflected on times that they felt that the problem solving approach had been successful. These were typically characterised by change being thought of as long term (not defined according to financial years), the language and rhetoric being in accordance with the farmers own, that the skills that were learnt built on their current experiences and were characterised by thinking about the community as a whole as opposed to positioning them against each other. For example,

And then it went to fence lines and you sat down at a meeting of three farmers in this area here. All came to a meeting, maybe at our place, and put your map down and overlays and so everyone sort of got to know what other people were doing and then you had to do your plans, your five year plan of what you would like to do. So then everyone sat down in their groups then. So I knew what this neighbour up, further up the catchment was doing they knew what I was doing further down and what was planned over the fence. So you might be able to tie that into what they were, you know doing. So the first two or three years was all that and I think nearly everyone joined in that...Yeah and a lot of that was, it was really educational for most of us because um prior to that people really probably didn’t know what farm, neighbours farms were like or what problems they, like you wouldn’t really talk about it much.

One participant described it as being a “sense of catchment”, reflecting that it was this form of social bond that enabled some of the barriers to be broken down and consequentially success in their collective land care endeavours.

And it was but we, we were just saying that having the sense of catchment and how it affects one another. I reckon it would have been quite strong. And that’s broken down those sort of barriers I think. But I was just saying that that sense of
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

*catchment and how it affected one another is probably why we were more successful than most of the others.*

The approach in their land care works was contrary to the typical approach of individualised funding endeavours and instead operated at a collective level. This generated a sense of mutual support and cohesion and broke down the potential competitive barriers that appeared to characterise other land care approaches. Significant to the approach of this collective method was that it mirrored the way in which the community operated ordinarily, whereby the interconnected and interdependent nature of remote rural life was conceptualised as an asset as opposed to something that requires breaking down through the use of incentives and funding at the individual or competitive level.

Aside from the obvious paradox presented, there is also the associated problem related to the underpinnings of such problem solving. The approach is characterised by the assumption that farmers would want to change, this may not be the case. There is also a perceived right on the part of Government and science to offer advice and encourage people to change. It positions farmers as being in deficit, that as land managers they have failed and that they require ‘experts’ to advise them how to run their businesses better. This has the propensity to be particularly disempowering for farmers and communities and strips them of being experts in their own field.

### 4.5.3. Worldview/Discourse

The Worldview Discourse Level of the Analysis is concerned with considering the deeper value systems of a community. This level recognises the importance of gaining an understanding of how people frame and interpret their world. This Level aims to structure analysis beyond gaining a contextual understanding of the individual and through to posing how it is they see themselves and the world.
4.5.3.1. **Social Construction of the Farmer**

Over time, the social construction of the farmer has changed. It has moved from an early settlement perception of the dryland farmer as a hero to one that is an environmental vandal. Now, rural life is often presented in a negative light and in deficit to rural communities’ members’ urban cousins. When dryland farmer issues are conveyed in the media, rarely are the communities presented in a positive light, rather the hardships, and shortfalls are communicated which does little for promoting the region, nor, for the wellbeing of the communities which reside in the towns. Suicide is a serious issue within the dryland farming culture in Australia and the media presentation of the region does little to summon empathy. During interview, farmers consistently undervalued their efforts, expertise, local knowledge, problem solving and adaptive skills in continuing to work and live in complex settings. Wheatbelt farmers tend to operate on a collective and collaborative level, they not only see themselves as a farmer, but a member of a community. For instance, one farmer reflects on the success of a field day,¹¹

*It’s really good. And the best one that we are in allows you to benchmark yourself against each other and it doesn’t matter, you know. There is no pride involved at all, it is all just about seeing what blokes are doing to get the most out of their soil and how they are doing it and who does different things and what results they are getting. So everyone at the end of the day walks away with a bit of information. Either, they know they are doing it the right way and there may be a few other ways that they could make it even better or they know they have to completely change their structure and alter their whatever.*

Farming practices, while also informed by a myriad of sources, for instance formal education, involvement in conservation groups, historical practices, trade and

---

¹¹ Field days are coordinated, generally top-down initiatives whereby farmers in a community meet to learn about farming activity/ies that is/are occurring in their area. For instance, this may involve the demonstration of a funded trial on a farmer’s property. The field days aim to provide an information sharing forum in which farmers can ‘take home’ potential learnings to employ on their own property. Many farmers describe the actual benefits of the field days as being the social interaction with other farmers in their community.
mechanical skills tends to be dismissed as being highly influential in how farmers manage their farms. For some, their farming practice also draws on instinct and an emotional, if not spiritual, connection with the land. It is a type of knowledge about how the farm operates from living and breathing the business. The almost instinctual nature of farming is highlighted in the following farmer’s comments, where he expressed that the system in which he farms is oppressive,

The farmer can tell you whether its better or not. Oh I can grow a crop on it now or a tree will grow on it yeah. It’s just so frustrating trying to work within the system [Bureaucracy]. I can’t wait to be out of it to be honest because I just don’t feel productive in the end.

This illustrated that the social construction of the farmer and the social and institutional processes that are developed to ‘aid’ farmers has the capacity to disempower the communities.

4.5.3.2. Changing Farming Paradigms

As the structure of rural communities change, so too are the ways in which farmers manage their land. It makes sense then, that over time, there has been a change in the farming paradigm. The changes in the structures of families have been particularly influential, with one of two general scenarios occurring. Firstly, there is the risk of farms selling up with many farming families discouraging their children from farming, for instance,

I am not encouraging my son to come home on the farm. He has got enough brains I think he can do something better so it is silly not encouraging him. What’s going to happen in the long term with the farm I don’t know.

There is an overriding sense that for some areas particularly in the Eastern Agricultural areas the notion of family farming is disintegrating due to the broader
social processes of living in rural communities, namely the pressures of unsatisfactory service provision and market and climatic pressures discouraging continued participation in agriculture.

The second scenario is that those that remain on the land are conceptualising farming slightly differently for instance, typically, sons or daughters with an interest in farming are gaining relevant tertiary skills, and returning to the farm with new skills, ideas and vision. Such younger farmers, although in some cases viewed with scepticism from the older more traditional farmers on the land, are highly responsive to opportunities and tend to be more actively engaged in land care activities, which in part, have come out of what they have learnt from their education off farm. The group I speak of here, runs across two generations, late baby boomers and their offspring. The relevance of this particular group is that the younger farmers have received insights that were acquired through institutions such as agricultural colleges, universities and TAFEs, and their parents, were likely to be involved in farming during the Decade of Landcare. This is a significant shift in how farming operates and marks a subtle yet pervasive move away from the traditional family farming approach. For some of the late baby boomers, their experience of succession was complex in that during the 1990s they were presented with a new way of thinking about farming, namely in terms of conservation as opposed to purely production.

For instance, one farmer reflected on her family’s experience regarding the historical changes in the value of trees on the property,

*Further in the Wheatbelt it is really, it is really bad. The salt is just lying on the ground I mean and in part that’s agriculture’s problem, well their fault as well, I mean, I know we’ve, since Doug*12 and I have been here we have replanted oh look I don’t know how many trees. We have replanted trees because they, in his father’s

12 Name changed for reasons of confidentiality
day and grandfather’s day, the sole thing was on clearing whatever they could see to crop and they made good money back in those days, I mean, that wasn’t good money but they made a good living from farming. Whereas now we are trying to replant trees or we are replanting or have replanted and not for salinity so much but um its environmental as well. We have done things very differently to, or doing things very differently, and that’s also technological and all your other sort of um...

But I know on the train going to Kalgoorlie further inland its, its pretty bad news.

What is significant in this reflection is how over a generation there has been a drastic change in farming worldview. A generation is a short period of time. One farmer reflected on this point,

... you have got to remember that it’s been probably forty-five years since we started spraying rather than ploughing and so you are talking two generations now and they know nothing else.

Not “knowing anything else” marks a significant transition. Another farmer reflected on the economic rationalism that characterised farming during the 80s,

Relationships survived very much until quite recently and what happened is from about oh ‘86 or ‘87 the economic rationalists basically took charge and the attitude was well if people aren’t prepared to pay it then why are we doing it? [Landcare]. Especially like our parents age group would they, they didn’t really discuss things like that but it was, it became a, you, what’s the word, you were all responsible for the land and how it worked wasn’t it really. It, you still had ownership of what people were doing in your catchment because it was, it actually had an effect on other people, either further down, generally further down in the catchment.

In addition, this observation marks the importance of community, whereby there is an awareness of the interconnection and dependence between family farms and enterprises. While it was challenged during economic rationalist times, the value
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

placed in community has remained relatively constant irrespective of the farming paradigm.

4.5.3.3. **Othering**

Throughout interviews there was a frequent use of othering. The othering occurred when the farming community and the urban society were differentiated and took the form of how the farmers perceived city people and how they supposed city people perceived them as farmers. The reflections were highly insightful and tended to mirror the issues that were prevalent to the theme of ‘Escarptmentalism’ discussed at the Social Structural level of the analysis. Commonly people in the city or urban areas were generally perceived as being relatively disassociated and ignorant of rural life. In the most extreme description given, there was a,

*... city attitude, no-one wants to help anyone. They are all like self absorbed. Interested in their own money making, their own lifestyle, you know being rich snobby people.*

Other comments were made such as,

*They [city people] don’t know where milk comes from.*

And,

*No you can’t survive on the wages we are getting in the city because we have got to go to the movies three times a week, fast food every second night - I don’t get a wage rise.*

Others criticised the city of possessing an unwillingness to learn and experience country life. An example was given encouraging the need for school children to visit
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

the region, in essence, so they can form their own opinion about what country life is like,

No there’s two sides to every story and there’s just no people out here now so and too you get people going back to the schools and getting people out to have a bit of a look around and meet people that are trying to improve the country areas you know in your own farms. We have got tens of thousands of trees and stuff like that. Until you get people out, have a bit of a look and talk to them one on one you are wasting your time. Some idiot gets on the radio and TV and in the paper and there’s twenty people standing around and saying you have got to do this and you have got to that.

Generally, there was the perception that farmers were seen as being lazy and ignorant by city people. There was a sense of urgency within some sectors of the farming community for this perception to be disproven and for attitudes to change. This attitude marks a significant departure from how farmers were previously conceptualised as being hardworking heroes.

Participant 1: But they all go to Muresk and you know anyway. But people look at me and oh I’m from the country and they go ‘you don’t look like a country girl’. Or Sam comes and speaking to my friends and they go ‘oh no way you’re from the country?’ He wears trendy clothes you know like he is like going out in Subi, or Claremont or Mt. Lawley or whatever and he doesn’t come up as the typical farmer. I say [to them] you don’t understand

Participant 2: I know enough, you know, intelligent smart farmers and I did an agricultural degree at UWA and a lot, most of my mates have ended up on farms

---

13 The Muresk is an Agricultural College situated in the Wheatbelt close to Northam.
14 Name has been changed for reasons of confidentiality.
15 Subi (Subiaco), Claremont and Mount Lawley are affluent suburbs of Perth which are known for their bars, restaurants and night clubs.
and they’re by no means the only guys down there with half a brain you know there are just so many, the guys that decided they wanted to be farmers, they didn’t have to go to uni, which is fair, and they’re just as smart as, just as articulate.

The othering appears to have come out of a response of farmer frustration at their perceived social construction. By being constructed themselves in a negative way, their response has seemingly been to negatively construct city people.

4.5.4. Myth/Metaphor Level

The Myth/Metaphor Level of the CLA is a powerful means of exploring the deeper aspects of how people conceptualise their world. At this level, the mythological stories and the ways in which they adopt metaphor is often unconscious and ways of being become ingrained into everyday life. The aim of the analysis at the Myth/Metaphor Level is to identify these deeper conceptualisations of their farming community culture.

4.5.4.1. Deficit Model

The social construction of the Wheatbelt is typically of a region in financial, social and economic decline. A common message during the interviews concerned farmers’ remorse regarding how their circumstances were portrayed. There was acknowledgement that currently farming and rural community life more generally has been experiencing some challenges, however a degree of scepticism as to why hardship tended to be the only messages or images communicated to the broader public. The media was perceived as being particularly detrimental to the rural image,

Also Perth media. Perth media papers are much the same. They don’t have a great grip on things. Um but Perth radio, well radio based in Perth. ABC quite often, talk back radio and I think the media owes us a hell of a lot because they, they have a
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

story to put on the radio every second day but they’re not terribly good at defending
your spot. There’s people who, well a couple, a month or so ago there was a couple
of farmers on the radio basically telling people how it was and how terrible it all is,
and they were spot on with what they said, and a heap of Perth people um rang up
saying about all the subsidies farmers get and they get this and they get and we just
don’t get any of it.

In this particular scenario, the frustration was directed to farmers who were on the
radio and also to the station/s who cover these stories. So while the stories
regarding the complexities of farming in the current social, political and economic
climate attempt to give voice to a community that is experiencing some challenges,
endeavouring to gain pity from urban centres only validates the mythology.

Criticism of the media was also directed at the rural media,

The rural media is oh they’re just as bad as, as the metropolitan media. Um some
papers like the Countryman, when we got four inches of rain in the middle of
harvest, start talking about you know, record seasons predicted when we didn’t
even have the last season harvested.

In this instance, the mythology surrounding farming is operating through slightly
different mechanisms. It is portraying farming as boom-or-bust positioning farming
in either a highly positive or negative light. The see-sawing of portrayed opportunity
and portrayed decline communicates mixed messages to urban communities who
may or may not have the knowledge of farming systems to distinguish good from
bad reporting on the state of affairs.

Another farmer reflected on how there is a need to change the negative perception
that is portrayed, she commented,
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Negativity. Whenever the Wheatbelt is in the news or farmers in the news it is always doom and gloom and at that rural seminar the other day I just said we have to give a perception out there. We have got to talk about the good times.

Another farmer expressed remorse regarding the generalised perception that farmers are discouraging their children from farming, for instance,

*I mean I often get the query said to me, ‘oh your son has gone home to farm he has got a uni degree, why?’, and I said well why wouldn’t he??*

What is particularly insightful above is how there is an alluded to status associated with gaining a formalised education and taking on a profession as opposed to deciding to farm. The assertion is value laden, implying that farming is less valuable or worthwhile.

The impact of this overwhelming deficit orientation is disempowerment. Many of the research questions and projects, funding opportunities and support programs are created with the sentiment of wanting to empower communities, change their practices or redefine them. Paradoxically, these approaches which in part are presented with the aim of empowering communities have the capacity to disempower. Communities are positioned as in need of improvement or betterment as defined by people outside of the community. Had the motivation come from the communities themselves it is highly likely that the outcomes would be fundamentally different, where they have the power themselves to determine if they wish to change, and if so how.

Changing the perceptions and attitudes that have tended to define the region as in deficit was seen by several farmers as critical. One women reflected on the positivity of her husband,
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

I am very lucky. Barry has always been very very positive and image positive and it makes things and where we come and people say to me oh that’s all right. You know we have had four generations or three and a half generations of pretty successful farmers. So it has been, its good. Um but as I said looking around this year and you know the margins are a bit, going to be tighter this year and it depends on how rain we get today, this is looking better.

In her reflection, a positive attitude made for a happier life lived. The deficit myth threatens the capacity for rural communities, even in complex or challenging farming or social settings to operate positively. Another farmer’s suggested solution to dispelling rural mythology is by inviting people to the country and learning for themselves the reality of rural life,

... some of the kids came up and we take them for shearing and take them through the shed and you know let them jump on the tractor and things like that and, and some of the kids obviously know that. There would be better than fifty per cent that would have absolutely no idea what’s happening out here and the mind boggling thing is in twenty years time they might be making decisions in what we do out here.

4.5.4.2. Myth of Cultural and Social Drought

Related to the Deficit Model Myth, concerns the myth of Cultural and Social Drought. There is a pervasive perception that the Wheatbelt communities are void of a cultural and social vibrancy with mythical parallels made between the community as being akin to the state of the landscape, as degraded, fragile and in decline. One participant in her 20s reflected on her life working in Perth and her encounters with young women from the city,

... there are so many preconceptions about farm, rural. It doesn’t have to be farm life but rural life, I mean I sit there in a bank and I work around the branches and I

---

16 Name changed for reasons of confidentiality.
you know got the young girls. I tell them I am from a farm and ‘oh gosh never live there, I could never go’, and I say ‘you just don’t understand like there is a great social life especially if you like sport’. I mean if you like sport, you know it’s huge that’s what you do on the weekends.

Significantly, she challenges the mythology surrounding regional communities, arguing that rural life offers far more than farming. She later goes on to reflect on her aspirations for the future. Of significance is that she sees the Wheatbelt as the place that she would like to raise a family. Her values convey an importance in community over wealth,

I come from a different, I think of things that you might not think of though. I think of if I want to have kids, I want my kids to grow up, I mean you have that feeling but and you know, and I like the community spirit. I like, something that I really, I am probably more emotional about. I will look after myself and my family and be happy before the economics.

The culture and social life is shaped by the notion of community. There is a sense that each member has a mutual responsibility for each other,

... they are genuine nice young citizens these people and there are still some of them around and I tell you what I reckon. The majority of them are from country areas because its still in a family community structure. They are still answerable to the neighbour and the other three people that are at the hotel with them because if they know their fathers and mothers and brothers and uncles and aunties and you run into them around. So you have got to be responsible for your actions because you are all part of the community.
4.5.4.3. Farmer Responsibility

A pertinent myth within the Wheatbelt, is that drought has come as a result of farming practices. It relates to a mindset that farmers are environmental vandals. In essence, all environmental issues that are experienced in the Wheatbelt have been condensed under terms and phrases such as ‘environmental degradation’ or, ‘unsustainable land management’. For instance one farmer likened drought to a natural disaster, questioning why it is not perceived as such by Government,

*I mean, oh if, like a cyclone goes through a place there is instant help from the Government. Now I am not saying we should get, but if we get a drought oh and because drought’s a sort, what is a drought. I think oh are we having a drought, we could end up with a good year. It would just be nice to know that we are appreciated.*

Another farmer gives an account of trying to engage in land care activities when they operate in highly uncertain settings,

*And that’s another reason probably land care is not becoming an issue because money is getting so tight. You know we have had, well we, we look like last year of having one of the best seasons we have ever had and then one night in October frost come along and wiped us out. And then this year a drought has come and wiped us out and I was an idiot enough to buy a farm last year because it was family. My brother sold up and the family block was left, sentimental value got the better of me.*

His reflections touch on several aspects of farming culture. There is the topical issue of uncertainty and lack of control and expressed in his example of frost and drought. Additionally, he laments on purchasing the property of his brother who left the region, due to ‘sentimental’ reasons. This nicely illustrates the significance of family and of a connection with the land.
Another farmer compares the experience of farming to running a small business, again the lack of control is central,

_Yeah and I mean just to be absolutely totally dependent on the weather which is absolutely out of your control And its your livelihood. No other small business would do that you know._

Both examples convey the reality of uncertainty in rural farming communities. It is unreasonable to expect that farmers can predict or prepare for these sorts of environmental impacts, exemplar above is the frost. Despite the realities there is the perception that land management issues are solely the responsibility of farmers, which fails to account for the myriad of uncontrollable variables that impact on their capacity to act on a day to day basis, let alone plan into the future. Farmers are in a position where to a degree, they have to be immediately responsive to the conditions around them. The climate and weather shapes the capacity of what they can do, and natural events such as frost, storm or drought are not controllable nor predictable entities.

4.6. **Causal Layered Analysis - Government, Scientific and Community Organisation**

Government, scientific and community organisations were interviewed as part of the Wheatbelt study. Interest in speaking to such groups was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of community life in the Wheatbelt, whereby a perspective from the groups that service or engage with farmers could be developed. The groups came from various backgrounds, not limited to natural resource management.
4.6.1. Litany

The Litany level concerns the socially overt issues that are present in community life. The discussion of the litany level here is interested in how it manifests in the life of Government, Scientific and Community Organisations in light of farming and rural culture.

4.6.1.1. Discipline Based Activities

At the Litany Level of the analysis the focus was on problem solving energised in part due to a constructed sense of crisis. Government and scientific responses to crisis are framed in terms of their disciplinary background, which is expected and reflects the interests of the individual and group interviews. Reflections are specific to their discipline and factual, attempting to articulate the complexity of the Wheatbelt issues according to how they engage with the community as part of the employment. These issues are closely linked to the participants worldviews and it is clear how their education and profession helps them make sense of the complex problems put before them. For instance a department’s scientists reflections’ on the issue of farm sustainability is framed in terms of his biophysical interests and background,

_Things like root disease. Things like in the cropping side, things like your root disease, your rust, varietals issues, plant breeding issues, they are the ones who are supposed to be developing all our plants. Lets see some rust resistant varieties and some, you know, lets get some research done on frost on things like that. Things that are actually costing farmers massive amounts of money. How they can apply micro-nutrients at a much cheaper rate. What are the long term affects of deep banding liquid fertilizer. All that sort of information that, you know, no-one has really done._

Another also reflects on the issue, again framing the response to rural sustainability and land management in terms of biophysical solutions,
There is probably still the old school that the contour banks and good rotation systems, I suppose also with the salt bush. That was the other area, growing, not growing trees as such.

And,

So I guess that’s the hard. I am not sure I am answering your question, but the hardest, the hardest part about it all is that farms have boundaries and fences but they are not necessarily from a soil conservation point of view. You probably need to have you know, one big farm, the whole state.

Further,

You know, so, or you would at least have farms on, mapped out on soil types or conservation, but they are not, they are based on straight lines, a lot of it.

A Catchment Manager contemplates rural agricultural issues slightly differently from a strategic catchment level. Note how she does not work on an individual level, but instead focuses her attention on broader collective management,

We don’t work very much one on one. In the past I have done a lot of group work with farmer groups and catchment groups doing focus catchment and farmer catchment planning and probably most recently we have completed the catchment appraisal report. We have done one of those each on the big catchments within our region and they deal with basically, for salinity reasons they were done but the natural resource management issues. So we have districts hydrology, vegetation, farmer systems and what the resources are there and how you can manage.

Another participant who worked for a men’s health group, conceptualised rural issues very differently,
Rural sustainable, sustainable rural life... it's just community spirit, engendering strength and making, making life in the community something to look for.

Participants' reflections on rural life and how they conceptualised regional issues varied greatly. Their responses were very much indoctrinated by their school of thought and marked paradigmatic perceptions of issues and how best to address them.

Interestingly here, the complexity of agricultural issues are conceptualised according to systems, what is learnt in terms of these systems are then communicated back to farmers with the intention that this will facilitate positive and sustainable change within the farming community.

A lot of the time it, yeah, because we get to bring nothing to scientific papers, they, the farmers. It's probably not coming back to them. Although it probably depends, there probably is some effort there to get that information back and could probably do a lot more of that side of things. Like with field days and Ag articles and farm like. There are sort of publications which are directed to farmers whereas the other agencies probably do as much of that, have those avenues all set up. So getting their information out is a little bit more difficult.

Interestingly, the general orientation of these groups is to solve or prevent problems or issues, whether they be natural resource related, community issues or both. The problem solving orientation does little to directly develop or support the pre-existing skills and expertise within the farming and broader community. Alternatively, a service provision model that is based on prevention by enhancing the capacity of communities may act to alleviate the development or prevalence of issues occurring.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

4.6.2. Social Structural Level

The Social Structural Level of the analysis concerns social and institutional habits and conventions. Being ingrained in community culture, its significance is often overlooked. The aim at this Level of analysis is to consider the way in which the Social Structural Level manifests in the experiences of Government, Scientific and Community Organisations. This is a particularly informative Level as it sheds light into differences between organisational and community way of life.

4.6.2.1. Endeavours at Problem Solving

At the Social Structural Level of the analysis there are some interesting disparities between how Government and science act at the Litany and how they conceptualise the broader social system in which they work. There appears to be a highly genuine and reflective appreciation of the complexity of living and working as a farmer in the Wheatbelt which does not necessarily appear to translate when they act according to their disciplinary background. It is almost a case of when they ‘switch off’ from working as a scientist or bureaucrat they are then able to identify the problems at hand. Note the differences at this Level of the analysis when their experiences of community life or self reflection of working with farmers are taken into account. For instance,

Well that, that’s my argument, that too much the money goes to the um academic and department staff and not enough to, to hit the ground where it will be more effective or made available to the farmer or the landholders who can then project some strategies that work within his framework not someone else’s perceived idea of how it should be um. There is a lot of talk about sustainability but I don’t know that there is a lot of work being done on ground to help sort out the sustainability issues.

Another catchment manager reflects on the history of the region and gives an empathetic rationale as to why it is hard to encourage agricultural change,
In the late ‘60s about a million acres by then were being cleared of new land, a lot of it to the eastern rabbit proof fence and I worked initially in soil conservation in Narrogin so I had experience on soil conservation work and also um drawing and department implementing farm plans to try and get producers, or primary producers and farmers to clear their land on a more rational basis. But it was pretty hard to do because the blocks of land were allocated on a grid system. Virtually rectangular blocks which cut across um topographical features and it is very hard to get individual producers to sort of fence line or to run contours or fence lines, creek line.

When the issue of drought is considered in terms of the social implications for instance, a Government employee gives her impression of the issues at hand she acknowledges how difficult the situation is and acknowledges that there is little that the farming community can do to combat the uncontrollable conditions,

So the further east and north the more marginal the land and by and large if there is drought or adverse conditions they’re the areas that suffer most and it does pretty well tie in, um, because, um, they do. They have to get bigger to keep up the production and all that sort of thing um and there just aren’t, even historically, the number of towns and everything.

And,

There are areas of WA that had to fight really, really hard to get that um last year. Not last year the year before. The two years before that, because of drought, and even here we had very low rainfall but just the, I mean from my own personal records on our property, we had two years, one year when we have had barely half of our annual average.
There was also recognition of the contribution in kind made by farmers. It was noted that this tends to be poorly recognised and leads to a false economy concerning the impact of monetary support provided by Governments.

And often, and there is a lot of false economies, and false accounting so that people don’t place a factor in. You know, the guy on a tractor might, might go out and do the, you know, let’s say, rip the site for the re-vegetation and might grow the trees himself and you know get a volunteer crew to plant them. But effectively that all costs, you know, its either peoples time, you know it’s the machinery time and if you were to actually budget that out you would realize that um that’s what it does actually cost in real. It might not be costing them real money but it is still a real. Its false accounting or false economy if you don’t actually factor that in.

Others reflected on drought relief funding. Criticism is directed towards bureaucratic process for not sufficiently supporting farmers.

They’re slowly getting the drought relief through a bit quicker. I think that was always a problem that it, they made it so hard with so much red tape that by the time you got it, it probably wasn’t any help to you.

Another also critically appraises the program. She feels that while the approach aids in the short term survival of farms it does little to address what she expresses as being ‘the real issues’. Significantly, these issues are long term as opposed to the short term support that the current drought relief program provides.

Drought relief is useful but I don’t, once again I don’t think it addresses the real, the real issues. Um, there has been talk by both State and Federal people over a long period of time about developing drought bonds. Providing top up funds for farmers that invest in protecting their future, I think there has got to be a lot better way than just having a hand out and at the end of the day the drought relief to provide feed and water to stock I think is essential and needs to happen and that’s the good part
of what happens with drought relief. But in keeping people afloat and surviving it is very hard because it is such a, such a costly exercise and I don’t know what the answer is to that.

Some reflected on the complexity of drainage, not from a scientific perspective, but rather the social and emotional impacts that have come about through their construction,

He is at the top of the drainage line if you like. Water starts on his property and he has already got a neighbour now. He has done some draining and he has got a neighbour who now is complaining about the water that is running onto his property. You know because he is draining his land there is more water. And I believe there is a court case involving a friend of mine in Coolon who is with the same issue. Where two or three farmers have got together fixed up their bit and um which means draining and getting water off their property but it has got to go somewhere so it’s the, the next farmer down the line isn’t in favour or doesn’t want to do it.

There was also a great deal of empathy directed towards the complexity of farming. A common construction of Wheatbelt dryland farmers was criticised in the following excerpt,

So that is probably the worst case emotional issue. Um and I am sure they get talked about in the local paper and its just another issue to deal with, I mean there are lots of issues that farmers just have to deal with and they are often seen as whingeing but there is probably not that many people who would have to deal the sort of business, size business that they do plus manage the books, do the work and put up with the weather. So it is a pretty stressful job I think. It is a good way of life when things go well, it is very nice on a day like this and you are outside in the sun, it’s fantastic, no noise and you can do what you like. It doesn’t matter if you don’t work today too much sort of, but it is pretty hard going.
Another Government employee gave a detailed account of some of the broader social issues which communities grapple with. The description is insightful and informative, examining the layers of community and recognising their interconnections,

*I can see that one of the, one of the biggest problems that I hear people talk about on farms is doing the job with labour problems. They farm, farm, farmers and the community they live in, so the town and people, mostly associated with agriculture. In the secondary level um very concerned about things like education and health um you know what, what jobs are going to be here for my kids and just very the things people are most thinking about deep down. They don’t. If you ask them directly they will probably say more of my land going saline or, or dollar, dollar value for my wheat product out the door is getting less and all these sorts of things but they are all inter-related of course. But I think some of the biggest social things are those other things that it’s their living in a community are not just affected by the physical things. There is the whole social atmosphere there as well and people don’t generally talk about that in, in a forum. Like woman might talk about it when they are having a coffee or a meeting at a women’s group but if you have got a, you know a big meeting or a gather or a group of farmers saying how can we improve our situation they will tell you the very physical things like we need, we need to look at new diverse options for our farms because wheat, we are getting less money for our wheat and yeah you have probably heard heaps of those things already. Well it is usually men you talk to when you go to field days and things. I think men in general like to talk, they try to fix problems physically. If there is something wrong they will try to do something physical to fix it and that usually means for example we are getting less money in how can I introduce a new enterprise on my farm to make this work or so they are trying to make? They can be very focussed on doing the day to day things that will bring money in for the family to survive or to allow them to buy their new car, or whatever their aims are in life. They are working hard at what they know in order to get that, to achieve that aim but the don’t very often
Sit down and look at the long term things that are effecting their family and their community. Although yes the footy club folding it might mean that, that’s one more thing that’s effecting them not getting a good farm worker because there is not, not as many things for the farm worker to do socially and um its also competing, the farm wage is competing with very attractive mining wages at the moment.

The scientific and bureaucratic approach becomes highly paradoxical. It is evident that the groups have a high understanding of the genuine challenges within the community – such as uncontrollable drought conditions, unsatisfactory bureaucratic support programs, community social dynamics, and population pressures. Despite this recognition, the means to which the groups engage with the community is far removed from their understanding of the issues. Their problem solving is ill fitted to the complexities that at a Social Structural Level they recognise and instead continue to offer solutions that are identifiable and solvable according to their disciplinary background, for instance, biophysical solutions (scientific background) or monetary handouts (Government).

The impression is such that either they are oblivious to this inconsistency and paradoxical situation, or, too powerless to do anything about it. Interestingly, when the groups consider the issues of the region from the perspective of a community member, as opposed to their profession, their descriptions and interpretation of issues becomes far more complex. There is an appreciation that farmers are a part of the community, where as at the Litany, it was generally the case that farmers and their issues were constructed as separate to the community. The holism that occurs at this Level is encouraging and marks a conceptual shift whereby issues are not just interpreted as stand alone, rather as part of a complex, interdependent and intertwined system that is inherently to do with people.
4.6.2.2. Changes in Service Provision

Many reflected on structural changes to their employment. The greatest impact related to how their interaction with farmers and the community was becoming less common. This has marked a shift from individual to catchment or regional management, for instance,

*When I first started we did. I would probably go out and see a lot of farmers one on one and look at the salinity sites to work out how to deal with them in that sort of way, and assess, do some surveying and that sort of thing. And the Department has more, gone down the group role. Working with catchment groups and you talk to more people at once I suppose and the [tape inaudible]. These days we probably don’t even deal with the small catchment groups any more. It is more on the regional scale.*

He goes on further to reflect on how he feels about the changes, which is notably characterised by a sense of dissatisfaction at not being able to engage one on one,

*It can be quite frustrating because you feel like you are not really actually getting to the actual grass roots on things that are happening, if you know what I mean. Like I suppose talking in the more big picture across the whole of the southern river basin or the whole of the district rather than at an individual catchment level.*

And,

*We want you to work with a group not to work with individuals so much but to work with a group. So and the social challenge of that is that when you get into a group environment you get those that are very pro this and con this and then you start getting into the politics of the group and sometimes the real facts and figures are hard to get out because you are almost the middle man and that’s a typical thing about this draining issue.*
These frustrations however are rationalised by the desire to be proactive, and strategic in their management. This is not deemed feasible at the grass roots level,

*We were probably a little bit more reactive when I first started. So we can you know tell what the farmers wanted and we could actually do a little bit more and you felt like you were probably achieving a lot more. But these days we are probably a little bit more pro-active and yeah probably hopefully thinking the bigger picture is ahead of times or when things are going to be needed and that sort of thing.*

Again this appears to be paradoxical whereby the value of working at the grass roots level with the farmers is somehow rationalised as lacking strategy,

*Now that’s a very important thing you have got to remember. So we learnt from them and they learnt from us. We observed what the innovative farmer was doing and we were able to make those sort of suggestions to the guy who was wagging the tail a bit and didn’t want to do much, you know. So it allowed us to try new techniques with the innovative guy. Work out where we were going with the early adopter and then basically help the rest of the farming community to see what these people have done and to move on. In terms of how I would view it personally is probably fifteen per cent would be in that innovative category. There is probably another twenty per cent in the early adopters um and then you have got the rest and unfortunately the tail is pretty big. And it is bigger in some areas than others. So we were accused at one stage as a department of just working with these guys and because it was easy, it’s dead easy, they ring up and they say when can you be here, you know.*

Note in the above discussion the use of statistics. At the Social Structural Level of analysis is not uncommon for statistics or quotes to be used as a means of validating a particular topic that a participant feels strongly about. It is an interesting rhetorical tactic that attempts to provide girth or justification to claims that may be mythological, in this instance the social construction of farmers and
their willingness to change. This excerpt also indicates a significant change in the way that the departments conduct their business, for means of effectiveness and proficiency; they are investing in the farmers that are more proactive and accepting of advice and change. Government departments are also experiencing pressures such as the impacts of service centralisation, resource pressures (people and financial) and structural changes that come from the change of Government.

Accordingly, there was a great degree of loss expressed particularly by the Government departments who grieved over the previous interactions they had with community members. They felt frustration out of not having the jurisdiction nor the capacity to engage with people as they once had. One department in particular almost expressed shame in that they had lost the legacy of working closely with farmers.

4.6.2.3. Budgetary Cycle

The Government budgetary cycles were perceived as critical to the functioning of the department. The funding and budgetary cycles (generally based on the financial year) directly determined its focus and capacity. This was also the case for some non-Government organisations that depended on funding rounds for support. Fundamentally there is a degree of uncertainty that accompanies working for these groups which appeared to be heightened by associated pressures with living and working regionally.

Change and adaptation was a frequent theme at the Social Structural Level. The groups, particularly Government and scientific, who operated in the towns had grown accustomed to job insecurity, and decisions being made regarding their livelihoods and activities by people out of town located in head offices (usually in capital cities). The adaptation required included specific things such as language,
Our language does have to change to fit but also we as a Government body act on a twelve month budget.

And the capacity to plan their activities years ahead at a time,

Yeah so on the twelve month budget cycle right now, right now, this week I am attending a meeting that will start to look at where we are going to spend our 07/08 dollars so we are now nine months out to the budget being set and we are starting to plan now where the investment of the department should be OK. Now the investment for the department needs to be able to reflect the whole of Government, what are we going to get in spending money, what is the impact going to be OK. Now the problem is this investment impact stuff, you can’t see the impact for twenty years. How do we sell to Government that we have a finger on the pulse and we know exactly where to spend the right money?

The Government departments are faced with a complex scenario in that for their survival they are required to present a budget that captures the broader aims of Government (a Government which may or may not be aware of the rural and agricultural issues at hand). This is further complicated by the knowledge that many of the intended outcomes of what they are proposing will not come into fruition in the budgetary cycle nor even the Government’s term in power. This makes for a particularly complex situation. When in the context of the typical planning practices of farmers, which are characterised by longer term aims as opposed to fastidious detail, critical to ensure that the departments can sell their case and receive funding. Frustration associated with these bureaucratic processes has resulted in a shift in people’s willingness to work for Government, for instance,

Um basically there was a, there has been a huge explosion in the number of private consultants and a lot of those people were Ag Department people who worked for the Ag Department for three or four years and got trained and then saw the
opportunity to become a private consultant and earn more money and were frustrated probably by the bureaucracy, that’s your Government department.

Another commented,

They are doing a job and they are working as individuals within some pretty draconian frameworks. I mean only today I was dealing with one of them in a department, not to be named, and you know he was saying as a private person he wouldn’t do it anywhere near that way. He would do it another way but because he is working under this process, and in this particular department, you have got to do it this way. So you have got to find the way of getting the system around the system.

The flux of consultants has been felt by the farming community. Many of the farmers spoken to expressed reluctance in engaging with the departments as the one-to-one relationship that used to characterise their interaction with departmental staff has now no longer practiced. Farmers feel that this form of engagement can now more aptly be met through consultancies. Long term employment is also uncertain when working for Government which makes the position less appealing for potential staff and the turnover rate is high. This impacts on the farming community who look for long term and trusting relationships which are proving to be harder to establish with Government employees.

4.6.3. Worldview/Discourse Level

At the Worldview/Discourse Level, the analysis aims to focus on the deeper underpinnings of people’s actions. Specific interest is in exploring the ways that people frame and conceptualise the world that they live in. Hence the aim of this Level is to develop an understanding of the worldview of service providers in the Wheatbelt.
4.6.3.1. Disciplinary Paradigms

At the Worldview/Discourse level of the analysis, disciplinary paradigms were at the fore. Participants training in various fields reflected on how they conceptualised rural issues. As noted, there were very close ties between Worldview and the Litany Level whereby their disciplinary paradigms frame how they conceptualise rural agricultural issues. Despite problems being identified according to disciplinary interest, there was recognition of their role as social agents within the communities in which they work. Typically, this meant that they would have to draw on skills that were outside of their training and comfort zone.

I see that as a problem too. That if you have your, if we have some of our best scientists and the [tape inaudible] best scientists are in that group and they are the people we have got out there trying to make the even ground between this. Who has been heavily involved in that? People from the Dept of Water and scientists and to me it seems just a waste of air, amazing mental capacity in the research...in terms of hydrology to have them try and mediate between farmer A over here who is an extremely proactive drainer and farmer B over here who doesn’t want to do it at all for either environment or social reasons.

And,

With the goals continuing to change over that twenty-five year term, there are some real fundamental challenges in there about how you actually see impact and how you keep the community engaged over time because we are changing the goalposts all the time. We are changing [what] people [are] focusing on and the guys on the land are continually being pushed ... they actually haven’t got the money to put out, that wouldn’t keep food on the table.

Note in the above excerpt how at the Worldview Level, there is a shift in how employees are conceptualising their interaction with the community. There is an empathy that was not as prevalent at the Litany and Social Structural Levels. This
marks an interesting discrepancy between what underpins people’s actions compared to how they actually engage, focussing rather on overt issues, for instance drainage, as opposed to deeper emotional and social implications of the problems at hand.

A Government employee reflected on the importance of personalities and how this can impact on farmer willingness to seek out information from professionals such as scientists. She comments on the various aptitudes for adopting science within the farming community and the need for there to be suitable individuals capable of translating the science into farming terms,

Say if in the Wheatbelt region there aren’t people who perhaps read and are aware of these things and um and then have the inclination to perhaps go and speak to someone from more a research side um, then, you could say it is very dependent on personality in individuals rather than it being a, um, sort of embedded in the culture of the organizational structure.

Another had felt similarly on this issue,

The farmers say ‘well OK who is going to help me do it? I know what needs doing just as well as you do’ and ‘OK you come in from outside and you, you can sort of see the bigger picture. I have been here for you know however many years. I know every stick and every stone on my land. I know every tree, I have got names for them you know. You can’t tell me that you know that I should be doing this or that um so there’. There’s yeah, I would say probably, probably comes down more to attitude and, and listening. If you’ve got someone that comes in and wants to do all the talking without doing any listening, doesn’t take anything away, you know. They are keen to bring things in without taking something away, then that, that will cause problems too.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

For instance, an ecologist reflected on the science that was being conducted and questioned its relevance to on-ground activities,

*I think there is still a big gap between our needs and what science division are delivering from our perspective. So they are still not necessarily delivering the sorts of things that we perhaps need.*

Again, these reflections from catchment managers and ecologists conveyed an appreciation for the complexities of farming life. It is interesting then, that farmers at times feel disempowered by the organisations and structures that are there to assist them and convey a genuine motivation. It appears the case that there is conflict where the Worldviews of these groups are based on an emotional and intrinsic understanding of the emotions, challenges and strengths of farmers, and yet the programs that are developed fail to convey this empathy. The tendency rather is to fall into industry speak or organisational rhetoric which only distances the farmer further.

4.6.3.2. Land Care as Central to Farming Business

Scientists and catchment managers tended to conceptualise land care as practice central to the everyday operation of the farm. This is a markedly different perspective to farmers who saw land care as an activity in addition to their farming practice and in the majority of cases due to budgetary constraints, a luxury activity. For instance,

*I suppose how you see the participation of land care is it like yeah, is it volunteering, yeah, or is it just part, be seen as part of the farm business.*

Volunteerism is a particularly delicate issue in the Wheatbelt, particularly in the more remote communities whereby volunteerism comes out of necessity as opposed to purely good will. Here, land care is presented as a central to the running
of one’s farm or as a voluntary exercise. In the following excerpt a Government department employee reflects on the notion of land care from these different perspectives, attributing land care as being a central to the management of one’s farm while also acknowledging the constraints on the farmer. She uses the example of tree planting,

*The attitude that, for instance, you should be doing more about salinity, ‘You should be planting more trees, you know, can’t you see that your property is degrading’. ‘Yes I can see my property is degrading. I can’t afford to, to do that’. You know um that type of thing um because there are a lot of farmers out there have put hundreds of thousands of dollars into tree planting and fencing and land care and some who haven’t and the, the problem there is that um land care including salinity is cross boundary.*

What is particularly interesting in her account is how she recognises the interconnected nature of farming. Cross boundary issues are critical to fully conceptualising the issue at hand. There has been a tendency, particularly in peoples’ responses from Government, to consider problem solving in terms of the individual as opposed to the collective. This contrasts to the ethic within the farming community, the exception being the approach to drainage. Interestingly, the approach became popular amongst some of the community members from drainage research that had been conducted in the catchment. It was after the approach had been modelled through research as being a relatively successful management option that it began to be conceptualised seriously.

There were instances during the interviews where there was a heightened appreciation of the difficulties that farmers have in engaging in acts of land care. In particular, there was recognition that the rewards of land care are generally in the long term as opposed to the immediate returns which are required for their financial survival,
I think with land care I don’t know. I have only been working in this area for a couple of years, but the term land care kind of, I don’t know if it meant you did have to be part of a group and you had to put in this volunteer effort to get works happening on the farm but really is volunteerism doing something that will in the end give you a return. Like give you a production benefit. I mean, isn’t it something that you know if you’re looking after your land you want better production. That’s the decision you have got to make and you know land care seems to be always tacked on, tacked on, to the, oh I’ve got a bit more money I’ll buy some trees. But really I don’t know if it’s the fault of Government or just the community councils in general but just to push it as being you can get productivity benefits from doing this work, it won’t happen next year but it will happen in twenty/thirty years for the future of your farm.

There was also reflection on the part of catchment managers regarding environmental values, with particular reference to how these can vary depending on the individual’s worldview. A comparison is given between farmer and department perception of salt lakes,

And the interesting thing is, talk about conservation values, world scale conservation values for the landscape. So we have CALM who are saying these salt lakes are incredibly interesting ecosystems and need to be valued, need to be kept to a pristine condition. The farmer says, ‘oh dump it out in there, it is wasteland’. So it is a perception, it is a bit of wasteland; no it is an ecosystem it is really unique. So there is a whole conflict there because for farmer Jack it is not productive land, it is wasteland. It doesn’t even feed his sheep, so there is a whole conflict there so the farmer says dump it in that little bit of land there because it has got no value. This whole conflict, there is a social conflict between production and the environment and values. How do we actually value conservation? How actually do we value biological diversity, ecological diversity?

This particular Worldview is interesting in the sense that it appears to divert from the more empathic understanding of farmer experience expressed in relation to
disciplinary paradigms. The discourse of these groups appears quite conflicted. For many of the groups interviewed, the general orientation of their working life was geared towards conservation or more generally land management with the broader aim of sustainability. When considering land care, this becomes complicated as it also draws in social expectations regarding motivation, and expectations regarding individual landholder capacity to effectively act as land stewards within a broader business setting of agricultural production. It is easy to capture the unease that some of the participants felt regarding how they perceive land care and how they see or fail to see it applied. This emotional reaction on their part appears to stem from a conflict of wanting the best not only for the environment, but also for the people in their community. For many of the participants, their disciplinary worldview puts the environment first, but it appears that their personal worldview and social ethic struggles to reconcile the differences.

4.6.4. Myth/Metaphor Level

The Myth/Metaphor Level is interested in capturing the deeper cultural stories and myths that contribute to the way in which people see, interpret and interact with their world. The aim of this level of analysis is to consider what these are to Government, Science and Community Organisations, and how these impact on the culture of the Wheatbelt.

4.6.4.1. Sandbox Metaphor

Social dynamics and interpersonal relationships featured prominently, whereby there was critical awareness of the need to consider the way in which people interact. A metaphor of a children’s sandbox was used to describe best collaborative practice,

*Have you read that sandpit thing, everything I ever learnt that was of value I learnt in the sandpit at school? It is a great little [inaudible] and it is all about sharing and*
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

respecting and don’t throw sand at me and don’t. It is brilliant, it is just great, anyway if you ever come across it as a bit of junk mail you should read it, it’s brilliant, and it is so true, get down to the basics of what we all want and how we should treat each other, anyway, going right off that.

This metaphor is particularly powerful in that it acts as a contradiction to the scientific paradigm which gives accolade to complexity. Comparatively, this metaphor recognises the wealth in simplicity drawing attention to the power that can come from positive group interaction. She calls into question the need for complex solutions to seemingly complex situations by crediting success to the benefit of community values and how genuine and sincere interpersonal communication can aid in the process of solving complex problems.

4.6.4.2. Right to Control the Environment

There is a pervasive myth regarding humans’ perceived right to control the natural environment. For instance,

Trying to speed up the processes of the natural landscape, trying to overcome our problems with the amount of coal we have. Now what we don’t know is, is there any negative impact on that, and so what actually often happens is that we are mopping up after this because we couldn’t actually predict what was going to happen. And I think whereas it has taken 125 years for us to really start taking seriously salinity from the day man first started clearing land to now, so it has taken 100 odd years to see the real impact. I could be the devil right now and put something out there that environmentalists wouldn’t like and that is that. This was bound to happen anyway our landscape is naturally changing.

One scientist reflected on the reality of the state of the environment and with an air of irreverence reflecting on its impending doom stated,
So probably the land is going to be dead in another thirty years, forty or fifty years and what is going to happen next is going to be, is going to take longer to get back.

Interestingly here, it is alluded to the fact that it is human actions have resulted in the current degraded state of the environment. Accordingly it is assumed that it is through human will that it is possible to restore the natural environment. There is powerful Christian mythology associated with this metaphor. Specifically, like Christs son, the land has died for farmers sins (poor land management). There is faith that as sinners (farmers) they will be redeemed.

The other issue is related to the time frame, as has been the case, land management issues are recognised as being matters for the next generation. Several scientists and government employees reflected on the impact of generational legacies, for example,

*But it was very much the pioneering spirit you know and it wasn’t just in Australia it was happening in the USA it was happening in South America, happening in parts of Russia too. There was just this huge population expansion and the need to feed people in large cities, you know, shift from subsistence agriculture to an industrial society.*

This particular mythology becomes alarmingly paradoxical in that the natural landscape is held in such regard, and yet as a society we have become dependent on its destruction to ensure our survival.

**4.6.4.3. Power of Science**

One of the most pervasive myths relates to the perceived power of science. One scientist reflected,
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

We, the Government agencies and research institutes haven’t actually got an answer as to whether that will actually work at the grand scale. These guys here are saying it will work but they haven’t got the scientific background either. So there is a perception versus factual stuff that continually gets challenged. A continual catch up in, that’s an idea at what scale do we look at it.

The power of scientific findings is even seen to be potentially threatening the existence of some agricultural communities. A non-Government organisation group member reflected,

We are now getting into the very dodgy political areas where people are starting to tie climate change into shutting down areas of agriculture. And you, you just wonder at the, the rationale of that, the legality of that. The impact socially of that being pursued by academics rather than getting down on the ground and actually sussing out what is going on and what changes could be implemented to keep. Keep it all viable, or keep it happening or make it sustainable. So a lot of talk and a lot of airy fairy politics at the moment which it will be interesting to see how that pans out.

There is a fear associated by the power that science has in influencing decision making. In the above excerpt, a distinction is made between science and academia working from a different space, both physically and conceptually from their study areas. It calls for the need for science and academia to think more critically about the potential application of their work and the implications that can emerge for the communities in which the research considers.

The scientific paradigm also failed at times to recognise the intricacies of rural community life, particularly the importance of family and history. One scientist lamented,
At public meetings is when someone stands up and says well my grandfather lived here for eighty-five years and he didn’t have to do that. And you think straight away stop this conversation because those people are not going to change.

This mythology actively discredits the art, expertise and science that it takes to be a farmer. There is little recognition of the tacit knowledge that farmers possess, nor of their potential in working alongside science. The paradigm as such has been science helping farmers as opposed to farmers and scientists working together. It points to the critical need for people working in communities to develop a sound understanding of the community’s culture. Failure to do this results in conflict, misunderstanding and resentment.
Setting Two – Kununurra

4.7. Demographics

Kununurra is located in the Kimberley region, in the far north of Western Australia (see Figure 1 Research locations). The region is known for its extremes in climatic conditions, perceived abundance of fresh water and iconic natural landscape featuring rivers, gorges and tropical savannah. The town of Kununurra in comparative terms to other towns in Australia was settled by a non-Indigenous population relatively recently in the 1960s and 1970s. Of particular interest is the town’s irrigation area, which covers approximately 14,000 hectares, irrigated by water from the Ord River and Lake Argyle. Notably the region has a diverse economic base extending beyond irrigated farming to include, significant mining resources, a strong retail sector, tourism, and pastoral industries. The population rate in 2008 was the second fastest in the State at 2.5 per cent (Kimberley Development Commission, 2008). The population of the region as a whole features a large proportion of Indigenous people (47.7%) (Kimberley Development Commission, KDC). Noteworthy is the history of uncertainty which has characterised the regions agricultural development, specifically Ord 2, or the extension of the initial irrigation area (Lane, 2007). Talk of the proposed development has lead to a great deal of community fatigue due to the uncertainty and holds a great deal of complexity when considered in light of the implication it poses to traditional landholders, particularly in respect to the previous impacts that occurred from initial settlement and irrigation development.

4.8. Researcher Narrative

Grounded Theory research processes require reflection on part of the researcher; hence a researcher narrative was developed. The narrative includes moments throughout the research process that were significant to the researcher, although due to its relative personal nature may not appear overly profound to the reader.
Moments captured in the narrative for the Kununurra study area include interactions with the local community or the physical environment that aided in understanding the culture of the region. For instance, the narrative includes interaction with wildlife which proved to be influential to the researcher given the apparent abundance of native fauna in comparison to the Wheatbelt. Such seemingly simple encounters aided in developing an understanding of issues associated with biodiversity and conservation.

From Perth, the easiest way to get to Kununurra is by air. Kununurra, is one of the major towns in the Kimberley and I called it home for just over a month. There are daily air routes from Perth to Kununurra via Broome or Argyle Diamond Mine and between Kununurra and Darwin. The journey is pleasant enough and a mixed bag of passengers, including Government employees, fly in fly out workers from the diamond mine and tourists depending on the season. Very occasionally you might spot the non-Government employed local. Essentially, it is a luxury trip and one that locals do not really like to make, not only because of the expense but because for whatever reason it means they are leaving their home. Several people I spoke to commented that how they came to settle in Kununurra was that they were travelling around Australia and just stopped. There is a type of mysticism that accompanies this town – it is almost as though you don’t choose to live there, rather, the town chooses you. The apparent abundance of water, the rich black soil and unusual wildlife add to the alluded to spirituality. The town is only a 40 minute drive to the Northern Territory (NT) border and the relentless climate with its distinct seasons, and the distance to capital cities in the south gives the ‘North’ a bond and camaraderie. While the distance brings with it complexities it also casts a degree of anonymity and mystery to the rest of WA. To the townspeople this is a drawcard, for some it meant they could start afresh and disconnect themselves from their past.

The town site of Kununurra is easy to navigate and for much of my time there, I rode a bicycle on loan from one of the locals. The heat would prick my skin as I
peddled the streets, but it was always a pleasant and easy ride. One morning as I came down the stairs to make my way to an appointment I noticed something sitting on the wheel of my bike. I edged towards it, and suddenly, it leapt off. On the ground was a lizard, about 30cm in length. It looked at me, I looked at it. Suddenly it ran a metre or so, froze, and looking at me it began madly flicking its front leg in my direction, as if it were gesturing a rather manic good-bye wave. Then it took off, travelling another metre or two and waved again and continued the ritual until it made its way to a garden and disappeared. I stood bewildered, and started chuckling to myself. It was as if I had been hypnotised by a rather nervous looking lizard as it made its escape route waving goodbye as it dashed. Each morning I would be greeted by the creature and would engage in the same ritual. I learnt from my house mate, a woman who offered me a room while I stayed in Kununurra that they were known as ‘Ta-Ta’ lizards, because it was like they were waving and saying Ta-Ta as they made their panicked retreat. That is the thing about Kununurra, you see and experience moments of wonder and intrigue, like the time I came across a grasshopper on the balcony that was the length of my pen or resting at a pool in a gorge and having tiny fish nibble at my toes. Nature, in its richest and most biodiverse sense is all around you, from the moment you step outside.

The landscape of the Kimberley is striking despite drastic changes having been made by means of the damming of the lower Ord River, the construction of the Diversion Dam, the irrigation area and the town site itself. The size of the town and the two irrigation areas are relatively small, but significantly they are surrounded by land that is relatively untouched (see Figure 7).
Listening to interview tapes you can hear birdlife, insects, during one tape in particular the sound of a frog being gobbled by a bird. The sounds captured an ecosystem. The importance of this landscape is obvious in terms of the biodiversity, cultural and social values (particularly for the Indigenous peoples) for tourism and mining but it also illustrates a complex balancing act that the local community still appear to be navigating, that being how to develop and promote the region while maintaining the integrity of the landscape that they value so highly and which is paramount to their culture and livelihoods.

Kununurra is young, vibrant and active. The mix of people is eclectic and dynamic. The town itself goes through several extremes, all related to weather. The activities and customs in the town are decided upon by the climate – being a tropical
monsoon climate there is ‘the wet’ from (November to April) and ‘the dry’. For the locals, there is a third ‘season’ called, ‘the build up’ – the humid weeks that lead to the monsoonal rains. When you visit Kununurra will give you a vastly different perspective. During the dry season, The Muster as it is known in the region is a time for celebration. The Muster marks the mild period for Kununurra, as this time, the influx of tourists marks a different pressure on the environmental and social system. The town centre is inundated with four wheel drives, campervans, the accommodation is booked out, and there is a flood of people to diamond and Indigenous art sellers and distributors. Money, people, and noise are injected into the streets. The locals become frustrated by the traffic on the road, the lack of parking, and how the pubs are packed. There is an alluded to sense of invasion, but the locals are aware that this season is vital for the town, so the complaints are made only under ones breath, and never in the presence of the tourists themselves. During The Muster, the weather is mild and you only break into a mild sweat. Shops and services that only open during the tourist season are in business, so there is more to see and do in town. Roads that flood during the wet season are now passable by four wheel drive so it is possible to go exploring in some of the gorges looking for water holes. It is a playground for the adventurous types, of whom most of the locals are. Seasonal work also attracts people to the region, adding to the mix of people and interests. The work profile is dynamic and fluctuates greatly depending on the time of year. It is not a cheap place to live, the rents are expensive and there are few places to buy. Common to all of WA, the Kimberley is also experiencing shortages in housing. There was a land release a few years ago, they got snapped up very quickly. So during The Muster, the town is literally bursting at the seams.

In Kununurra it is not uncommon to have small, intimate encounters with the locals, provided you are open, willing and not overtly distinguishable as a tourist. “Did you find a diamond?” I was ecstatic and itching from the combination of sweat and granite laced sand. “Yep” he said proudly demonstrating the pear shaped diamond nestled in a velvet box clasped in his small, grubby hand. “That’s awesome! What
are you going to do with it?”, “Dunno” he piped pompously peering at his treasure. It was The Muster and today marked the annual diamond dig. You pay a small fee for the privilege of digging in a pit of sand filled with prizes. The grand prize – a diamond. The boy I spoke to, not more than 12 years old was one of the three lucky diamond winners. By now it was late afternoon, we were all hot and emerging sandy and blackened from the dig and took the short walk to bathe in the fresh water crocodile infested shallows of Lilly Creek Lagoon. We bathed fully clothed in the shallows, splashing water at each other, laughing. There would have been 100 or so of us in the murky depths. Strangers standing aside strangers as we bathed - women, men, children, dogs. There had been celebrations and activities each day all week and today had a particularly good feel to it. Tomorrow was the four wheel drive rally for Rotary, yesterday there had been a night market with lights and stalls, circus entertainers and food. Today, there was also a festival feel, barbeques, ice creams, fairly floss, families, friends, and ‘out of towners’. Everyone was welcome.

The two weeks of celebration subsides, as do the number of tourists in the area, and gradually things go back to normal. Some shops close, tourist operations wane and close their doors and the community begins the wait for the wet or makes the pilgrimage out. The locals have their streets back and the weather becomes the focus of attention. With the build up the weather gradually becomes insidiously humid. The clouds build, the air becomes thick and almost impenetrable particularly as there is no definitive sign of relief and you are forced to wait it out. Colloquially it is known as ‘suicide season’, the season that tips people over the edge. There is constant waiting for the weather to break, for the rain to fall and cleanse the community of the dense air, to no longer be house or office bound, for seeding to be over, for clothes on your back to no longer become saturated in wet season sweat. Then finally the weather breaks. Only for a moment, the rains fall and then it returns to the muggy heat. Then it falls again, for longer, marking the beginning of ‘the wet’. About 90% of the region’s rain falls over three months.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

I had felt conflicted about the history of Kununurra and the relationship between the local indigenous people and the non-Indigenous people. I participated in a Cultural Awareness Course that ran out of the Language Centre, located on the outskirts of town with the Indigenous Radio Station, Arts Centre and other Indigenous services. I wanted to learn more about the local culture, and try and make sense of how at times the racism in the town ran so thick. I went and spoke to the linguist that worked at the Language Centre a few times too, to hear about his experiences and what he saw. On one of the visits I was sitting on a bench outside the Centre and a man came and sat next to me. He introduced himself and told me how the sign for the Language Centre had been painted by his dad. He told me a little about what it meant. We sat for about 10 minutes or so and then pointed down the road and commented that the group of people that were getting into the truck were going to welcome Baz Lurmann to country and show him where he could film his movie, Australia. He said he was disappointed that he could not go with them today because he was busy doing things at the Language Centre. I liked talking to him and hearing about the painting that his father did.

It is hard to describe what it was like there outside the Language Centre. It was still and you could hear people talking in the distance. I would have been no more than a kilometre from the centre of town, but it felt, different. Talking to the linguist, doing the language course and talking to the guy on the bench were seemingly small but really significant encounters for me. The most significant encounter was the day I met Lana. I decided that I wanted to buy a piece of Indigenous art. There were dealerships all through town as it was The Muster, but I decided to go to the store that was on the outskirts near the Language Centre. The man I met at the bench encouraged me to go there, even just to look and not buy. The building was rammed earth and although it was incredibly hot outside, it was cool and fresh inside. There were many people, some I suspected were part of Lurmanns crew. To my eye, the art works were spectacular, although I realised then that I can only ever

17 Name changed for reasons of confidentiality.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

during the Cultural Awareness Course, my conversations with the linguist and the
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

man on the bench, nor, my 10 minutes with my artist- friend and her grandma and all the other artists in their outdoor studio with the kids and flies and the dirt and the ochre as Lana’s grandmother painted her country.

Racism runs thick in Kununurra. The non-Indigenous settlement story, as with the rest of Australia’s colonialis t settlement, tells more like a story of invasion. What remains in some parts of the community is a chequered xenophobia that is also remnant in some of the region’s social policy. Racism manifested in different forms – a perception that Indigenous people require the guidance or help of non-Indigenous people, the notion of the noble savage, overt racism in the means of slurs, gestures or abuse, racism through ignorance. The mythology that socially constructs the image of Indigenous people in Kununurra is usually highly damaging. When non-Indigenous people spoke about Indigenous people in Kununurra it was most commonly slanderous.

There is a tentative balance in how I have decided to report on Indigenous culture in this research. Fundamentally, as a non-Indigenous white female in her 20s my interpretation of Indigenous life is shaped by my own cultural background. So while Indigenous culture appears to be reported on the relative ‘periphery’ it is so based on ethical considerations. Engaging at a tokenistic level to gauge an understanding of Indigenous culture would itself be harmful particularly as my interest is in the nature of rural farming culture. Investigating this with Indigenous people in Kununurra relates explicitly to the dispossession of the country through western invasion/settlement and talking about this is in itself oppressive. Also in light of Garvey’s (2001) recognition that Indigenous people are the most researched group of people with the least benefit from the process, it appeared potentially harmful for me to explicitly interview Indigenous people in light of the aims of this research. This research process, and its aims would have been fundamentally different had I decided that I had the capacity to ethically conduct research with Indigenous people as opposed to on Indigenous people. Moreover, Vicary and Bishop (2005) have described the processes required to work with Indigenous people. The research
processes they outline involve considerable contact with the community prior to engaging in the research. The research agenda also needs to be negotiated with the community. Given this, I decided that my limited capacity and timeframe would not allow me to engage with the community in a respectful and meaningful way.

What is striking having spent a month away from home and living out of suitcases is an eerie vibe regarding the future of the areas. When I reflect on Kununurra there is a gentle, persistent buzz within the irrigation and non-Indigenous communities – the focus is on the future. For the non-Indigenous community, despite the persistent uncertainty, there remains a degree of hope that for the irrigators at least Ord 2 will come into fruition. This exists even amongst those within the community that are reluctant to change and whose primary interest is in maintaining the current nature and dynamics of their community. For the MG people, as they negotiate their future with the white settlers, there appears to be a concurrent sense of loss and a conservative optimism.

The Wheatbelt battles with its past – past decisions, past practices, its changing imagery and perception by urban people, specifically the notion of Australia riding on the sheep’s back does not apply and the Wheatbelt is not perceived as possessing opportunity. Like Kununurra, the future for the Wheatbelt is riddled also with uncertainty but it is framed in a recessive sense. Unlike the Kimberley, media representation of the towns is framed in terms of the problems not opportunities or strengths that the regions possess. What tends to set Kununurra apart from other rural towns in Australia is that formal non-Indigenous settlement only took place during the 1960s. This contrasts greatly to the settlement history of the Wheatbelt which is steeped in generations of family farming practices. Kununurra feels like it is still trying to define itself as the Wheatbelt tries to redefine itself.
4.9. Kununurra Causal Layered Analysis Summary

In Table 9 the summaries of the CLA for both the farmers and the Government, scientific and community organisations are presented.
Table 9. Summary of the CLA analysis for Kununurra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Irrigators</th>
<th>Government, Scientific and Community Organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Litany</td>
<td>▪ Optimism and vibrancy</td>
<td>▪ Interaction framed in terms of regional optimism and opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ The importance and value of water</td>
<td>▪ Sense of isolation and remoteness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Hobbies and recreation prized, tending to be water oriented (e.g. boating, fishing)</td>
<td>▪ Physical isolation resulting in relative freedom in scientific and governance arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ The significance of the weather to the towns dynamic (e.g. wet and dry seasons dictating irrigation practices, tourism)</td>
<td>▪ Opportunity seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ First non-Indigenous settlers still living in town</td>
<td>▪ Physical landscape presenting relatively unchallenging NRM issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ High internal locus of control</td>
<td>▪ No sense of crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Very limited but emerging land management issues (e.g. low level flooding and irrigation salinity)</td>
<td>▪ Development of water allocation plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Relatively few pressures associated with drought (e.g. as compared to other Australian agricultural regions)</td>
<td>▪ Negotiation with stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Sense of freedom</td>
<td>▪ Regulatory frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Observed seasonal changes – some discussion of possible signs of climate change</td>
<td>▪ Presence of National Parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ A sense of privilege and joy associated with their irrigation practices</td>
<td>▪ Argyle Diamonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ National notoriety regarding the towns highly fertile soils</td>
<td>▪ Tourism industry in Kununurra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Water rights and ownership</td>
<td>▪ Indigenous employment in mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Reactive as opposed to preventative environmental management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Smaller scale and locally targeted research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Fire perceived as a major environmental threat to biodiversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Sense that the community are adopting learnings and implementing them in their irrigation management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ A sense that their work has impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Structural</td>
<td>Change is perceived as easier to achieve, suggesting change as an end point as opposed to a process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second generation of farmers – young in comparison to other farming regions in Australia (the case for both dryland and irrigated agriculture)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of family farming enterprises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of corporate farming enterprises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear associated with the introduction of managed investment schemes and the perceived threat in power moving from local to corporate circles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generally no observation of entrenched historical or traditional irrigation practices, seemingly a product of the relative youth of the irrigation area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seasonal workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation from other communities and decision making powers in the State, particular reference made to Perth and Canberra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iconic nature of ‘the North’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kununurra’s connection with ‘Northern Australia’ as opposed to Western Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived water ownership and water allocation rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tendency for informal yet informed on-farm decision making processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of locally developed, operated and managed community groups that address locally defined irrigation needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking long term relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movers and shakers in the irrigation area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social legacies to manage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fly-in Fly-out research ethic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent departmental and organisational change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power of industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power of key stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An east-west linkage between Kununurra and Darwin in the Northern Territory as opposed to Kununurra having a relationship with the rest of Western Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business partnerships with Indigenous communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispossession of Indigenous land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pressures associated with time frames based on the financial year (e.g. implications associated with funding rounds)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical impact of the Department of Agriculture Research Station</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pressures associated with living and working at the Research Station</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frustrating bureaucratic processes (e.g. purchasing of office supplies from Perth as opposed to...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive local structures present</td>
<td>Darwin) also exemplar of a Northern as opposed to a Western connection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation results in a sense of independence in making decisions regarding irrigation practices, and general governance processes in the local community</td>
<td>Management implications associated with uncertainty of Ord 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community connection to the physical landscape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigators hold a strong sense of community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local facilitated processes in decision making seen to have lead to empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher levels in trust in local science, management and governance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in relationship with the Department of Agriculture. Historically the extension officer role has changed, irrigators call more on agri-businesses for advice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense that Perth takes the majority of the wealth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of growers groups and associations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closure of the cane mill and cessation of cane production in the ORIA – change to the towns identity and production</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market diversity (e.g. irrigation, tourism, mining)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and accommodation provision shortages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to release more land for development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Title process and outcomes seen as a barrier by non-Indigenous community members to regional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure on health services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions regarding the calibre of education facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldview/Discourse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Title process and outcomes</td>
<td>Future orientation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism directed towards Indigenous community</td>
<td>Belief in the capacity to influence the future of the region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially constructed, non-Indigenous superiority associated with perceived rights due to the process of settlement</td>
<td>‘Northern Australia’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production oriented</td>
<td>Native Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontierism and colonialism (e.g. the dispossession of Indigenous people and the creation of the ORIA)</td>
<td>Scientific paradigm, science as fact and rigid science communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Ord 2 (e.g. the long proposed expansion of the irrigation area)
- Social and psychological impacts associated with the climate
- Fears associated with the produce market flooding and impacts associated with over supply in relation to demand for produce
- Power associated with relatively favourable growing conditions (e.g. water, sound soil fertility)
- Community transformation and change occurring at a fast rate
- Tension regarding the future focus of production (e.g. a move away from purely food production to plantation)
- Current identity based around food production
- Value of localism and perceived threat in city values
- Distinctions between rural community life and city urban life
- Value in the local and aversion to external threats to the local community (e.g. chain stores, big business)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth/Metaphor</th>
<th>Ample water</th>
<th>Freedom and right to change the naturally occurring environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions regarding scale (e.g. Bigger is perceived as better)</td>
<td>Resistant to decision making (e.g. resource rich and motivated and yet non-committal on Ord 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Container metaphor relating to the containment of resources for exclusionary local benefit (e.g. Kununurra as a food bowl)</td>
<td>Racism of “at the table” regarding the relationship between Indigenous people and Government departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water, soil and resources all ‘belong’ to Kununurra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Right to control and modify the naturally occurring environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness</td>
<td>Racism and mixed cultural competency (e.g. some present a high level of cultural competence “because water to them, it’s part of their culture, it’s not separate from their culture, so that’s the thing, even though they have been westernised I guess in one way but there is still this very strong connection to the land even if they have been alienated from it and the dams been put”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural stressors and barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities</td>
<td>Differences in time frames</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western governance, social structures and processes dominating the town and impacting on the livelihoods of Indigenous community members</td>
<td>Departmental foci differ (e.g. some departments having a conservation focus, others are concerned with regional development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short termism and reactionary catchment management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.10. **Causal Layered Analysis – Irrigators**

**Procedural Specificities**
Interviews were conducted with irrigators or farm managers in Kununurra. All were either first or second generation. Property sizes ranged from smaller hobby scale ventures in which produce was sold locally, large scale growers who sell their produce nationally and through to managers and workers as part of Managed Investment Schemes (MIS). Larger scale farming enterprises tended to be located in Ivanhoe Plain (north of the town site of Kununurra), and smaller scale in Packsaddle Plain to the south. Produce included cucurbits (e.g. melons, pumpkins, cucumbers), sandalwood plantations, chickpeas, peas, sugar cane, chia, fruits including mangoes, papaya. The following is a CLA of their interview transcripts.

4.10.1. **Litany**
The Litany Level of Inayatullah’s (2004) CLA is concerned with identifying actions, events or happenings that occur or impact on our everyday life. These are the day to day happenings that often go unnoticed because contact or encounter with the phenomenon is so frequent. The aim of exploring the Litany is to identify what overtly impacts the lives of irrigators and irrigation managers and consider how this is conveyed as part of the farming culture.

4.10.1.1.1. **Optimism**
The irrigation farming community in Kununurra is generally young, vibrant and optimistic and there is an energy and sense of freedom within the community. These traits appear to be typical of a community that is still going through an early settlement phase, namely, the community is still trying to define its identity, and is not faced with the agricultural or land degradation issues which tend to emerge over time. The current absence of pressing environmental issues in the ORIA means
that the farmers’ focus is on production as opposed to land management or repair. This is a privileged position for an Australian farming community whereby it is more typical for there to be pressing concerns relating to previous detrimental farming practices impacting on current practice. Irrigators in Kununurra are also comparatively free of pressures associated with drought. Although some farmers reflected that they noticed some seasonal change which some hypothesised may be signs of climate change (for instance the 2005 wet season coming slightly later in the year), generally however the degree of the anxiety is only marginal.

There is also a degree of mysticism associated with the region and the township, where some participants alluded to how they felt the town chose them to live there as opposed to the community choosing to live there themselves. Several irrigators reflected that they had been travelling around Australia, came across Kununurra and decided to stay, one participant reflected,

*I was meant to only come over here for a short period, but I stayed.*

There is a rugged and alluring character that many irrigators alluded to, but had difficulty in articulating, and related to a genuine sense of joy relating to the beauty of the region they live in, their passion in the work that they do, and a sense of privilege in the relative ease they have farming compared to other regions in Australia.

### 4.10.1.1. Climate, Soil and Water

The irrigation area is known nationally for its fertility and richness. The ‘black soil’ as it is colloquially referred is iconic and separates the region from other growing areas in Australia; the most notable difference is the soil’s health. While other areas in Australia struggle with issues such as dryland or irrigated salinity, drought and erosion, the ORIA is yet to experience such challenges at a problematic scale. Only recently have there been small scale concerns expressed related to the rising water table and occasional flooding, issues which have generally been managed at
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

property level with assistance from Government in exceptional circumstances. The apparent abundance of water also greatly separates Kununurra from other growing regions. As the majority of Australia grapples with issues of drought, Kununurra’s experience appears to be contrary to the climatic norm. The water has acted as the major drawcard to the region, with many farmers and irrigators migrating to Kununurra in search of farming solace. For instance, one farmer commented,

I loved it up here I always wanted to come up here, farming and the water.

And,

It is a pretty special place to live up here. Enjoy the fishing and the nature it’s a great community, the weather is hostile at times, that makes it hard. It has been a difficult wet season this year.

Note how the beneficial aspects of living in Kununurra – the conditions for irrigation, hobbies such as fishing, are all related to water. Another irrigator reflects,

I think one of the reasons people come here is that they are fascinated about seeing all this water and this agriculture and generally you don’t hear a lot of bad things about farming. You always have those people who don’t like the paddocks looking the same, the monoculture, when you have been driving through this amazing wild country and all of a sudden you get to this, this row cropping, all these green trees and the water, it does something to you. People really enjoy living here and it is because of the water, and that is because of farming.

Here, this irrigator articulates how the landscape is physically different from many places in Australia. The language ‘amazing wild country’ nicely illustrates the terrain. The landscape in the Region is undeniably wild and there is a notable difference when entering the town site and the ORIA. It is markedly tamed by human intervention and makes for a striking comparison. This difference alludes to
the theme of Frontierism which is discussed in Worldview/Discourse Level of the analysis.

The weather is a particularly significant factor that underpins the day to day functioning of not only the irrigation community, but the broader non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities. The wet and dry seasons have a dramatic impact on the social and institutional practices within the town and the more remote Indigenous communities. The seasons dictate not only the irrigation schedule but also the tourist season. During the dry there is an influx of tourists to the region, in the wet, there is generally a marked drop in the population numbers. There is also a reliance on seasonal workers, mainly tourists such as backpackers and until recently ‘grey nomads’ (retirees typically with no fixed address who haul a caravan or drive a campervan. Increased fuel prices appear to have impacted on the prevalence of grey nomads in the Kimberley). Seasonal workers typically pick fruit or assist in the packing and preparation of produce for transport and exportation. Many irrigators leave the area and holiday during the wet season which marks the only opportunity of the year in which they are not bound by farming practices on farm. However, there is also an increase in the number of Indigenous people in the town site, with many people vacating the more regional country which will be flooded with the seasonal rains.

4.10.2. Social structural
The Social Structural Level of the CLA is concerned with exploring the social and institutional makeup of a community. Often, the organisational or institutional structures are so ingrained into the practices of a community that they go unnoticed. Hence, this level is interested in the way that communities operate structurally, more specifically the way in which the community organises itself and the way that the structures organise the community. The aim of the Social Structural level of analysis is to identify what structurally is influencing how
Irrigators farm their properties and ultimately how these social structural facets of farming life impact on the community’s culture.

### 4.10.2.1. Farming Structure

Most commonly, the farms in Kununurra are family enterprises. The entire family lives on the property and generally a single family member does the majority of farming practice and management. It is not uncommon for the spouse (some employed off farm) and children to participate on farm activities, although farm employment is generally supplemented by seasonal workers. What makes Kununurra’s farming structure unique is that there are generally only one to two generations of farmers present. Consequently, there is an absence of a family farming tradition and historical farming practices that are typical of other more established farming communities in Australia which shape and influence practices and decision making. Consequently as the farming enterprises are typically void of familial or historical practices that have the capacity to doctrine farming activities across generations, the decision making processes tend to be more fluid and relaxed. Independent farmers exhibited a greater capacity to make their own decisions including those that appear to be more radical.

Irrigators that are a part of larger corporate farming enterprises and act more in managerial roles or perform other farming roles as an employee of a corporative farming enterprise tend not to have the same flexibility. This in part comes as a natural response to broader corporate ownership and management, thus, their role is governed as they are a part of a broader corporate structure. Such enterprises do share some similarities with the family businesses in that they do not currently face severe issues of land degradation or drought. While notions of suitability may be present as part of their corporate identity or profile, there remains a production focus, again in line with the attitudes of the family farmers.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Common to both corporate and family enterprises, was the sense that as irrigators they are more informed in their decision making processes due to learning’s made from other farming areas in Australia, for instance,

*People are saying that you are going to make the same mistakes up north as you did down south, I don’t see that at all. One of the reasons I think things are going well up here is that we have been able to learn lessons from elsewhere. We are not perfect, we make mistakes but it is because of those mistakes we are getting better all the time.*

Noteworthy is the irrigators’ optimism associated with how they perceive their future. Challenges or mistakes are not conceptualised as setbacks, rather they are part of a beneficial learning curve that serves only to increase their knowledge base.

The decision making process, particularly in family farming, is characterised by informal interactions, for instance,

*The young fellas on the farm, we were making a few decisions this morning over a cup of coffee.*

This marks a vast distinction between the way that irrigators go about making their decisions compared to the scientific and bureaucratic paradigms. There is value in informality on farm which tends not to be the case when decisions are made from a Government or scientific perspective. Within these frameworks the orientation is geared towards formality, structure and regiment which are not necessarily responsive or reflexive to the issue at situation at hand. Decisions makers in Kununurra are not bound by one particular generation of farmers, which tends to be the case in other farming districts in Australia and results in a positive dynamic.

Informal interaction also occurs between the irrigators (both corporate and family enterprises) and local industry groups, for example,
If it is only running 3 or 4 megs (mega-litres) and it should be running 12 I will call up Brian \(^{18}\) and have a bit of a yarn with him.

Here, the irrigator comments on interaction with one of the locally run organisations who manage the allocation of water for irrigation. The relaxed style of the interaction is significant as it mirrors very much the style of the community atmosphere in Kununurra – relaxed, engaged and cooperative. Irrigators both family farm scale and corporate, are supported by cross-generational local expertise through locally initiated, operated and managed groups. The dynamic is friendly, supportive and most commonly informal.

4.10.2.2. **Remoteness, Isolation and Independence**

As an irrigator living in the region, frequent reference was made to a sense of isolation and consequentially independence. Living in the far north of WA, both independent family farmers and those working in corporate groups commented on how being geographically isolated from key decision making in Perth made for a more liberal existence. They expressed that they felt that a lack of genuine attention made towards the current irrigation community meant that they had more freedom. They also felt that to a degree they were removed from pressures of city life. This is nicely illustrated through the community’s self governance structures.

The physical geography of the landscape has a significant impact on the community’s joy associated with living in the region. Outside of irrigation activities, there are a myriad of social activities in which people heavily engage, most commonly these relate to interacting with the natural environment. For instance,

\(^{18}\) Here the irrigator refers to a specific worker. Their name has been changed for confidentiality reasons. It should be noted however that all employees at the organization have nick-names, for which they are referred to by colleagues and the wider community. Workers are conceptualized as being as much a community member as they are someone who provides a service. This is a significant and valued characteristic of community life.
people hike, swim, fish, boat, and camp. This is a vastly different experience to other remote farming communities in Australia where social activities are heavily based on sport. The isolation from the rest of the state is highly valued by the community. Such isolation appears in part to contribute to a sense of ownership over the natural resources.

4.10.2.3. Information, Social and Support Networks

The communication and information networks that irrigators have developed are geographically based. This is unsurprising as the monsoonal climate and irrigation methods are typical to only Northern Australia providing a common conceptual and applied understanding of the farming experience. While there is irrigation occurring in the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) in Australia’s south east, the climate is temperate and makes for a different experience of irrigation and thus information and social networks are less transferable. Irrigators from the Burdekin (in far North Queensland in Australia’s eastern states) were often cited as a useful source of information, for instance,

*I do what I do and most of my knowledge comes from the eastern states. If you want information you go to the places that have got it. You can’t do that in this state because you won’t get the answers you want.*

This was due to the fact that they experienced similar challenges to Kununurra irrigators (mainly due to climatic factors) and other major industries were located there, particularly at the time of the interview, sugar cane. Also, several farmers now residing in Kununurra reflected that they had migrated from far north Queensland which suggests that there may also be other social or community links that currently bind the communities.

Information networks also had a local focus. There was a great deal of trust directed towards several of the locally operated services. These services were highly valued
within the community and their expertise, particularly in respect to their local knowledge meant that generally there was very little need to find support outside of the ORIA. This dynamic highlights the connection which is evident in Northern Australia, and alludes to a sense of self sufficiency which is valued in the local community. For instance, there was a sense of resentment directed towards information and support from the rest of the WA’s farming community. One irrigator expressed that the information provided in Western Australian farming publications was generally redundant to Kununurra’s needs as it focussed on issues concerning dryland farming and horticulture. If anything, this apparent absence only energised the irrigators to better their production and performance independently and similarly appeared to increase their sense of community. Although within State rivalry was not made explicit, these reflections alluded to its presence. Information, social and support networks are generally locally or Northern Australian based. The current success of local industry related groups which came out of necessity appear to function highly due to their local focus and the trust that comes out of truly knowing who you seek information and support from.

### 4.10.2.4. Self Governance

Remoteness, isolation and independence as discussed at the Litany Level of the analysis has lead to a great degree of Social Structural innovation on the part of the local community whereby there is a high degree of local governance. Most notable governance is seen in the locally operated irrigation co-operative who manage the irrigation water resources, specifically monitoring, charging and allocating water to the irrigators. The group facilitates the more pragmatic side of irrigation (e.g. ensuring that the irrigators receive the correct water allocation as per the schedule) and also leads any decision- making processes that may impact on irrigation practices. Part of the organisational structure of the group is a board which is made up of locals representing different grower interest groups. One irrigator reflected on the value of the group in depth,
We, the farmers wanted to invite everyone in the community to have their say so the teachers, the greenies, the Government bodies, had the opportunity to have input regarding the environmental issues in the valley. It has been a really good vehicle in empowering people to have input. We don't want decisions to be made in Canberra or over in Perth, we want to make them. We are quite able to deal with the mistakes we make. We are here, we care, we are going to fix it, we are going to sort it out. We see it so quickly we are out there all the time.

Note the passion for local governance. Out of necessity the community has become self organised and successfully so. The disdain for decisions to be made outside of the region was a common theme with particular criticism directed towards Perth and Canberra which are perceived as being bureaucratic and decision making hubs. The remoteness has somewhat provided a buffer from their practices and processes being greatly influenced by external powers, despite there being a Local Government presence in town. The difference being to other regional farming communities is that the Government employees that work in Kununurra are long-term-to-permanent residents of the town, and perceived as being a part of the community. Their science, management or enforcement is not perceived as threatening compared to governance from bureaucrats or scientists from out of town. There is a higher level of trust due to an appreciation of their local knowledge and experience. Being a community member, there is an assumption that their decision making would be for the best interest of the town given that they are also a part of the community.

Despite this, there was also reflection on how the relationship between the irrigators and the Government departments had begun to change; particular reference was made to the Department of Agriculture and Food (DoAF),

*I guess, anything that can improve farming, it would be nice to have the old Ag Department back like they used to be, the farmer-researcher relationship back.*
guess in the early days they probably had more farmer trials that what they did, more extension officers which made sure the message got out, they have still got that but I guess to a lesser extent and I think it is all getting driven by dollars in Perth. They don’t seem to think they have the money to spend in those areas any more. Whether they are reallocating to quarantine, but they seem to have less. We are relying more on Landmark agronomists more. But it is always nice to have a non-aligned or non-biased group there doing the research. There is probably no-one up here that would do any specific research on our crop.

This is quite a significant shift, given the community was originally settled as a research station, where research was directed towards exploring the feasibility of the area for large scale irrigation. The shift by irrigators to seek information and support from private enterprise is also noteworthy, the reason given that the Department is conducting non-applicable research, which was in line with other irrigators’ reflection on the Departments utility and current practices. The participant reflects on bureaucratic process in Perth and how it has eroded the relationship between the irrigators and the departmental staff. This marks a significant observation regarding broader state level Social Structural issues.

There are also locally operating growers associations. These associations mark strategic management at the community level, whereby the growers themselves are formally represented. While the degree of formalisation of these groups varies, the ultimate interest of each is to ensure the longevity of each of the industry’s future, and the security of the ORIA. A pertinent example of how these groups operate occurred recently when the cane growers collectively put forth a bid to purchase the cane mill. Despite the bid being turned down by the company (which has ultimately lead to the closure of the mill and the cessation of cane production in the ORIA), the collective grower effort marked an important interaction within the community particularly in terms of its collective agency and determinism. One irrigator who participated in the negotiations reflected on the outcome,
The way that the meeting went this afternoon I don’t think we are going to have a sugar industry for much longer. We will all know on Monday. That is the way the Korean company is playing the game. They were telling us that unless we buy the mill from them for a certain minimum figure they are going to take the mill back to Korea, they won’t even start the season. The Season is due to start next week, everyone is ready to go, the crop has been fertilised and is ready to go, contractors have got their harvesters ready to go, staff is coming from all over Australia ready to start next week. But they told us today that we have not got enough in our bid. You can’t trust the Government to do anything, and then there is only people there to lend you money but people only lend you money if it will make a profit and that mill will not make a profit if Stage 2 came along. The Government has dragged its feet for too long and the Korean company hasn’t got any faith that it is going to happen.

His commentary is closely linked to the theme of Globalisation which is discussed in more depth in the Worldview/Discourse Level of the analysis. Self governance is a particularly important facet of irrigator culture in Kununurra, the relative isolation from major decision making powers lead to the emergence of groups, originally out of necessity but which now present a highly valued and empowering social interaction.

4.10.2.5. **Infrastructure**

Kununurra has been developed at a relatively fast pace, due mainly to its vast array of financial opportunities, namely mining most notably the Argyle Diamond Mine, tourism and irrigation. Consequently there are a myriad of social requirements that need to be met to attend to the needs of at times vastly different interest groups. This makes intuitive sense, but alarmingly the primary infrastructure concerns expressed at the Social Structural Level of the analysis are more fundamental, relating primarily to the provision of accommodation and housing. For example,
Housing is a real issue at the moment. We are boarder living on the farm. Like I said we are working hard to look after our staff but if you have to buy houses for them they have doubled in price in the last year. You can’t get housing. A three bedroom two bathroom house in town will cost you $650 a week in rent. And that is sort of greed, there is a certain amount of greed there, having the rent that tight, all the good people will leave and the middle, the people with those good leadership qualities that we need, will leave.

The above excerpt captures the pressures felt by some of the irrigators who hire seasonal workers, generally backpackers. He also reflects on a specific concern relating to the cost of living having the propensity to force valued members of the community out. Specific reference is made to those with leadership qualities which also alludes to another important aspect of the social structure of Kununurra, that being Government employees. There is also pressure within Government circles, where the heavily subsidised housing made for departmental employees is greatly stretched. Accommodation issues become more pronounced during the dry which is peak tourist season. During these months locals who reside permanently in the caravan parks compete for space, and it is not uncommon that during this period the entire town’s accommodation is booked out.

The failure to release land for both irrigation and accommodation is a sore point within the community, one irrigator reflected,

Land should not be the leaving factor here, and it is. It is embarrassing.

Significantly, the failure to release land is in part due to the Native Title process. These procedures have contributed to an at times highly xenophobic and racist worldview (which will be discussed in depth at the Worldview Level of the analysis). Despite this, there was the occasional reflection from irrigators that there is a growing need for culturally appropriate services and housing for Indigenous people.
At times it was expressed that there was pressure on medical services and allusions made to the inadequacy of the calibre of the education system in the town, but overwhelmingly the concern related to the desire for land release. Given the current infrastructure issues that were raised by the irrigators, it is interesting that there remains a strong push for Ord 2 to come into fruition. It presents a potentially worrying scenario where the already stretched service provision and basic infrastructure would be under increasing pressure from the consequential leap in the population, not only in terms of the eventual population, but also in terms of those who would be involved in the area’s development.

4.10.2.6. Water Ownership

The notoriety of the region’s assets has resulted in community being somewhat possessive of the region’s water resources. There is a high degree of opposition associated with the possibility of water sourced in the region being shared with other regions in Australia. Major opposition was made with interest from the south of the State to pipe or cart water from the Kimberley to assist with city and dryland farmer water shortages. One irrigator commented,

*Perth steals our water. Just think about it for a minute, even if they paid for it, we have lost our water.*

Water ownership emerged as a critical theme. It is significant at the Social Structural level of the analysis as it signifies the way in which the issues heated nature created a social divide between northern and southern regions of Western Australia. This emotional contention is somewhat similar to that in eastern Australia where the States have historically feuded over water allocation rights. The difference on the west coast being that the environmental flows in and around Kununurra are geographically limited to that region and do not stretch to the southern parts of the State. Kununurra is in a particularly powerful position, where they have water resources that the rest of the country lusts for. Despite discontent regarding threats
to water allocation, irrigators expressed that they welcomed other people including new growers to the region,

As for everyone moving up north I don’t necessarily have a problem with that but they need to come up here in October and November, the weather can be very hostile and depression is a serious issue, they call it the suicide season and that is what people do. They get that depressed that they kill themselves. It is not always as nice as sitting in a nice air conditioned room; I don’t think we can all move up north. And I think the politics need to stay out of it.

He warns of the harsh realities of living and working in the Region and recognises the weather’s propensity to psychologically impact on people. His comments also dispel some of the idealism associated with living North, acknowledging that while the landscape may be breathtaking and the water seemingly limitless, there are challenges in living and working in the Region. Despite the apparent welcomeness, his message also acts as a harsh deterrent and positions current locals as having a unique resilience to be able to contend with the conditions. There were others during interviews who expressed similar concerns related to newcomers flooding the already established market.

These assets socially construct the region as different to other areas. The fertile soil and water give the community a degree of power over the circumstances that many other agricultural communities in Australia are not privy to experiencing. It helps create a community who feel more in charge and optimistic about their future. They are however governed strictly by the climate, which not only defines their farming practices (e.g. planting and seeding times) and population trends, but also their health and wellbeing.
4.10.2.7. **Globalisation and Regional Identity**

The relative youth of Kununurra to other agricultural towns in Australia is unique. As Kununurra continues to establish its infrastructure and identity, it has done so in a dramatically fast paced and changing world. This has had some interesting implications within the community as it grapples with a strong will to maintain the elements of community life within a broader culture of globalisation. Many of the irrigators reflected on changes they have witnessed within the ORIA, particularly in reference to the rapidly changing face of farming. Increasingly there has been the trend towards corporate farming and this has been met with a degree of scepticism from the smaller, family scale irrigators. Of particular concern was the observed change from food production to plantations, in particular sandalwood. One irrigator reflected,

*There has been quite a number of farms being sold to timber plantations at the moment, so the local ownership of farming land is, is being lost quite rapidly. There are management investment scheme, MIS, yeah that is what they call it management investment schemes yeah, and we just need to be careful. It is one of the real advantages of having smaller family farms that people really care about what the next generation is going to be. I have a lot more incentive of doing good on this farm compared to the neighbour that is a tree farm. But yeah, it all gets too much over there, the manager there can go and get a job at the mines and move on, where I really would struggle to do that.*

His comments reflect the sense of community amongst food-producing irrigators, while also giving insight into regional identity, where the irrigators associate the region as consisting of food producers. There appears to be a sense of nostalgia associated with this perception which relates back to non-Indigenous settlement during the 1960s. Similarly a level of distrust associated with non-food production which may be related to the failure of the cotton industry during the early years of the ORIA. There is attachment to community-level owned and run irrigation enterprises as these businesses are constructed as having a community ethic. He
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

also implied that the family run businesses have an interest in the long term as opposed to short term with reference made to the interests and needs of the next generation of irrigators. ‘Local’ is identified and valued and a perception given that the local growers have ownership rights. The valued community way of life is constructed as being threatened by ‘absent’ farmers. ‘Local’ is socially constructed as wholesome and community oriented, and the large scale corporate enterprises as threatening this. While employees who directly manage the MISs live in the town and invest in its future in a similar sense as other irrigators, for instance purchasing goods and services, participation in community life, there remains a degree of anxiety from family scale irrigators. This appears to be related to fears associated with smaller family operated schemes being squeezed out of the market by absentee farmers.

The discourse surrounding the impacts of globalisation demonstrate a striking difference in farming paradigms, and the intricacies of how family scale irrigators conceptualise themselves, and the future of the region. Ord 2 was a frequently raised topic during interviews and illustrates a complex disparity regarding the irrigator’s hopes for the future and the lifestyle and the identity which they aspire. There is the overt desire to keep Kununurra ‘local’, and there is the perception that this will be threatened by corporations. This notion is particularly complex when considering how Kununurra conceptualises community, and the interactions between irrigators compared to more traditional Gemeinschaft notions,

There is very little operationally. If you are a good farmer here you are a good farmer there. The community is what you are probably interested in. In the Wheatbelt you are not seen as competitors. Each farmer is a friend of the next door neighbour and because of the way you sell stuff sheep or wheat or so on. Whereas here, if your next door neighbour, and this isn’t because we don’t like each other, if he breaks his leg during harvest, we don’t go over there and do his harvest we sort of smile and ooh the prices are going to go up. And if you are thinking that is a bit unhealthy, no its not, it’s actually not, some of that competitive streak. There is a lot
of crops that we do work together on, but we don’t see ourselves as business
relational, or relatives in business, we see ourselves as competitors in this business.
Socially in this country though if you like we haven’t got the history with the family
and so on. The second generation, if you like, is just starting now, so we haven’t got
that long term family relationship so you’re been around for the last 24 Christmas’s.
One of the things that I have real problems with Australian farming is family
farming. But if you are with, like I come from a family farming background in the
Wheatbelt, if you are like my brother, got the family farm, and I had another farm
and felt that I could do anything I like with it. But my brother got the family farm
and he always felt the opposite and he wanted the family farm because it was the
family farm, but he didn’t realise it was a noose around his neck. To this day in fact I
was speaking to him just recently and we talked about it. He didn’t at the time but
he does now start to see why I didn’t want the family farm.

His reflections on farming life are not in line with the conventional notions of family
farming enterprises which he compares to the Wheatbelt. This is an interesting
disparity and appears to reflect the complexity of wanting to maintain community
life within a setting that is highly competitive and production oriented –
conventions that are typical to the Gesellschaft. This translates into a subtle
competitive atmosphere between irrigators, particularly those that produce the
same crop. While the irrigation community tends to be close knit in a sense that
there are no major feuds and there is a general sense of support between irrigators,
there is not the interdependency which plays out in other rural farming
communities in Australia. In part this may be due to the knowledge that irrigators in
the ORIA are dispensable and replaceable. If one irrigator leaves he or she will be
quickly replaced and this does little to threaten the sustainability of the ORIA or the
town. Despite this, what can only really be deemed ‘community values’ are
important, and distinguishable between life in Kununurra compared to city life.
Another irrigator compared his experiences of living in Kununurra with visits to
Perth,
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

I find it really sad. You smile at someone and they find it really hard to take, I don’t need that (laughter). And there is some real advantages of living in the city, a great place for a short holiday, but um, it is a tough place, it removes very much the human element of life, it is all about economics.

His account provides some insight into how there is a difference between city and country life, with particular reference made to the interpersonal differences between city and country people. Similarly, some irrigators expressed distaste in supplying their produce to larger corporate companies, particularly the supermarket chain stores,

I am not a great chain lover, they dictate you, they pay you nothing, so I try and target the independent stores. The chains [stores] are just getting more powerful in my view.

Again, this appears to be associated with wishing to maintain community values. The irrigators’ perceptions about community values are complicated by their endeavours to develop the ORIA, compare to their distaste towards city life, and the corporate farming identity that appears to be penetrating the ORIA.

Specific reference was made to international factors that were impacting on local farming. The impending closure of the sugar mill was particularly pertinent within the community during the second field trip when negotiations were occurring between the community and the overseas owners of the mill. The impacts of globalisation are far reaching in Kununurra, aside from the more overt challenges of markets and doing business, there is the subtle yet more pervasive impact in terms of community interaction. The irrigators are presented with a paradoxical situation where there is a strong value in community life, but due to a business ethic are competitive and slightly removed from each other. While they value community, there is no critical motivation to nurture or maintain their own. They live life comfortably with the knowledge that if a neighbour was to leave the ORIA, it would
not be catastrophic to the social structure of the town, they would remain sustainable.

4.10.3. **Worldview/Discourse**

At the Worldview/Discourse level of the CLA, interest is in investigating the deeper worldviews and paradigms which operate within communities. Worldview is significant in that it underpins the way that communities operate. It is a complex layer because a community’s worldview may not be something that the community itself is aware of, rather they go about their daily lives not necessarily understanding what drives or underpins their actions. The aim of analysis at the Worldview/Discourse Level is thus to examine what the worldview is at the community level and gather an understanding of how this worldview implicates the irrigation community’s farming operation and ultimately the community’s culture.

4.10.3.1. **Racism**

Racism is a particularly complex issue in Kununurra and is expressed in various ways, all of which have a damaging impact on the Indigenous community and the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Within the irrigation community, the most common form of racism is overt. One irrigator reflects on an encounter between two Indigenous men in town,

*I was there one morning, there was a drunk Aboriginal an Aboriginal pulled up in a Toyota, didn’t have a uniform on but had work clothes on, driving a company vehicle. He worked for one of the mining companies, getting something to eat. The Aboriginal guy came up to him and said ‘give me a ride to the airport’ and he said ‘no, I can’t do it’ ‘give me a ride to the airport you black nigger (sic) abo (sic) blah blah’. If I said the same thing I would have been up for racism. I called the police because this guy was beginning to beat up this guy for not giving him a ride. And all he was doing was his job. But the Aboriginals think, you watch in front of Coles,*
women will come out with their things and I have seen people come up and take things from their shopping basket because it’s supposed to be shared communal. Drive around and look at their cars. The Government gives them everything, therefore everything they think they should have. The ones that work, one of the guys that worked for me back in ’73 is now a policeman, here in town, another one disappeared I don’t know where he went he was really good with the equipment, he is now doing offshore drilling, he doesn’t live here anymore, he moved to Darwin, where he isn’t related to anybody. Yours is mine.

In this account he depends on generalisations to socially construct typologies of Indigenous people. He compares the two constructs against each other expressing admiration and almost value in the Indigenous people that he has encountered that were perceived as being most westernised by leaving their community and finding work. Consequently he expressed pity towards the Indigenous people who he conceptualised were challenged by their traditional culture.

Accounts given of the early white settlement history were characterised by the community’s attempts to overcome the physical and emotional challenges of establishing a remote community. The tone of the stories tended to depict the white settler as heroic in their endeavours to manage the harsh elements of the regions climate, the physical terrain and the isolation. These typically constructed the white settlers as being exemplary and their triumphs as profound achievements. The early white settlers depended on the provision of supplies including food and postal communication that were delivered monthly by air. Some of the stories that were told, for instance, surviving without radio contact and television only highlight the dependence that white settlers had on modern conveniences, as one of the first settlers reflects,

People come in all the time, it was quite good, before the advent of modern entertainment. When I first got to Kununurra there was no radio, there was short wave. I heard the first radio when they had the ABC. The ABC at that time had of
course the farmers’ hour, the little kids’ hour, mothers’ hour, they had this, they had the soapies and then in the afternoon they had the toddlers and the older kids on in the afternoon. So that was the first radio, then later we got the ABC television, then we got a commercial channel. You know what the first commercial channel played in Kununurra? Coca-Cola. That was the first television commercial played in Kununurra. As all of this came in, life in Kununurra has gone this way. Before there was arts, there was pottery there was sewing all these things to do at night because there wasn’t any TV, it was before videos and at the beginning of the cassette.

He reflected with enthusiasm how these modern technologies were introduced into the town, and yet he goes on to lament that the very necessities contributed to the demise of other valued facets of community life such as arts and crafts. It is ironic in that these necessities fractured the community’s social structure and fabric. Non-Indigenous settlement was constructed as iconic and heroic and yet simultaneously referred to as losing valued qualities central to community life by its own dependence on technology. Meanwhile, accounts of the impact that white settlement has had on Indigenous communities in the region since settlement are varied, but the majority were racist.

See here we have a lot of problems, the Aboriginal industry is a problem. I mean it brings lots of money to industry but Aboriginal industry. You know what I am talking about? The welfare, they destroy cars, destroy houses, builders fixing them, panel beaters fixing them, it goes on and on, they spend a lot of money of their welfare. It earns probably more money than farming...The Aborigines, you look at some towns in the Wheatbelt that don’t have any aborigines quite clean, stay clean, Kununurra, have you driven around early in the morning? Drive around early in the morning. Beer bottles, cans, wine casks, food.

These descriptions regarding early settlement mark a discrepancy between non-Indigenous and Indigenous livelihoods, whereby Indigenous people are positioned as being inferior to white settlers. Indigenous people are miss-portrayed as being
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

culturally void, lazy, dangerous and savage. In reality, the Indigenous communities, which were described by some participants as being saved or rescued by western settlers managed *without* the apparent necessities of western culture. The perceptions are alarmingly ethnocentric, illustrating the incapacity within some parts of the white community to realise that Indigenous people did more than survive in the region without western influence, they lived, were happy, fruitful, safe and culturally rich. Meanwhile without modern conveniences, the non-Indigenous settlers struggled; further, they experienced detriment with the introduction of modern conveniences and technologies by experiencing social fragmentation. Although obviously not to the same detrimental degree that was felt by the Indigenous communities, it does convey a parallel and highlights white settlements’ refusal to acknowledge the impact of technologies and impacts of settlement, even to their own people. This particular irrigator went on further to reflect on rubbish in the town, placing blame solely on Indigenous people,

*... oh by the way did you know Aborigines consider that white mans trash/food packaging, containers, bottles, cans, is not their responsibility? I used to be on council and affronted some of them about it, they will sit there and there will be a trash can in front of them and they will not put anything in it. I walked up to them and said why don’t you clean this all up and put it in there? And they said oh this is white mans trash it is not ours.*

He assumed that by the phrase ‘white mans trash’ that the Indigenous people are defining what is and is not rubbish or waste according to their culture. His confrontation did nothing to dispel the possibility that the rubbish was not actually their waste, that in fact it could have been waste/rubbish that others had littered and yet, he assumes it to be theirs. He further assumes that it is their responsibility to clean the streets (including the rubbish of their oppressors) and then attempts to convince me that it is the case.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Another irrigator lamented on their struggles to employ Indigenous people. He has a genuine desire to employ Indigenous people and comments not only on the Indigenous culture but also his western culture. He reflected on the cultural barriers that influenced his decision and had stifled his enthusiasm to employ Indigenous people,

*Tomorrow is Thursday. You drive around town tomorrow lunch time, can’t sell liquor before lunch time. I think they get their cheques on Thursdays and they are lined up, and I don’t want to say anything bad about it, we all have our vices. I would like to employ some young Aboriginal guys for the farm but I have to approach it different. I have to set it up so there is some job sharing so if they had a bad day or something happened in the family they can say ‘I am not going, you go mate’. And for things like helping with the irrigation morning and afternoon. The seed we grow we have a lot of corellas that eat our crops, so morning and afternoons we have to spend chasing birds. So you know to put these young kids in a car with a gun to chase these birds away it would show we do trust them but if they had to do it seven days a week it would fail. They would have one day off and they would feel ashamed so they don’t turn up again, ever. Those are some of the cultural things that we need to get around. It would be a long term investment, there would be lots of failures, and that is why I have not done anything in the past, you have to be prepared financially. I haven’t had the guts to do that. Not only do us whitefellas have to change, the blackfellas have to change too, got to realise that if someone goes to work, the rest of the family bums off this guy so there is no benefit. They don’t see any personal gain. It doesn’t add up. Success is measured differently, and I don’t even mean success in terms of money it is a lot more than that. A lot of ways it has to do with choice and freedom and quality of life and they lose of that when they go working. And it really scary for them to suddenly be in a whitefella environment. I feel uncomfortable when I am in an Aboriginal community, it’s hard. They smell different, they look different, you can hardly understand what they are saying, they can hardly understand what we are saying. It is just a different culture and is very
very scary what is happening to the children and the elders and the loss of a culture, very scary.

What is so significant with this excerpt of transcript is how his reflections on Indigenous culture attempt to be empathic yet, are also marred with racist generalisation, such as highlighting that Thursdays are when Government financial aid payments are made and commenting on liquor stores opening hours. During interviews, the most common slurs made towards Indigenous people, related to generalisation about alcohol misuse in the community, such as those made there. Despite this, his comments recognised a cultural clash between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people whereby the western work structure was understood to be inappropriate for the cultural needs and livelihoods of Indigenous people.

There is also a more subtle racism that operates whereby Indigenous communities are judged according to western parameters of success or achievement. The metaphor of “Indigenous people are really coming to the table” demonstrates this. This will be discussed in more detail at the Myth/Metaphor level of the Government/Scientific analysis.

There is a high degree of cultural antagonism present within the townsite. On the first field trip to Kununurra, on the main road artery heading into town from the irrigation area in Ivanhoe Plains, a large barramundi, about a meter in length was slung from a sign post. We asked a participant if they knew why a perfectly good fish had been wasted. His response was that it was directed at the Indigenous people in town. He said that fishing meant different things – for white people it was a recreational activity, for Indigenous people it was solely for food. He said that the Indigenous people do not understand why the non-Indigenous people waste so much food and the non-Indigenous people do not understand why the Indigenous people catch under size fish. He said that he suspected someone who had caught too much decided to let the Indigenous people know about it.
Another example of similar antagonism related to the street name of which the fish was slung. There had been requests on the part of the local community for the name to be changed because it was after a family who were known to have had at some time enslaved and abused Indigenous people. The street name, thus, was a constant reminder of Indigenous oppression and the Council agreed for it to be changed to something more suitable. A large consultation process commenced, in which a name was finally agreed upon by the local communities and presented to council. It was knocked back because the pronunciation of the name was too complex for non-Indigenous people. Consequently, the original name remains.

This is a pervasive and detrimental Worldview that has been heavily ingrained into western culture. While some of the racism is overt, other forms are deceptive, but have equally if not more detrimental impact. By racism being ‘hidden’ through apparent subleties such as street signs, the racism is not overt and it is difficult to openly criticise.

4.10.3.2. Production and Frontierism

At the Worldview/Discourse Level, a pertinent worldview amongst the irrigators concerned their general attitudes relating to the landscape of the region. The non-Indigenous settlement history is relatively recent and is marked by dislocation and dispossession of Indigenous countries, the flooding of the lower Ord River and the creation of the town of Kununurra. None of these acts were done with any consultation with the Indigenous owners in the region. These acts were inherently colonialist and assumed white ownership and power rights over traditional landholders and the natural environment. This assumed right and power differentiation continues to influence irrigator interaction with the natural environment and the broader community. In relation to the natural environment, the irrigators focus was on agricultural production with minimal concern expressed towards the future health and well being of the landscape. There are yet to be any significant physical evidence of impact of irrigation in the ORIA, as a consequence,
there are no major remediation or conservation endeavours and current practice continues. It is probable that if environmental issues were to arise, it is then that attitudes and practices would change in an attempt to manage the issues presented.

The majority of the focus on the Region’s future was framed in terms of the uncertainty associated with the development of Ord 2 – which was generally met with frustration at the perceived Government inaction, for instance,

*The rest of Australia is running short of water and they [State Government] can’t even start up Ord 2. Now the Government wants private investors to pay for infrastructure, roads, power, you can’t do that.*

And,

*Bring it on [Ord 2]. It has to happen. I am probably too involved to comment, if it is there, the political system just destroys my soul I can’t say it any other way. The chances are they will get it wrong, but bring it on.*

These reflections highlight a lack of faith in Government as it is perceived as inhibiting the capacity within the irrigation community to extend their frontier. Given the current health of the soil and the apparent abundance of water, (particularly in comparison with other farming areas in Australia), there was little reflection made on future irrigation practices, particularly in terms of conservation and preservation of natural resources. Currently, the worldview that is held is very much oriented towards production and the ethic appears very much to be, if there is a problem it will be addressed immediately at the individual or collective level. A good example of this was a case of fish poisoning, the irrigation community came together and developed a strategy to manage their chemical use in a bid to prevent future possible incidents,
We had a fish kill. XX\textsuperscript{19} is a very old chemical, is species specific, cheap and really works well. We the growers really like it, but it is an oil and it floats on the water and really toxic to fish, no one wants that. So we basically created a protocol to work with it and we have only had one problem since.

Here, the community management was evidently successful and facilitated through a local organisation that is the community’s closest organisational comparison to a Catchment Management Authority. This example highlights the reactionary nature of farming practices in Australia. Despite the stress under which the natural environment is placed through farming, it is uncommon for there to be preventative practice, instead action tends to be reactionary, as was the case with the fish poisoning. Currently, the ORIA is operating under a paradigm of short-termism, where the activities of the irrigation community are driven by the immediate aim of maximum production and profit. There is very little concern expressed regarding the long term implications of their current land management activities and as such there is little to reflect in terms of community or individual level conservation endeavours. This is interesting given the high value of the natural environment and how critical it is to their livelihood and sense of place.

The stories and reflections of some of the first settlers interviewed in the research depict their strong will and determination to make the irrigation area successful. The settlement was based on an intrinsic assumption that they had the right to settle, that the land was freehold, and that they were the makers of their own destiny. This sentiment remains today. This worldview is generally contrary to the Indigenous community where the inherent spiritual connection with the land in western culture could be interpreted as a stewardship ethic, however this potential interpretation undermines the connection between Indigenous people and country and is a sign of Whiteness.

\textsuperscript{19} Name of specific chemical removed for legal reasons.
It is evident that the natural environment is valued amongst the irrigators due to the favourable farming conditions and the recreational opportunities which the landscape offers. In both situations, the environment is being tamed and enjoyed by the local community, whether it is in terms of farming practices or because it is central to the recreational culture e.g. boating and fishing. Consequently, this frontierest attitude contributes to a complex paradox regarding the way in which the physical environment is both valued for its natural state and yet is simultaneously manipulated and utilised for its production. In Kununurra, the opportunities for the irrigation community were many, and as there were no signs of threat to their current practice they valued the landscape because they enjoyed it and reaped financial benefit from it, as opposed to valuing it because they could lose it. A powerful example of the shift in values was with the closure of the cane sugar mill. The mill was valued because it was a part of cane growers farming practices. After the sugar is harvested, there is a window of opportunity for the cane to be crushed before it spoils. Cane growing was also a part of the local identity, and valued in a sense that it contributed to the notoriety of the region as producing cane sugar. However, the threat and eventual closure of the sugar mill increased the local irrigators’ value of it due mainly in response to the threat of not having it. A reaction that somewhat paralleled the saying ‘absence makes the heart grow fonder’. Presented here is the paradox of a frontierism worldview – there is the enthusiasm and energy associated with when the times are good, and a high level of anxiety when valued ways of being are threatened. It is the case that until there is the fear associated with losing something, there is very little action made to protect it. This paradox is particularly complex as simultaneously the natural environment is valued whilst it is recognised and embraced as something that can be tamed and exploited to human benefit.

4.10.4. Myth/Metaphor Level

The Myth/Metaphor level of the CLA is interested in unveiling some of the deeper subconscious underpinnings of community life. Of particular interest is the
mythology that is often caught up in the culture of a community, which because it is so ingrained, often goes unnoticed. The significance of this level is that it provides insight into some of the drivers that underpin particular practices, traditions or norms within the community. The aim of exploring Myth/Metaphor within the irrigation community is to develop an understanding of what influences their culture and how this impacts on their farming practices.

4.10.4.1. Bigger is Better

Issues of scale are significant to the culture of Kununurra. The physical environment, both undisturbed and modified by human interaction has a grandeur to it, for instance, the Bungle Bungles, Lake Kununurra, and the Diversion Dam. These facets contribute to mythology regarding scale; in particular that bigger is better. Most obviously, there is the historical enthusiasm to increase the size of the irrigation area. The eagerness however is also met with caution from some irrigators as there is also a sense that they may have to increase the size of their operation in order to survive. One irrigator reflected,

Technology is there to go further but it is just too big a step to take. I am too small a grower to do it and I have no intention to get bigger. WA only, too many big growers over east, too competitive just want to service me own State. It makes transport easier but it limits your size.

Here, he negotiated the possibilities for growth and rationalised his intentions with me. It conveys a succinct message regarding the nature of irrigation in WA, and ties nicely with the Social Structural Level whereby there is a reported high level of self governance within the community. The physical isolation poses barriers, but also provides opportunities for those interested in establishing and securing markets. Despite this, the mythology regarding scale continues to introduce a level of anxiety within the growers. In part, it appears to be associated with the social structural issue of globalisation where myth surrounds an apparent need to keep up with
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

markets and technology (as noted in the above excerpt). The irrigators generally had a strong aversion to chain stores, and big business. This becomes paradoxical in that there appears to be a valued community orientation between the growers, but are noted to be highly competitive. There is a seesawing of interests, namely maintaining the small scale of local, but also feeling a pressure to increase the scale of their operation, essentially a response to globalisation.

4.10.4.2. Container Metaphor

Container metaphors were prominently adopted. Container metaphors symbolise containment or enclosure (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The container is used in Kununurra to suggest the use of the irrigation area, where the valley is socially constructed as a bowl in which the produce is held. The container metaphor has been somewhat dynamic corresponding with the use of the irrigation area. Initially Kununurra was a sugar bowl with the high proportion of cane growers and the presence of the valley’s own sugar mill. The closure of the mill has transformed the identity of the valley, similarly with the struggles in eastern Australia’s MDB, there has been an increased focus on the future of Kununurra as being the new food bowl for the nation. ‘Food Bowl’ was a common phrase adopted during the interviews to describe the ORIA. Historically there has been interest in the Ord Regions potential, particularly from Government, who are interested in the capacity that Kununurra has to one day be the primary food producer for Australia. Generally this metaphor is positively received by the irrigators, however is simultaneously being met with a high degree of scepticism. Ord 2 – an extension of the current Ord irrigation area has been discussed for over two decades and has resulted in very little action on the part of Government. The uncertainty regarding the Ord’s expansion has resulted in a high degree of frustration within the community. Much of the blame has been directed towards the Indigenous communities who have been undergoing negotiations associated with their loss of country and associated impacts of being dispossessed of their land through the damming of the Lower Ord and construction of the town site of Kununurra and the irrigation area.
The transformation of the container is particularly significant, as the continual adoption of the metaphor suggests that there is the desire to maintain a sense of ownership or containment of the valley by the current community. As was expressed at the Social Structural level there is a relative acceptance of people migrating to the town, but it appeared to mediate the interests of the current irrigators – for instance fears related to flooding of particular markets, or the strong aversion MISs or other larger corporate scale irrigation.

4.10.4.3. Right to Control and Modify the Natural Environment

Consistently there was the perception that the natural environment was something that humans had the right to modify and adapt to their own requirements. The development of the irrigation area – with its history of flooding the Lower Ord, the dispossession of Indigenous Land, the creation of the Diversion Dam and Lake Kununurra – have created the platform in which it is deemed acceptable to alter the naturally occurring environment. There appears to be a slight disassociation between the act of farming and its associated impacts on the natural landscape and the value that people have on the surrounding environment. For instance, fishing, camping, and hiking are highly valued and are greatly associated with the community’s sense of place. The desire to further develop the irrigation area therefore presents itself as ill fitting in light of the community’s broader appreciation and value of the environment. The mythology is closely related to the perceived power of humans. While the complexities of this paradox were spoken of in the Worldview/Discourse Level of the analysis in reference to production and frontierism, it also operates at a slightly deeper mythological sense. Hence, there is an intrinsic right, particularly within western culture that the natural environment belongs to people. Central to this myth is the perceived sense of ownership which positions people as superior to and in control of the environment. This introduces a myriad of issues related to land stewardship versus production, but that itself is too
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

dichotomous. Rather, the interest here is in how it is ‘natural’ that people will alter
the environment to suit their needs.

Related to the sense of control of the natural environment is how the mythology
contributes to regional identity. Being a relatively ‘young’ community, efforts are
seemingly unconsciously being made to construct their identity. As such it is
embedded in their irrigation practice, for instance,

_I always say that farmers are guardians of land and water because we are, we don’t
get treated like that we get treated like we are uneducated idiots a lot of the time,
by a lot of town^{20} people, oh yeah._

This reflects that the irrigators feel undervalued for their experience, intellect and
contribution. In addition, the term guardian acts in part as a means of rectifying any
of the environmental degradation that may come as a result of their farming
practices. It demonstrates a conflict regarding the practical necessity of requiring
food, while impacts associated with food production challenge ever present values
regarding the conservation of the natural environment. The term guardian attempts
to relieve this tension, reframing agricultural practice as being a responsibility in line
with environmental values geared towards conservation.

4.11. Causal Layered Analysis - Government, Scientific and
Community Organisation

Interviews were conducted with various State Government departmental staff
including governance and research and community organisations. These interviews
provided a highly valuable perspective into the reality of governance and research
within rural communities. The reflections on part of these organisations provide a
different perspective to life in the region, particularly in terms of their professional

^{20} In this instance ‘town’ refers to the city of Perth.
interaction with irrigators. The following is a Causal Layered Analysis of these groups which contributes to an understanding of the culture of the region.

4.11.1. Litany

The Litany analysis aimed to consider the overt realities of Government and non-Government organisation and scientists within the town. Particular interest was in exploring the culture of these groups from the surface level. The face value of the culture is important, particularly in regional areas as often the contact that outsiders have with these groups and institutions are fleeting. Understanding this in more depth is useful as it provides an understanding of what people ‘leave with’ when engaging with these groups in short term or occasional arrangements.

4.11.1.1. Optimism

At the Litany Level, science and bureaucracy conceptualise environmental issues and the physical landscape in a manner quite differently to other farming areas in Australia (both dryland and irrigated). In Kununurra is it characterised by a sense of optimism. This reflection is not to undermine the complexity of the issues that they do manage, but rather it is aimed to highlight that the setting in which they operate allows in part a degree of intellectual and Governmental freedom. At times, their work setting was compared to other parts of Australia which they allude to as being in decline, for instance,

The Wheatbelt of WA their problems are in their face, there is salinity, over clearing, biodiversity loss and ongoing salinity issues, where as here, you know, it is fairly resilient. The Ord is obviously hugely modified because you have put the dams in, but the water quality is actually still quite good, groundwater is rising but it has not got to crisis point. No one really knows what the story is, but it seems to be below that two metres which is the critical point.
There is almost a naivety in the above example. There is a sense of ‘see no evil’, despite there being recognition of the future potential for Kununurra to experience land degradation issues. It also alluded to a reactionary approach to problem solving through the use of the phrase, ‘crisis point’, whereby action to address an issue is made only when the issue itself has reached a critical status. For many natural resource issues, that tends to be identified at the Litany Level. When issues reach ‘critical’ status the impacts on the physical environment can be irreversible or, require a great deal of investment to amend. This marks an interesting disparity whereby commonly there is enthusiasm, particularly within science and bureaucracy to learn lessons (especially from the southern parts of Australia) that can be applied in other natural resource settings. The intention to prevent is a strong motivation evident in policy and science alike, although the preventative ethic itself appears yet to have been applied in Kununurra, again the current good times appear to outweigh activities based on prevention.

Generally there is optimism on the part of science and bureaucracy, particularly in terms of the seemingly pristine state of Kununurra’s landscape. For instance,

*We have the best water in Australia, it is the cleanest, not many people can drink out of their irrigation channels. It is good water.*

And,

*We have a few things to our advantage, because we are so isolated we are free of many pests and diseases. And because it is all dry season as well, once again we don’t have the pest and disease problems associated with water on the plants so we are quite fortunate there and that also provides us access to markets that other areas of Australia can’t.*

Further,
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

I think the threats out here are outside of the irrigation area, so that's fire; fire is a huge problem particularly from a biodiversity point of view.

While currently not having critical land management issues that require immediate attention, it was acknowledged that despite the community's relatively young history, they have developed learnings which they wish to apply,

Because the whole irrigation area is 14,000 hectares there is no emphasis on planting wildlife corridors and things like that because you got the river running through it the hills and things like that. You know, that is a bit different and I hope with Stage 2 there are areas that are not cleared and they are all connected. You have to remember that Stage 1 was set up in the 60s so the understanding was very minimal.

Another scientist reflected on how the community was picking up on research learnings and actively applying them. It was commonly expressed that the community is particularly intelligent, savvy and willing to learn,

You can see how they are managing their water and they are managing it better than they used to. A lot of people are going to drip irrigation as opposed to surface flow. People understand it better now, it is not something where you turn the water on. I mean I am talking like 15 years, things take time. I think there is a much higher level of respect for water than what it used to be.

The general positivity that characterises these groups can also be seen in the way that science is conducted. Interestingly, these groups tend to work towards solving problems as opposed to preventing them. This is particularly evident in natural resource settings within Australia where there is a strong orientation towards introducing more sustainable farming practices. This orientation has typically emerged from environmental or land management issues prompting community or Governmental action in a bid to remedy the issue at hand. Given the comparatively
sound environmental condition of the ORIA as compared to other irrigation areas in Australia which are under increasing environmental and economic pressure, the engagement of groups and agencies in Kununurra is characterised by positivity as opposed to deficit.

The scientist, Government and non-Government department employees reflected that they can actually have impact in the communities in which they work. This in itself is highly encouraging, demonstrating how the service providers themselves feel empowered. Seeing positive benefit out of their engagement was a common reflection, for instance in relation to how irrigators conceptualise water,

*I think we have seen, the way that I have seen change is in the way that farmers relate to water. Because we have so much water, people in the past have been unaware of how much to use. We started having community concerns with regard to ground water. So we put some projects in place and research into looking how we could change all of this stuff. They were very keen to change. Change is easier up here, you are not set in your ways so change is a lot easier to do or achieve.*

There was common recognition of the unique environment that they worked in, particularly given the relative absence of historically entrenched farming practices (perceived by some as being a barrier to change). Community willingness to change was perceived by participants to make for an easier role for those acting within Government or research settings. Participants from scientific and bureaucratic backgrounds expressed a sense of liberation working in an environment that is yet to experience the degree of land management challenges that come with irrigation, nor working within settings experiencing severe drought. Consequently the approach that they employ when going about their business is framed in terms of optimism and opportunity. This is similarly the case for community based organisations that support irrigators, such as growers groups. While generally there was a sense that without crisis there is no perceived need to change, change generally was not perceived as a threat to the community culture or the act of
irrigating. Such attitudes may be related to the types of farming programs that are made available to irrigators in Kununurra. Programs are fundamentally different in the sense that they are aimed at production and based on future planning as opposed to attending to past land management issues or other environmental woes such as drought. Programs for other farming communities tend to be oriented towards remediating ‘poor farm management’.

4.11.1.2. Analytical Note
Analysis at the Litany Level concerning Government, Scientific and Community Organisations was an oddly difficult task. Much of the complexity appeared to come about due to my own scientific worldview. Part of the problem appeared to have emerged out of a natural reaction to actively look for problems to solve. At the Litany level, generally the experience of these groups in how they go about their work is not characterised by the same heaviness that accompanies the challenges that other agricultural communities in Australia are faced with. Yes, they have challenges in Kununurra, particularly in terms of social and cultural issues, but in terms of the physical environment, comparatively there are relatively few challenges for the departments and agencies. This reflection highlights the need to consider not only the challenges that a community may experience, but also their assets. It is often easier to identify what is wrong with something, including communities, than it is to articulate the strengths. This deficit paradigm is something that all researchers, particularly within community settings should be wary of.

4.11.2. Social Structural
At the Social Structural Level interest is in analysis that gives insight into how social structures influence the nature of communities, commonly the presence or the relevance of a structure goes unnoticed. This tends to occur in situations when structures become so integral to the outer workings of community life that the
inner working or the underpinnings of these self organising behaviours become a way of life. This level of analysis aims to identify and explore how Government, Scientific and Community groups structurally operate.

4.11.2.1. The Research Station
At the Social Structural Level, there are some nuances that contributed to the unique way in which science has historically been conducted in the ORIA. The most striking is that the non-Indigenous settlement was first established around the Department of Agriculture Research Station. Their trials suggested that the area would be suitable for irrigated agriculture. The Station is still present and operational today, positioned in the ORIA out of town. Interestingly, as was the case in the 1960s, the scientists still work and live with their families on the station. Conversations with Government employees who reside on the station lamented on the pressure associated with there being little distinction between work and personal life. Being physically removed from the town both in terms of their research practice and socially removed from others in the wider community appeared to contribute to a social divide between the research community and the wider community, not in terms of conflict but rather in the dynamic. More specifically, the science that is conducted on the station is conceptualised as being of a more traditional or hard science paradigm. In Kununurra, this type of research, and the expected engagement that would be expected (such as field days or shed meetings) still occurs but a stereotype of a ‘scientist’ appears to influence their reputation. The traditional stereotype of the scientist, irrespective of whether it is an accurate perception, is powerful because it is a perception. The main benefactor of this perception is the mysticism associated with their living and working at the station. The Research Station’s location also physically and intellectually removes science from being publicly accessible. Although only physically a short distance, the impact is more in its symbolism. It means that the scientists have to work harder to make their science relevant to the community.
A tour of the Research Station by one of the employees illustrated pressures felt on the part of the employees, of particular interest was the aging buildings and plans for redevelopment. The redevelopment plans were generally poorly received by employees as the design was not suited to the climate or the requirements of the staff. Although still in construction, the working areas were limited in space and privacy and there was poor ventilation. The proposed development appeared to only heighten the issues currently experienced by the community, primarily a lack of space to self.

4.11.2.2. Time

Time frames were a dominant theme throughout discussions with Government and Scientific and Community organisations. Firstly, it related to how their practices and activities were defined according to the financial year in which their funding was tied. There was a high degree of uncertainty associated with some groups funding. One researcher lamented,

“How do we take things to the next level? The group has been working quite well collaboratively and a lot of that is because there was enough money to go around and people are really busy doing their projects, but, I am interested in what is happening post-June 2008. I suppose get the group to a point that we are really cohesive.

Time was also an issue in terms of their capacity to conduct and communicate quality science. There was recognition that the scientific paradigm requires a degree of certainty which comes out of investing time, effort and knowledge. There were strong concerns expressed that this need for quality assurance in their work is not only for their credibility, but also to the benefit of the community. One scientist commented,
I think where we still need improvement and it is a time thing, is interpreting it [the science]. The difficulty with that, with science, is that people are not prepared to say anything unless it has been tested hundreds of times.

Many of the Government departmental staff noted that there is a strong drive within the irrigation community which is characterised by forward planning and an enthusiasm to get the job done. The speed at which irrigators operated similarly resulted in pressures in the Government departments who were conflicted between required processes and the demands that the community placed on them, for instance, irrigators call for face to face and immediate support and advice, which cannot always be met given governmental processes and protocols which slow the pace of interaction.

Structurally, the challenges with time relate to differences between how these groups operate, the complexity arising when they naturally draw on each others services. These issues are closely related to bureaucratic structures in which these groups are forced to operate.

4.11.2.3. Bureaucratic Challenges

The bureaucracy in Kununurra has lead to some local challenges. One discussion featured the issue of accessing office supplies. It is logistically easier and more economical to access supplies from Darwin, located in the Northern Territory (NT). However, the Government departments are forced to resource from their own state and are thus made to do business with Perth suppliers. These sorts of processes are frustrating to Government employees who feel the pressures of micro-management from over 1000km away.

I don't get the NT news very often. Darwin is the closest centre if you want to go and get something. You can physically drive there in a day and get a lounge suite and drive back again, I mean you just wouldn’t do that with Perth.
Organisational change was also a significant challenge for the departments. One employee reflected on the history of reorganisation, most evident through the renaming of departments,

So I guess in WA if you look back at the ’70s and ’80s and then it went to the Water Authority and then it went to um from the Water Authority came the Water Corporation from it also came the Water Rivers Commission and there was the Department of the Environment but now we have got the Department of Water and parts been merged through to CALM which is now DEC that’s in WA so yeah.

The impacts of these structural changes related to uncertainty over job security and frustration over the expenditure associated with the structural change (e.g. changes to insignia). From the community perspective it translated into confusion and apathy regarding bureaucracy, the main feeling was a sense of being increasingly dislocated or removed from the governance structures and from the science being conducted in their community. These feelings were mirrored also by the staff in the departments.

Uncertainty regarding Ord 2 was also creating some challenges for the groups, particularly Government who were receiving criticism due to the uncertainty of the proposal despite local Government departments having little to no influence on the outcome of the deliberation regarding Ord 2,

It has been moving forward yeah (laughs) it has been moving forward for 20 something years. We hope by 2009/2010 there might be something going out there. (Ord 2). There is a lot of infrastructure to be put in, there is a lot of roads and channels all that sort of stuff has to get put in. The last area of Stage 1 has just been released and that area is called Green Swamp, which is sort of north of the current irrigation area. That has been sitting there for quite a while, that is about 1300 hectares which will hopefully be developed this year. The soil type is a bit different it
is a heavier clay it is a wetter area so they have got to sort of, it butts onto a range and if it rains it sits in this area so we are trying to make that water flow in a different direction so that we keep that water off that area so there is a bit of work to do on the area. It has all been worked through and it has all got the environmental clearance.

The bureaucratic challenges that are present within Kununurra really relate to the culture of the region failing to be fully understood by major decision making powers in Australia, particularly from Perth. Contextual considerations such as climate, cultural needs, and location do not appear to be fully conceptualised and there is a failed assumption that a one size fits all approach is suffice. This is not an uncommon experience in rural and regional communities, and in response what has emerged is a very powerful connection between communities that have a mutual understanding of the complexities. For instance,

The problem with Kununurra is its isolation, and the cost of the isolation, and getting out of that isolation and I think that is one of the things that people don’t like, and you can’t fly east, two days of the week you can.

4.11.2.4. Northern Connection

Many of the bureaucratic challenges felt come about through a power differentiation between locally operated agencies and the influence of major decision making powers. Being such a distance from Perth has resulted in camaraderie across the north of Australia, a link particularly between Kununurra, Darwin and far north Queensland. At the Social Structural Level there is a strong Northern connection which comes out of an affinity of shared cultural experiences relating mainly to weather, climate and geographical isolation. Many comparisons were made between the perspective and interests of Perth people compared to those that reside north with an astoundingly consistent perspective that those in the south do not understand the north, for instance,
I think it is interesting, people here, if they come from Perth, they relate to it. If they haven’t come from Perth it’s a long way away, it is a different climate, it is the political system that we operate here under but unless you have interests or relatives there who cares. I mean yesterday it was interesting the QLD Country Life had reporters here, that was one thing that struck me in the Territory a lot of people read the QLD country papers, the West Australian papers are all about southern wheat growers, who cares!

There is mutual understanding of the complexities of living north, such as the impact of the climate. The intricacies of a farming schedule governed by extremes in weather fails to translate to other farming communities (mainly dryland farming) in WA. This has resulted in a northern kinship and a sense of resentment towards other areas that fail to recognise the existence of multiple farming systems. It was also noted that the majority of the community are in close proximity to each other, with the exception of pastoralists,

*Only two people will have to travel more than 30km, that is unheard of up here, because Kununurra is such a little, sort of contained in some ways the services are.*

This marks a quite unique social structure, even for isolated towns in Australia.

The northern connection makes up for an apparent divide between the north and the south of the State. The divide is more than geographical, relating to differences in ideology and way of life. The Government, scientific and community groups have created their own support networks to cater for the deficit of support they feel from the south of their State.
4.11.3. **Worldview/Discourse Level**

The Worldview/Discourse Level of the CLA considers the deeper, relatively hidden conceptual space. The aim of this Level of analysis is to convey an understanding of the way in which Worldviews and utterances are a reflection of the lived experience of Government, Scientific and Community Organisations.

4.11.3.1. **Scientific Paradigm**

A prominent theme at the Worldview/Discourse Level of the analysis was regarding a scientific paradigm. The paradigm was characterised by a strong, almost non-negotiable way of conducting and communicating research with and to the farming community. It was also expressed that irrigators tend to operate in a different way to scientists which implied that there is an acknowledged alternative paradigm or worldview within the community. For instance, one scientist reflected,

*One of the challenges when doing the more scientific [research] is being able to present in a way that is understandable but without losing the scientific rigour of it I suppose and it is difficult when someone is practical out there doing stuff. What the scientist is telling the farmer isn’t backing up what they see and feel and intuitively think. That can be quite a challenge.*

As part of this scientific paradigm is their assertion that science is rigorous and based on fact as opposed to farming which is based on intuition and feeling. These worldviews almost intrinsically operate in opposition to each other. The contrast in paradigms leads to a great deal of complexity when the groups interact particularly as there is the heightened opportunity for misunderstanding and potential conflict. The propensity for conflict comes to the fore due to a power differentiation, where the perceived accuracy of science is conceptualised as being more useful or accurate. What appears to make this more challenging is that with these assertions there is an implied power differentiation that positions scientific knowledge as superior to farming knowledge.
Discursively, there was a high use of rhetoric which was testament to the existence of a scientific paradigm. The rhetoric itself does little to aid in bridging the gap between science and the broader community. The findings from this Level, make for an interesting connection within that at the Litany regarding Optimism. There may not be the same sorts of scientific challenges present in Kununurra as other farming communities, but despite this, science still holds pride of place, which in part may come out of a tradition within the community, particularly in light of the history of the region and the research station (as discussed at the Social Structural Level).

4.11.3.2. **Racism**

A racist worldview was also present within some of the groups interviewed. Large excerpts of interviews have been included in this section as a means of highlighting the extent to which racism operates, and are included to represent some of the most extreme accounts presented during interviews. These are verbatim, and I have provided no additional annotation regarding their content, as the implications of this Worldview become immediately evident in the words of the participants alone.

The average blackfella in Australia because they call us whitefellas, or worse, the average blackfella on the street has virtually received virtually no benefit. Some of it is finally beginning to filter through. But in general over 10 years have received no benefit, they think of it as, a joke because they haven’t seen any real benefit. Sometimes the only benefit of any progress that the Aboriginal will see is a new Toyota every year and that is not good for them, they know that. The oldies, the old grannies and grandparents the old blackfellas the station people that migrated into town after about 1966 with the equal wages what have you, they realised that we’re they’re headed is not good for them, but they are probably, they don’t have the influence these days, the kids rule the rile the elders the mums and dads or the grannies these days used to have the say that they used to have under their own tribal law.
When you think of it, 60 or 70 year ago they were a stone age race. We have taken them out of the stone age into the 21st century and expect them to be totally adapted. It is a bit like taking me to Japan and expecting me to be able to learn Japanese fluently over night. It doesn’t happen it takes time to learn. Its one of those things, I think probably if anyone was honest enough to realise what happened in 1966 and what happened in 1975 with the Racial Discrimination Act was probably a bad move, in retrospect but we can’t go back. The stolen generation will never go that way again, however the people in Halls Creek the Aboriginales are pleading for the Government to take the kids away and put them into hostels or else the kids will be dead. But no Government, I mean they just committed $21 million to build two hostels very reluctantly because they don’t want to be tarred with the stolen generation again. I mean I openly say, you look at people like Charlie Perkins, Lisa Donoghue, Rob Riley, they were saved, they weren’t stolen. But that is controversial, but I don’t mind.

The biggest problem is, when you were nine or 10 years old, your mum and dad knew where you were at any one time, it is not uncommon, to see kids six, seven, eight, nine, ten years old at night roaming in packs because they are safer on the street than they are at home, and this is Aboriginal. It is basically an Aboriginal problem and it has to be sorted out by sections of the Aboriginal community, with the help of others, but there is no longer any corporal responsibility, black or white and when kids feel, the cops can’t pick because of duty of care, child abuse, they can’t pick up kids off the street they have to call DCD not DCD here, they have a case worker in Perth and the cops have to call this 1300 number and talk to this person in Perth. Its not going to work and it is designed not to work I am sure. Kids feel safer roaming the streets. I mean I do work, I do volunteer work driving a bus if there is a party on I drive all night getting people home, one of my buses has had a big window smashed with kids throwing things. I blame the kids, but I blame the parents. The parents should know where the kids are.
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

The particularly horrifying aspect of this Worldview is that it is coming from community members that have a degree of power and influence in the community and a degree of decision making power.

4.11.4. Myth/Metaphor Level

The Myth/Metaphor Level of the analysis is concerned with the deepest underpinnings of peoples lived experience. The aim of this level is to identify and explore the influence of Myth and Metaphor in the way in which Scientific, Government and Community Organisations operate.

4.11.4.1. Freedom

There exists strong mythology regarding freedom in the ORIA. Much of the mythology relates to Government and department conceptualisation of how irrigators (their clients) relate to the natural environment. For instance the perception that,

The guy [irrigator] has a right over his own property.

They are also aware of the influence of generational factors on how irrigators go about managing their farms. Particular reference is made to the relative freedom that growers have because they are not bound by familial or historical practices ingrained through previous generations of farming, one Government employee reflected,

The first generation farmers are retiring. There are very few second generation farmers farming with their dads. Like Tony21 has got his children working with him, but not necessarily for him. You don’t have that system, and that is probably one of the benefits we have here. You have the freedom to make a choice, you don’t have to fight your dad to say I think we should do this.

21 Name changed for reasons of confidentiality.
While there was the recognition that currently there are not the pressures associated with family farming history, there remains interest in intergenerational equity, as is reflected in the following excerpt,

*The things that are happening I am a bit disappointed, like how we are handing the world over to our kids. I don’t know what we are going to do when we run out of oil. Everything we do, that was made from oil we travel up here we drive around. Perhaps not in your lifetime but it will be at the end of your lifetime we will run out of oil. I mean, we didn’t have a cure for small pox, we do now. We don’t know what to do with the waste from uranium, we will. And who knows what is going to come out of education and science in the future, but you know from the perspective today it looks like we are banging our heads on a brick wall, but there will be a way, there will.*

Interestingly, there is also the perception that the environmental challenges have the capacity to be solved based on reflections of other scientific successes (specific reference here made to infectious diseases). This marks a faith in science whereby there is the perception that,

*Unless there is severe degradation issues here, they can do whatever they want with it. It is freehold land they can do whatever they like on it! Stage 2 they are looking for preferred crop or preferred major crop. In regard to the land here, basically people can do whatever they like to it unless it becomes a major degradation issue and then the department can step in under the Soil Degradation Act.*

### 4.11.4.2. Racist Metaphor of ‘at the table’

The relationship between the Indigenous community and Government and non-Government departments is complex and generally contentious, particularly in relation to research with Indigenous people. Over time as the relationships have
seemingly strengthened, due seemingly in part to progress made with the Ord final agreement. For instance, one researcher reflected on this process and the impact that the agreement has had on Indigenous engagement in the community,

*The Native Title claims have been such that they have been key in inhibiting, or guiding development and obviously the Native Title situation here is different on the actual township. Kununurra obviously that is where the majority of people came to live and that is where the greatest impacts in land release or land issues have been the greatest. A lot of the township or the rural surrounds have been locked up in Native Title. My observation of Kununurra in the last six to eight years there has been definitely, a sort of, its great times, its interesting times for Aboriginal people. They are starting to get really organised. They are starting to have a real seat at the table. It’s only been a recent thing the level of consultation is mandatory, it is not just an additional extra. So to me that is indicating that they are starting to get a voice.*

The above excerpt acknowledges that increasingly Indigenous people in Kununurra are seen to be having a voice, particularly in formally organised western settings such as engagement with Government. It also exemplifies a pervasive metaphor regarding how western researchers/agency staff conceptualise their engagement with Indigenous people. Within some agencies there is a genuine desire for engagement with Indigenous people, and a strong will for Indigenous people to be empowered through these processes. However, despite these legitimate intentions Indigenous activities within the Kununurra community are judged according to indicators of success in white culture. The metaphor of Indigenous people having a “seat at the table” is particularly powerful. It implies that Indigenous people are bettering their future by taking part in protocols and processes that are white. Conversely, in comparing Indigenous culture to western culture in this way, it supposes that non-Indigenous culture is superior to Indigenous that western cultural practises and process is what other cultures should strive – a sign of success is having a seat at the table. For instance,
A lot of Aboriginal people are saying as part of the consultation process that 'You have got to properly resource your research projects so that you can involve us at a professional level' there is beginning to be a recognition of peoples value to projects, not becoming a rarity, it is becoming an expectation. If people are coming out to country to learn then they are going to have to pay for that. As professionals that is sort of changing.

Essentially, the metaphor symbolises the act of non-Indigenous culture critiquing Indigenous culture according to their own non-Indigenous social processes and highlights just some of the western cultural ethnocentricities. Furthering this, the symbolism of the traditional chair and table do not serve a place in traditional Indigenous culture, again emphasising the cultural incongruence in the adoption of this metaphor. The most powerful aspect of this metaphor is that the good intention surrounding the metaphor easily disguises Whiteness and thus it is the case that western social processes are continued to be supported and employed when engaging with Indigenous community members. The serious reality of having a seat at the table is that community representatives and Elders are suffering from exhaustion from being in such high demand by non-Indigenous consultative groups. While the process of consultation marks a significant improvement from no action at all, there are ramifications for the Indigenous communities themselves, particularly when traditional knowledge is so central and prized within their Culture. The continual consultation also has repercussions. For instance,

Legal recognition of their rights, the money flowing through there as well they are starting to get more organised. Obviously capacity is still very limited, they have got a huge amount of pressure on them to be involved with everyone. Everyone is trying to go into partnership with them in various ways and that has put a lot of pressure on their capacity internally. They have a lot of issues sort of at a grass roots level that they have to deal with let alone being involved in broader decision making.
One Government department employee lamented on changes that she observed,

_It is complex within their own societies and complex for us to manage partnerships. Gradually Government departments are understanding it and getting over the prejudice of ‘why does it take 10 Aboriginal people when there is one of us’._

She acknowledges that there has been a shift in how the department conceptualise their engagement, but there remains the mindset that it is the place for white people to manage Indigenous people.

**Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Project** – looking at trying to get the Indigenous pastoral leases up to speed trying to get them skilled up so that they can run as a profitable enterprise. So they have got the land, but in a lot of cases they don’t necessarily have the skills to run it as a profitable pastoral enterprise. So we put together a project with the Indigenous Land Corporation. That will be running till 2009 and we are on our second stage of funding so that has been going really well.

### 4.11.4.3. Inability of Government to make decisions

There is a prominent myth that Government is incapable of making decisions. For instance,

*Procrastination. Governments, Labour, Liberal, Communists, you name it, they don’t make decisions any more, we will have to develop a strategy, we will have a discussion we will have a display at a shopping centre, we will call for expression of interest, green papers, green papers are pretty famous, I know you have to plan things, but there is no need to reinvent the wheel over and over again. It is almost as if people are reluctant to make a decision in case it is the wrong one.*

And,
But I think and it comes back to the region and the individuals in the region, how they are related to other people outside the region, because for the area to progress culturally and socially and to expand appropriate industries and you know whatever that means, because people have different views of what appropriate is um you have got to have enough people in the engine room to be able to, to move things forward. I think that’s probably, the engine room hasn’t been there but there’s an engine room probably now, certainly there is an engine room now, and the engine room does include people from outside the area and, and those people um, and there has been a few decisions that have been made in the past, the recent past, that enabled confidence to go down the track and to explore those sorts of relationships, move things forward.

In part, this perception comes in response to irrigation community frustration relating to the uncertainty surrounding Ord 2. There is a persistent sense of being engulfed by bureaucratic process, and a feeling that the community is being hindered by the Government as opposed to being supported or stimulated.

One participant comments on how within Government, the departments are perceived to have contrasting ontology or differing value systems based on either conservation or development. This is a significant observation as fundamentally the orientations of these groups appear to play against each other. Further there is reflection of how living in a regional setting adds to the complexity of bureaucratic process and how such challenges due to conflicts in values appear to be heightened,

*It is also the thinking of Government and how Government changes in its way, and the way it structures its departments and you have got DEC the Department of Environment and Conservation who are the green part of society right and then you have got DoIR (Department of Industry and Resources) which is the development side of Government so you have got, its interesting how over a long period of time how the individuals in those departments actually drive different agendas and*
enable things to move forward and not move forward particularly in regional areas. Regional areas yeah are a bit more struggling to move forward.

Hence, there is the perception that a conservation ethic is acting as a barrier for development in the region and that departments that are geared towards this perceived value ethic challenge more dominant Government process which tends to be characterised by stimulation towards growth. This is interesting as it contributed to the perception of ‘country’ as being slower in its development which in turn is related to a perceived ethic which is ‘green’. Thus ‘green’ or conservation is not perceived necessarily as synonymous with ‘city’.

While Government is perceived as slow, grower groups are seen to be more active within the community,

Growers on that group, they’re very passionate about their irrigation and they’re looking forwards, they’re always looking forward and, and yes there’s a group called Ord Land and Water, and Ord Land and Water formed out of some key people... To any discussion about the progress on the Ord is really the Ord Land and Water group and its journey and its commitment and moving forward and how that’s you know one piece of the whole puzzle of things.

Significantly the frequent use of the word ‘forward’ poses highlights the community driven action within the town. Where Government is perceived to be lacking in motion or future thinking, the irrigation community becomes self organising and attempts to fill the perceived gap on part of Government.
Part Three Interpretation

Part Three Interpretation reflects on the previous two parts, (Part One Underpinnings and Direction, Part Two Findings). Part Three aims to interpret not only the research findings (Chapter 5, Paradox and the Unconscious, and Chapter 6, The Changing State of Communities), but also the research process itself, considering the direction of community psychology and contextualist research (discussed in the Epilogue).
Chapter Five

5. Paradox and the Unconscious

The Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) findings reported in Chapter Four provided an in-depth analysis of living and working in rural Australia. Being contextualist, the analysis captured a particular point in time and space. The analysis has also reflected my interpretation as a researcher and also active participant in the research process. At times there were apparent inconsistencies, which will be referred to as tensions between participants deeper worldviews and community mythologies compared to how the participants discussed management of the issues at the Litany and Social Structural Levels. These tensions are important as they act as markers of psychological paradoxes, more specifically, psychological stuckness (Smith & Berg, 1997). The following is a discussion of the critical paradoxes that emerged from the analysis, followed by an interpretation of the underpinnings of paradox. Specific attention is made to the more complex issues of psychological paradox as opposed to the everyday paradoxical tensions.

Chapter Four considered in depth the experience and community life of the Wheatbelt and Kununurra communities. The analysis conveys the complexity and diversity of Australian rural agricultural communities. Similarly it has highlighted the diversity of strengths and innovation in Australian farming communities, some of the challenges experienced in agricultural communities and insights into how the communities have dealt with these challenges and their resilience to these challenges. While some communities are feeling a series of challenges associated with a changing physical and social landscape others are feeling a sense of urgency to embrace change and transform their landscape further. Challenges are typically conveyed in terms of environmental issues, and in part the perceived demise of ‘Australia riding on the sheep’s back’ has lead to the emergence of a deficit model. The deficit construction of rural Australia, particularly in relation to Wheatbelt natural resource issues was challenged, through recognition of the inherently social
nature of environmental concerns. While issues were illustrated to be more complex, neither region is in deficit to the extent expressed by some, rather the construction appears to reflect the social and physical distance between rural and urban settings and the misunderstandings that come out of a failure to appreciate cultural differences particularly in relation to worldview. Bids to ‘fix’ the perceived deficits through governance systems are based on notions of empowerment through participation. These systems do not necessarily fit with the culture of the agricultural communities that were explored. What was articulated by participants particularly both the farmers and the irrigators was that there tends to be more power in locals defining their own futures as opposed to those outside their community deciding it for them. There are a series of particularly complexity issues felt within Indigenous communities. Most notably, as a community they are underrepresented, and are oppressed through inherently racist settlement and governance arrangements. Indigenous communities are either overtly oppressed through racist Governmental policy and values (as witnessed in Kununurra), or, oppressed through being forgotten, dismissed or ignored (as witnessed in the Wheatbelt). As both dryland and irrigated farming have been historically family based, there remain legacies that influence the nature of agricultural production in Australia. The notion of the family farm is one that is entrenched in Australia’s farming identity. Over time this part of agricultural identity has been challenged and farming communities appear to be entering into a period where they are attempting to renegotiate this identity. External pressures from uncontrollable forces such as markets, climates and broader social-political changes as seen with globalisation and the transition from modern to post modern times has challenged the values that were synonymous with agricultural communities. Family is becoming less important, so to traditions. The family business is shifting to an enterprise, resembling more of a business model as the families and communities manage economic downturns in the farming sector. Traditionally Gemeinschaft in orientation, rural agricultural communities are beginning to resemble some of the characteristics that relate to the values of the Geselleschaft. These concerns relate to one of the most pervasive messages that emerged across settings, relating to the
importance of community values. There were consistent concerns relating to threats to localism, specifically that country values, practices and ways of life are threatened by city values, processes, attitudes and behaviours.

What remains apparent through this analytical process is the existence of unresolved tensions. These tensions appear to manifest themselves in the form of seemingly unresolvable and highly complex social structures, interactions and problems. Consequently, these problems or tensions are inherently paradoxical and reflect a failure to consider in depth the problems at hand. Typically as conveyed in this analysis, problems are dealt with at best at the Litany and the Social Structural Levels, due mainly to these being the most overt levels to our consciousness. Failure to consider the deeper impacts of worldview, discourse, myth and metaphor leave the root of the presented issues behind. Chapter Five Paradox and the Unconscious explore some of the most pertinent paradoxes that emerged from the CLA which shed light on the complexities of community life. The two most pressing and influential paradoxes to rural community life in both the Wheatbelt and Kununurra relate firstly to tensions between the Gemeinschaft and the Gesellschaft and secondly to community members relationships with the natural environment.

5.1. Paradox 1: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft: ‘Community’ values within a ‘societal’ world

Almost idiosyncratic to the social construction of rural communities is a perceived set of values. The values can be conceptualised as being not so much about definition but rather a series of characteristics that create a ‘feel’ and are based on desirable notions of wholesomeness, support, and empathy. This social construction of the ‘rural community’ is very much synonymous with Tönnies' (1957) Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as discussed in Chapter One Conceptualising

22 Tönnies conceptualisation of social interactional styles presents the most fitting theory for considering the sociology and culture of the communities presented in this thesis. In line with the practice of grounded theory, his theorising of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft provided a sound theoretical base due to its capacity to be developed and interpreted in light of the findings that emerged through this analytical process. Like Tönnies sociological contemporaries who drew on his work as the primary underpinning, I too decided to draw on this particular thinking.
the Countryside. The paradox operates whereby there is a disjuncture between the values of community and values of society such as connectedness and holism (the Gemeinschaft) and disconnectedness and individualism (the Gesellschaft). Essentially this paradox is a matter of Worldview and surrounding mythology concerning the ways in which communities operate compared to the ways in which societies and cities operate. The situation becomes paradoxical where value systems clash. Noteworthy to this paradox is the subtle difference between how it manifests in the Wheatbelt compared to Kununurra. As such, each will be considered.

5.1.1. Wheatbelt Experience

As noted in Chapter One Conceptualising the Countryside, the current land management approach is based on the principles of the current neo-liberal paradigm whereby land care practices are tending to rest on the motivation and capacity of the individual. The removal of a structure (Landcare) which supported a stewardship ethic in many communities resulted in some farmers, previously a part of formalised Landcare groups being disenfranchised and isolated. Under the current approach of catchment management, support and opportunities operate at a competitive regional level as opposed to a local community level. Without the financial support individual farmers capacity to act as land stewards has become economically strained. There was seemingly a presumption on part of Government that the land care activities within the communities would continue despite the cessation of the formal Landcare program which provided both financial and community support at the catchment scale. For many communities in the Wheatbelt this was not a possibility, such was the case for Narembeen whose Local Council’s budgetary constraints prevented them from investing in the towns formalised continuation of the program (e.g. could not keep open the local office, nor fund positions).
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Arguably the effectiveness of the Landcare program in the Wheatbelt was due to congruency in the community values and the Gemeinschaft nature of the program; Landcare facilitated a group process which was consistent with the inner workings of how many of the Wheatbelt communities would operate ordinarily, namely, with an interest in the wellbeing of the broader community. Wheatbelt farmers recognised that they are a part of the community, as opposed to separating their personal and community lives. The Program in essence built on the pre-existing qualities of the community, in particular the friendship and familial bonds and on their desire to adopt sustainable practices during a fiscally challenging period. Generally it was expressed during interviews that land care activities were on farmers wish list of activities to do. Essentially it was a luxury activity that could only be honoured provided that they had the finances and people power to do so. For many spoken with, Landcare gave them the capacity.

In the Wheatbelt, the paradox has been developed and maintained over time. There is a perception that farmers are historically grounded individuals, while in part this is very true in the sense that history and family are highly valued. What lacks from this interpretation is a contextual appreciation of the environment in which they operate, much of which is influenced by seemingly uncontrollable factors such as climate (e.g. drought, frosts) and markets. While dryland farmers endeavour to navigate these challenges, there are offerings of support on part of Government as a means of relinquishing some of these pressures. In part, there is an expectation that farmers will change unsustainable practices, further that there is a willingness to change their farming practices to ones that are perceived as more sustainable. The move from a community oriented program that drew on the pre-existing worldview and localised processes of rural community life, to the catchment management model, left some communities feeling disenfranchised and disempowered. This management model marked a significant shift in the way in which communities were engaged in natural resource activities. Landcare was structured in such a way that the funding model allowed the community themselves to be the initiators of change in their district. While the Landcare program was
framed as concerning natural resource issues with relative success and despite concerns raised regarding volunteerism and burnout (Curtis, 1998, 2000; Byron & Curtis, 2002), it served a significant social function in that it contributed to community cohesion, empowerment and even conventions of self help (Lawrence, 2001). The introduction of catchment management however resulted in funding being held within a centralised body that possessed the power to initiate action as opposed to the community themselves. The cessation of the Landcare program was particularly painful for community members who were valued employees of the program and were able to draw on their local knowledge within their own community. The following table depicts some of the discrepancies expressed raised by participants regarding how social processes translate at the community level compared to a societal level. Generally these differences were depicted through reflections of how things ‘worked’ within the community, and events, happenings or processes that ‘failed’ or have the propensity to fail within their community. *Table 10* summaries the tensions between community and societal processes whereby the societal equivalent of community processes are presented.
**Table 10. Community Process and Society Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community –Oriented Process</th>
<th>Society – Oriented Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of demonstration sites – scientific learnings within the local context.</td>
<td>Application of learnings can be challenging as they often require,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Competitive application process against other farmers in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Dependent on funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Dependent on in-kind contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local scale participation.</td>
<td>Top down efforts to encourage participation at the local level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional technicians, scientists, Government employees etc., whereby local community members with on-ground context specific advice to inform decision making.</td>
<td>Drive–in–drive out/ fly–in–fly–out. Major inhibitor to the development of relationships and trust. Minimal investment in local community or economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction is based on physical connection for instance town based and to a degree regional based.</td>
<td>Communication is ‘remote’ whereby face-to-face communication is a rarity due in part to geographical distance. There is an assumption that all means of post-modern communication means are feasible e.g. internet, mobile telecommunication. While this has the capacity to increase the communication between people it reshapes the way in which people do communicate, making it potentially more frequent, but less personal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first issue, development of demonstration sites\(^{23}\), from onset was described by farmers as being an initiative that was relatively favourable in the sense that it provided them with localised knowledge which took away some of the uncertainty associated with experimentation or science. Paradoxically, however it was recognised that while the demonstration sites provided the opportunity for localised learning that was contextually applicable, the learnings were not necessarily applicable in the sense that they required investment, both fiscal and in

\(^{23}\) Demonstration sites are a land management education initiative whereby plots of operating properties are funded to act as a trial site for a new land management technique, chemical or farming approach. The aim is to provide the opportunity for other farmers in the area to get an applied understanding. It is typically accompanied by scientific inquiry regarding its effectiveness. It is felt that by conducting the trial, it relieves potential anxieties regarding change of farming practices in the community.
kind. So while the sites provided highly useful information, the exercise was essentially useless as there was no capacity to apply what was learnt. Furthermore, for some farmers who were interested in applying for monetary support to employ their learnings, it was often a competitive application process whereby their immediate competitors are other farmers in their community or local region. These processes are fundamentally characteristic of the Gesellschaft society, where there is an emphasis on the individual as opposed to the collective. While arguably the advantages of land care activities have the propensity to benefit the broader catchment, the process in place to support farmers in participating is competitive. The philosophy of such programs challenge the community oriented nature of dryland farming. Comparatively, there is a strong emphasis within the community on mutual support and cohesion. During interviews with farmers the supportive and nurturing nature of the community was something that was prized, valued and integral to the way in which the community operated. Competitive funding programs and discrepancy in terms of provision of support and opportunity within the community resulted in a degree of conflict. Essentially, it was felt that there was an erosion of some of the central and valued elements of community life that made living and working in rural communities so valued. For instance, some farmers found themselves in a difficult position of managing the social consequences of receiving support over others in their community that were not successful in the application process.

Local scale participation is based on the premise that social change or transition is based on the action of the community itself. The ideas, motivation, and input are all community driven, generally with the consequential outcome of community empowerment. Grass roots participation is just as much about the process as it is the outcome. In one of the communities included in this study, a relatively large scale grass roots program was being conducted. It was a locally conceived and run program which aimed to transform an area of remnant vegetation into a wildlife sanctuary and tourist attraction for the town. The community has sought funding from various sources over the years, which served to support infrastructure needs,
such as materials for fencing. All others that participated did so on a voluntary capacity, for instance, the local football team partook in a fencing project for the reserve. An important spinoff for this community project was that it served a significant social function, strengthening community cohesion and social contact while improving morale and a sense of control and achievement. The program was also symbolic in the sense that the remnant vegetation was a reminder that there is life and diversity in the Wheatbelt, which is contrary to the dominant imagery and iconography of the region as being in ecological and social decline. Life, conservation and preservation in this sense, and the act of humans nurturing the land, was a powerful reminder and hope giver within a complex and often formidable deficit context.

Several farmers alluded to the difference between this type of genuine grass roots participation and the participation that comes and is expected from Government initiatives that replaced the Landcare program of the 1990s. While land care groups are still operational in some towns of the Wheatbelt, others have experienced a great deal of grief associated with the loss of their coordinator, technicians and the presence of the Landcare office in their town. Most notably, the employees were local community or town members and their redundancy was painful not only on a personal or familial level but also at a community level. The cessation of support on part of Government resulted in a sense of rejection, mainly in terms of the community perception that their community was not worth investing in. While the program itself was a Government initiative the community lead nature of Landcare, particularly in the town of Narembeen, Landcare served a successful role as a hybrid between the traditional grass roots such as that exhibited in the case of the community wild life sanctuary project, and the top down Government initiatives that are typified by the current Catchment Management model. The apparent top down orientation of Catchment Management appears to be particularly pronounced in the Wheatbelt due in part to the geographical location of the Authority. Located in Northam an hour out of Perth, many of the farmers reflected that being located in the Eastern Agricultural Region there they felt isolated from
action and opportunity. There was also a sense that there may be favouring to towns that are located in closer proximity to the Authority. The positioning of the Authority for many farmers seemed inappropriate and not beneficial to their service to the wider farming community. For some, the positioning was seen as a strategic move on part of Government to assure employment at the authority. Being close to Perth meant that it need not be necessary to relocate to rural towns but still engage in rural employment, which results in a lost opportunity for rural investment (e.g. through settling in a town, use of services such as schools, health facilities, use of local business). Discursively, the terms management and authority alludes to a position of power over the catchment. This is slightly oxymoronic as catchment implies a collective or community orientation which is positioned against the powers of authority. Hence a paradoxical situation has emerged regarding participatory processes in that current initiative and groups that operate within the towns at an apparent catchment scale operate contrary to the values and worldviews of rural agricultural community life. Participation currently is not at a grass roots level under the current management regime but due to the reliance on participation in kind on part of the community for the success of the program it gives a false impression that the processes are grass roots. For example, Beeton (2009) has shown that land care activity can generate more community activity than NRM related issues, for example, she argues that tourism can be generated as a result of community involvement in land care.

The presence of regional and local technicians or experts was expressed as particularly important and valued within the farming community. There was a strong expression of the value and worth in developing long-term relationships and engagement with those who provided information and support in farming practices. This was related to trust, particularly in terms of the perception that it was unlikely for a local community member to provide information that may jeopardise their own town and farming community. It was also related to an appreciation of the contextually specific expertise held within the local community. Farmers felt it was easier to discuss matters with people they already were familiar with socially and
that were likely to have a long term understanding of the issues at hand. Although not stated explicitly there was also an alluded sense that the advice that they received from a qualified and experienced local would come from a genuine desire to help, as opposed to someone just doing their job. While the intimacy that comes out of this type of interaction was also acknowledged to have its challenges, for instance in terms of blurred boundaries associated with personal and professional roles, the benefits for the farmer tended to outweigh the challenges. It was noted during interviews that historically the prevalence of this type of interaction had dwindled and was increasingly challenged with the growing trend of town and service centralisation. Again, there was a sense of grief attached with the lost relationships and historical presence of Government department and employees within towns. The paradox emerges through the type of processes that have replaced the previously valued interaction. There is a high level of staff turnover and transience within the Government and support services that remain in the Wheatbelt. Conversation with Government employees conveyed that the main reasons for this trend relate to a high degree of job uncertainty with the tendency now for jobs to be offered on twelve month contracts. This practice has done very little to encourage people to apply for positions, which have no security, for instance there is a high degree of unwillingness to relocate ones family for a twelve month contract that may not be renewed. The consequence has been that those that apply for the positions may be university graduates who are highly connected to the city, and city way of life, but do not necessarily have family obligations. Government agency employees reflect on the trying conditions for young people who feel social and physical dislocation. There is minimal incentive to permanently move to the country due to the uncertainty and consequently the communities do not reap the benefits of a new community member. The employee is relatively removed and distant from community life due to a relative disinterest in personal investment. Consequently, there are seen to be transient community members which results in further fragmentation of the remaining community structure.
On a somewhat related note, the final tension in terms of the paradox between Gesellesschaft and Gemeinschaft values relates to changes in the form of interpersonal communication. Towns in the Wheatbelt were established ensuring that the distance of the town settlements were approximately the distance achievable by no more than one day’s travel by horse and cart. This distance made for safer travel and fostered connectivity between the townships. With the introduction of the automobile, accessibility to towns increased. In part, the capacity to travel contributed to the argument of service centralisation. With the increased mobility has also come a degree of social transience, as was discussed above, particularly in regard to the complexity in employing Government staff. Accordingly, there have also been changes to the way in which people communicate, most notably in terms of the expectation for increased accessibility of people through technologies such as the internet, mobile phones and other communication devices. Doing so has meant that the frequency of people’s interactions has the propensity to increase. Within the fast pace context of city life, these forms of communication ‘fit’ however within rural communities which were historically based on longer term, face to face, and fundamentally more engaging means of communication, relying on modes of communication beyond face to face is not as highly valued. Aside from the pragmatic issues of limited or restricted service of technology in rural areas, the dynamic is very different from the community oriented interpersonal communication that is in accordance with the values of the Gemeinschaft. With the increasing transience and further distance of services from towns, there exists an assumption that these new means of communication make up for the lack of face to face personal interaction. In reality, these means of communication tended to do the contrary, resulting in further distancing between rural communities and the services and organisation that are meant to support them. This argument is not to say that rural community members are not technologically savvy, for some it is quite the opposite, nor is it to say that the pace of country life is significantly slower, rather it reflects a difference in values in how to communicate. During settlement, Wheatbelt communities banded together out of necessity due partly to the pragmatics of being at the frontier.
However increased mobility and the introduction of technologies in communication have had Social Structural impacts, reshaping the way in which social interaction is conceptualised and enacted. These structural changes become complicated in the Wheatbelt whereby Myths regarding the nature and culture of community life remain. Hence, the myths have not changed at the same pace at which the communities themselves have had to adapt to broader Social Structural changes. They remain conceptually and mythologically within the Gemeinschaft and yet are experiencing the imposition, expectation and paradoxical complexity of Gesellschaft social processes.

5.1.2. Kununurra Experience

The experience of this particular paradox is quite different and conveys a great deal regarding the ways in which mythology operates within the town. Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft tensions do not present as a pressing issue in Kununurra. This marks a significant observation regarding community life and culture in Kununurra, where the orientation tends more to be directed towards the Gesellschaft society, with limited to no evidence of paradoxical conflict between the tenets of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. In part, this appears to be a consequence of western-settlement occurring in modern times which concur with the principles of the Gesellschaft society. The irrigation ‘community’ tend to identify themselves as independent, individual and competitive businesses. While grower groups are present, the emphasis is on providing support for the prosperity of the business and for market representation. Additionally, there is currently little to no entrenched historical irrigation practices that place pressure or bind future generations of irrigators to a particular practice. Thus, while the properties may be family own and run, the way the business is operated does not have an entrenched set of expectations regarding irrigation practices providing the opportunity for independence. The transience of seasonal works may also influence this, by providing dynamism and structurally changing the makeup of the workforce from being purely family.
5.2. Paradox Two: Environmental Sustainability Paradox

One of the most pertinent paradoxes that emerged through the CLA was regarding the complex interaction between people and the environment. Communities in both the Wheatbelt and in Kununurra expressed a strong adoration, connection and respect for the natural environment, whilst simultaneously relying on the surrounding environment for their means of production and the generation of their income. Whilst this relationship is also highly evident in urban areas, the degree of complexity is staggering in the agricultural areas, much of it arising from the intimacy of farming the land, particularly within a family farming setting which also holds history close. The environmental sustainability paradox is complex and manifests in slightly different ways in each of the research settings. Despite this, the fundamental paradox remains, that being a paradoxical relationship between how people value the natural environment but simultaneously modify and manipulate the natural environment for financial and social reasons which essentially come down to issues of survival and wellbeing.

5.2.1. Wheatbelt Experience

Within the paradox of environmental sustainability in the Wheatbelt, there are two sub-components, firstly, paradoxical thinking regarding how the natural environmental is perceived by the non-farming community (an externalised paradox) and secondly, paradoxical thinking within the dryland farming community itself (localised paradox). The difference is subtle, yet pervasive and tends to reflect an anxiety within the farming community regarding how they feel they are externally attributed.
5.2.1.1. Non-Farming Community

The current environmental condition of the Wheatbelt and a somewhat averse social response to the land degradation marks a departure from the historical perception of the region. There is a marked shift from the idealised frontierism that characterised the settlement of Western Australia (WA) and the plight of early colonies, which resulted in a heroic and iconic image of the farmer and the landscape. As outlined in Chapter One Conceptualising the Countryside the phases of WA’s agricultural development have over time lead to a sense of disdain directed at current agricultural practice that has the propensity to lead to land degradation. This perceived external perception of the Wheatbelt has had a strong impact on the communities themselves who feel under threat and under valued by how they conceptualise city people perceive them, and socially construct the ‘farmer’. The frustrations expressed by many farmers regarding their negative experience of engagement with people who reside in the city, and the increased pressure they experience through the extreme conservation or animal rights messages expressed by rally groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) have served to only validate a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ within the regional communities.

With the introduction of Government funded land management programs and centralised land management groups, which tend to be accompanied by a great deal of science, the message that is emerging is that farmers need to change their practices in order to be sustainable. Over time, Government speak regarding the notion of sustainability has become synonymous with environmental conservation, this does not necessarily appear to be the interpretation of the term by dryland farmers, whereby sustainability has a more pragmatic interpretation relating to issues of farm and town viability. This more generalised interpretation of sustainability as viability emerges within a broader context of struggling international markets and unfavourable weather conditions – notably issues that are out of dryland farmer control. Thus, what has emerged within the dryland farming community is a group perception regarding how it is they think others perceive them – generally of a community that position their personal and familial
livelihood as paramount to an ecological livelihood of the land they farm and the produce they rear.

Simultaneously, while farmers feel that externally they are being perceived in a negative light, which has tended to be confirmed – intentionally or unintentionally – for instance by Government initiatives which are framed in terms of an expectation of adaptation or change to ‘better’ practice, there remains the pragmatic issue of peoples need for food. Herein lays the paradox, there exists a perceived criticism directed at farming communities regarding the act of farming and modifying the natural environment with concurrent messages that demand produce for the supply of food. So while there is criticism from city and country people alike regarding the way in which the landscape is farmed there is a mutual recognised necessity for the production of food for human and animal consumption.

5.2.1.2. Farming Community
The Wheatbelt vegetation has been cleared to make way for dryland farming, the consequence of doing so is seen in the mass loss of biodiversity, the impacts of dryland salinity and soil erosion and compaction from hoofed livestock. The effect of dryland salinity in particular has prompted further alteration of the landscape through the construction of salinity drainage channels. Lack of planning has resulted in the complex issue of drainage waste management, while also of detriment to the natural environment it has resulted in a great deal of conflict at the local level where farmers grapple with the social pressures and implications of deciding whether to drain or not to drain. Amidst the mass alteration of the naturally occurring environment, the landscape is prized and valued. For many farmers in the Wheatbelt the farms soils also have sentimental value in the sense that the farms themselves have been in their family for generations, which poses a family legacy. Where the paradox emerges is in regard to the dependence and connection with the landscape amidst the practices of farming. A reality of farming is that farmers as part of their practice are required to make changes to the landscape and soil profile,
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

for instance, applying chemicals, clearing land, having hoofed stock. Each of these acts which are critical to their survival in some way impact on the wellbeing of the natural environment, for example, chemicals can alter the soil profile or run off into water ways, land clearing contributes to issues such as salinity and loss of biodiversity and stock with hooves such as sheep contribute to soil erosion. Each of these practices threatens their livelihoods as a business and conflict with the farmers’ frequent reflection regarding their love of the natural environment and of the rural countryside. This paradox in the Wheatbelt setting is particularly pervasive. As aforementioned, there is a paradoxical expectation on the part of those that live outside of rural agricultural areas that farming be conducted in a ‘green’ or sustainable manner. The reality of doing so is highly complex and results in tensions regarding farmers being positioned to choose between current practices that are insuring their families wellbeing and security in the immediate term, or taking a risk and changing their practices to ones that are deemed more sustainable but may not reap immediate fiscal rewards for their family. For example, tree planting which addresses issues such as erosion, salinity and biodiversity loss also results in the loss of potentially productive farming land and consequently income. It also requires time and monetary investment. Similarly the environmental benefits from tree planting are only seen in the long term.

5.2.2. Kununurra

The Environmental Sustainability paradox in Kununurra draws its particular complexity through the community’s simultaneous adoration of the natural environment coupled with the strong desire to continue and expand the irrigation area. There are also very complex impacts regarding the dramatic changes made to the natural landscape which have greatly impacted on the wellbeing of traditional owners in the region. Contrary to these critical impacts within the Indigenous community, unlike the Wheatbelt, development of the Ord tends to be perceived favourably by those outside of the community. Generally the development of the
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Ord is perceived favourably by Government and has provided hope regarding Australia’s food security in the future.

5.2.2.1. Irrigation Community

In the Kimberley the flooding of the Lower Ord leading to the construction of dams used for irrigation has had dire consequences for the Indigenous communities who were forcibly removed from their country. Similarly, the construction of the Ord River Irrigation Area (ORIA), while relatively small in comparison to other irrigation areas in Australia has similarly markedly altered the landscape, as has the settlement itself (town site of Kununurra), infrastructure, transport routes and housing. Despite the mass alteration of the natural environment, aesthetically the non-Indigenous community of Kununurra remains in awe of the naturally occurring river, gorges and waterways as they do those that have been constructed for the purposes of irrigation. There is a sense of having conquered the elements associated with the harsh dry and wet seasons, and managing to create not only a community but a thriving agricultural region. This perception of the naturally occurring environment was consistent between the irrigation community specifically and the broader community that were not irrigators. The natural environment is central to the community. They are inextricably drawn to its beauty but are in effect concurrently destroying the natural beauty for its productive properties. The rich black soil of the ORIA which receives notoriety from other farming and irrigation areas in Australia is prized, due to its contribution in producing high and relatively reliable yields. This drive to farm and populate the region is only further endorsed by State and Federal Government interest surrounding the capacity to promote development of the region. This apparent enthusiasm has historically been contentious within the community as there has been much in the way of talk and interest from Government but little in the way of action. While the emphasis on the Wheatbelt has been directed at how the area can be improved or healed, Kununurra is being framed in terms of the region’s propensity for further economic gain. There is an optimism accompanied with
anxiety as to how to best develop the region. Thus the interest in Kununurra is not how to better or improve how irrigators farm or manage their properties; rather the orientation is how it is possible to produce more, a message which tends to be supported by irrigators and the broader community alike. Similarly, the mining and tourism industries are also dependent on the state of the natural environment as a means of securing their fiscal livelihoods. Here the parallel between mining and irrigated agriculture is highlighted. The physical landscape across industries is being utilised and manipulated for economic and social gain.

The paradox again is such that the community is met with the delicate situation of how to navigate their high level of interest in profiteering from the now fertile soils of the land within a broader social context of complete regard for the benefits of what the natural environment provides for them as a community. This extends beyond the irrigation benefits and through to non-Indigenous social and cultural benefits, such as recreational fishing and camping. As noted, there is a strong sense of people choosing to live in Kununurra based greatly on a sense of being drawn to the natural beauty of the environment, which has acted as an additional incentive to move to the region as they sought better farming lands or a change in lifestyle. The lifestyle component of Kununurra is critical to the dynamic of the town and exemplifies non-Indigenous connection to the land. Water has been a major drawcard for the community as it helps in the construction of the region as being an oasis, particularly in comparison to other farming regions in Australia, both dryland and irrigated which have been experiencing the pressures of drought. This only adds to the paradoxical predicament, the national water pressures helps construct Kununurra as the water rich region of the country, and consequently there is a drive to capitalise on this apparent wealth. The issue of aesthetic also marks an interesting difference between the two focus areas. The Wheatbelt, marred within the impacts of drought and the ugliness of salinity and drainage canals, lacks the beauty and apparent ‘naturalness’ which is synonymous with the Kimberley. The perceived abundance of water, and the over riding scale of the Kimberley adds to
the sense of the town site as an oasis. This only acts to reinforce the frontiest position that is held by the irrigators.

5.2.2.2. Indigenous Community

In light of the vast alteration of the natural environment for non-Indigenous financial and social gain, the impact of the settlement of Kununurra by white people has been catastrophic for the Indigenous communities. Intensive interviews with non-Indigenous community members who had worked with and alongside Indigenous communities conveyed some of the stories that Indigenous people in the community had shared, regarding the impacts of settlement and the drastic changes made by non-Indigenous settlers to the natural environment.

Fundamentally, it was conveyed that the non-Indigenous establishment of the town of Kununurra along with the development of the ORIA are contrary to traditional culture. For the non-Indigenous people, in order for them to ‘have’ a community, they had to build and create one. This process effectively attacked Indigenous culture, doing everything but generating a community. At the Myth level within non-Indigenous culture there remains the inherent perception that humans have a right to control the natural environment. The landscapes of both Kununurra and the Wheatbelt have been dramatically altered for purposes of settlement and agriculture. This runs contrary to Indigenous culture.

5.3. Proposed Underpinnings of Paradox

The following is a discussion of truth claims regarding the generation of paradox, using the layers of the CLA as a model for considering participants conscious and subconscious conceptualisation of issues. The discussion of explicit paradoxes above represent the most pressing paradoxical tensions that impact on community culture. They highlight discrepancies regarding underlying value systems and mythologies compared to the reality of how they go about leading their everyday lives, for instance mythology surrounding the power of science versus a Social
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Structural observation of how problem solving using just science or disciplinary skills fails to fully ‘solve’ anything. These situations pose complex disparities between how people feel and what they value as opposed to how they act and the apparent success of their actions. The tensions as mentioned relate to these apparent inconsistencies and are symptomatic of psychological stuckness (Smith & Berg, 1997). As is the case with stuckness, the tensions are often unconscious, and this makes intuitive sense. When considering the unconscious quality of stuckness in light of the paradoxical situations above, participants from the community readily talked about each ‘side’ of the paradox but not in light of each other. For instance, scientists or catchment managers conveying pride in scientific intellect and arguing with conviction the value of the learnings, versus later acknowledging that the science is tending not to be adopted or was having little success in the field. There tended to be varying levels of awareness of such inconsistencies in the reflections, instead, blame would be placed not on the mythology (e.g. Science can solve everything) but on those that failed at implementing their science (e.g. the farmers and their land management practices at the Litany Level). Such instances suggest a connection between Layers of the analysis, for example as seen in the above example, Myth/Metaphor being connected to the Social Structural Level.

Furthermore, there appears to be the case for an additional level to divide the Litany and Social Structural from the Discourse/Worldview and Myth/Metaphor Levels. For instance, at times during interviews there appeared to be a point of conjecture in how participants described their world – experiences, process, stories and reflections – and related to the level of awareness they had regarding inconsistencies in their reflection. Specifically, these times were characterised by confusion and a point of dissonance where language was shaped by a sense of being on the cusp of something. At times, participants’ conceptualisations of issues would hover between a more overt literal interpretation of events and experiences and nearing a space of deeper reflection. Furthermore, at these times not only was there broader reflection of the social or cultural processes that were occurring but also reflection made by the individual on the individual (themselves). It appears that
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

this ‘space’ marks the division between the conscious ‘reality’ of the Litany and Social Structural and somewhat repressed unconscious underpinnings of our actions held within the Discourse/Worldview and Myth/Metaphor Levels. The state of confusion and dismay that tends to accompany this reflection suggests that this new central level in the Causal Layered Model may be the space that paradox manifests. More specifically, when there is inconsistency between Worldviews and how they act (Litany Level) or cultural Myths and Metaphors and how they operate at a Social Structural Level. Figure 8 illustrates the proposed connections between the layers and the point of conscious and preconscious/subconscious division.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 8. Proposed model of the connections of layers and the generation of Paradox.*

Noteworthy is that at the Myth/Metaphor Level, mythology and metaphor are heavily ingrained into culture and become part of common knowledge, but, it is the psychological meaning of these that are preconscious/unconscious. For some participants who were more self reflective, and on the cusp of identifying paradoxical situations or epiphany, it came at times when they were dealing with complex internal issues such as value systems or worldviews which appeared contrary or in conflict with how they operated on a conscious level. The most fitting example of this phenomenon is deconstructed in Chapter Two Research Paradigm where the Researcher-Participant relationship is considered critically. The
participant throughout the duration of the interview considered what collaboration meant to her, and was conflicted with the rhetoric and jargon that accompanies the construct and how she felt it was genuinely operationalised – by sitting under a tree and talking through the issue as a collective.

Being ‘in this space’ is critical as it is the beginning of critical consciousness – it is a ‘process’ space within the Causal Layers and it is here that the most action is taken, where the most ‘mulling over’ occurs. Due to its confrontational nature, typically paradox is avoided, leading again to stuckness (Smith & Berg, 1997). Consequently there is a cycling of attitudes and practices between the Litany and Social Structural levels, for instance there is the perception that salinity issues (Litany Level) can be solved through drainage (Social Structural Level). When perhaps the true issue is related not to salinity per se but rather to farmers attempting to dispel the myth that they are exclusively responsible for land degradation issues, that employing drainage solutions comes out of the motivation to dispel the deficit model myth and the associated social construction of the farmer at the Worldview/Discourse Level.

Our Worldviews shape the way we conceptualise and approach a situation. Furthermore, it is our worldviews that influence how we identify the issue at hand and subsequently how we attend to them. Discourses similarly shape the way in which issues are identified and defined, particularly through disciplinary oriented rhetoric and language. Mythology and our use of Metaphor are the other subconscious influences and are tied closely to the Social Structural level. Social Structurally, bureaucratic systems and processes, how communities organise themselves (formal and informal) are procedures employed that come to terms with an individual and collective unconscious shaped by mythology. Despite this awareness, it is more obliging to approach issues at the Litany Level or Social Structural Level (such as encouraging people to plant trees, engage in Landcare, land management, salinity management, drainage) as it is social conventions at these levels that we overtly witness and experience. There is a tendency to identify with conventions at these Levels and when there is a problem, attempt to resolve it
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

directly, at the same Level of analysis. It appears more correct to assume that the facets presented at the Litany and Social Structural Levels are manifestations of the problem as opposed to the problem itself. Rather what is proposed is that the underpinnings of the problems or situation that emerge at these more conscious Levels of analysis appear to come as a consequence of the deeper Discourse/Worldview and Myth Metaphor Levels.

Hence, the model of the CLA itself can be used as a metaphor for considering the relationship between our conscious activities and the social structures (Litany and Social Structural Levels) in which we are embedded and the unconscious impacts of our worldviews and the mythologies (Worldview/Discourse and Myth/Metaphor Levels) that are a part of us internally as individually and collectively through social mechanisms such as folklore. The theorising presented here is grounded in the in-depth interaction with community members and accordingly the analysis. This marks the beginning of a discourse that considers our apprehension to consider our internal processes both at an individual and collective level, and how understanding these processes could aid in relinquishing paradox.
Chapter Six

6. The Changing State of Communities

Chapter Six, The Changing State of Communities considers the truth claims regarding the notion of paradox further, by relating the nature of rural communities and the emergence of psychological paradox to Newbrough’s (1995) notion of the Third Position. Of particular interest is how the metaphors of Fraternity, Liberty and Equality can be used to describe the very nature of community life and culture. Newbrough’s balanced model is reconstructed in the sense that some metaphors are seen to dominate others, representing and resulting in what will be called metaphoric tensions. These tensions are argued as being akin to psychological paradoxes. Acknowledging that the nature of community life is changing, particularly at this very fundamental and ideological sense highlights the central thesis, namely, the need to critically consider the set of assumptions that we as researcher carry when entering into a community and the need to consider the appropriateness of our research process in light of a changing post modern world. The theorising in Chapter Six is testament to these truth claims.

When considering the histories of the Wheatbelt and Kununurra there are a great deal of similarities, particularly in relation to settlement patterns. As with the emergence of anything ‘new’ there is strong desire to learn from previous experience. When we conceptualise Australia’s early dryland and irrigated farming history, particularly in the eastern states, there appears to be fairly distinct periods of change regarding the relationship that people had with the land. During the very early 1900s there was almost an obligatory relationship between farmers, the land they tenured and their communities (Bradsen, 2000; Dovers, 2000). Specifically, there was a sense of shame that was accompanied with not taking care of the country. This overarching and essentially selfless farming paradigm gave way in the 1930s to farming that centred around the individual. Settlement and allusions to land management were colonialist in every sense. Note also the similar settlement
trends between the Wheatbelt and Kununura. While occurring several generations apart they depict white settlement processes that are largely akin, particularly in terms of the values and attitudes of the rural communities. Reflecting on Australia’s early land management history through to the 1980s there are some interesting assertions and parallels that can be made to the young farming and community history of Kununurra. Kununurra’s community was based on the same selflessness that more recently appears to be giving way to a globalised consumerist paradigm, particularly with the steady introduction of large scale farming corporations in the ORIA. Unlike the Wheatbelt, there is a strong Government presence in Kununurra and with that come science, governance and enforcement which has to an extent collectively acted in a similar way to what would be expected from a Catchment Management Authority (CMA). Significantly, and central to this thesis has been the changes that have occurred in relation to community life, namely shifts from collectivist or Gemeinschaft orientations to individualist or Gesellschaft (Tönnies, 1957). To begin to understand these shifts, Newbrough’s notion of the Third Position and the use of the metaphors, Fraternity, Liberty and Equity have been adopted as a means of conceptualising the complexity. As Newbrough (1995) states “The Third Position, then, is a process orientation that will move us towards a theory and practice of action, a praxis, to address the central question of what community can be in the postmodern world. It should be an intellectual stepping stone into the next historical movement” (p.16).

6.1. The Third Position and the Paradox of the One and Many

Newbrough (1995) in response to the paradoxical situation of the One and the Many considers the difficulties that modern science has struggled with the complexities of community life. He posits in a bid for a just community, “a synthesis of the Individual (Liberty) and the collectivity (Fraternity) by bringing in the principle of Equality and balancing the three concepts through a dynamic process of justice” (p.14) to make for what he deemed the Third Position. He sees it that Fraternity is
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

the thesis and Liberty as the antithesis pointing to the fragmentation of community life, in part a consequence of the modernist position of science and individualism. Liberty, it the overarching metaphor for modernism. In a bid to relieve the dualism, Equality is introduced to balance, hence making for the Third Position.

Exploring the culture of two rural communities in Western Australia (WA), diverse in the sense of their social profile, their social construction, and the perceived opportunity and future for each of the regions, it is informative to consider how each of these metaphors ‘play out’ in the communities. As Newbrough (1995) notes, “We have to get them [the metaphors of fraternity and equality] onto the field so that these three element can work together. This is the goal of the Third Position” (p.14). Both research settings conveyed varying transitions away from traditional community life and fundamentally concerned how the community was responding to a way of life based increasingly on notions of individuality. In both research settings, navigating this complexity and articulating the changing nature of the communities is complex in itself. In response, the metaphors of Newbrough’s Third Position have been employed to illustrate the changing dynamic of rural community life. The metaphors of Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality are conceptually critical constructs, present in all communities. What has not been considered is the implications of when any of these metaphors dominate, thus, how does community life ‘play out’ given an ‘unbalanced’ Third Position.

6.2. Considering the ‘Unbalanced’ Third Position

Three interpretations of how the Third position operates from a relatively ‘balanced’ through to unbalanced, is discussed as follows, with examples of how these changing states of community life have operated in the research settings. Particular interest is made to how the dominance of particular metaphors is akin to Tönnies notions of the Gemeinschaft community and the Gesellschaft society.
6.2.1. The Third Position

Figure 9 illustrates the aimed for balance within just community life, whereby the metaphors of fraternity, equality and liberty are ideally equal. It appears such that this balance models the conventions of Tönnies (1957) notion of the Gemeinschaft community whereby the values of the community aim at fostering equity at the collective and individual levels. The interests of the individual are present within the structure but not at the expense of the collective or community good, this is often described in terms of a community minded ethic. In part, it appears that this ethic contributes to the creation of an equitable community.

![Diagram showing a triangle with vertices labeled Fraternity, Liberty, and Equality.]

*Figure 9. Model of Newbrough’s (1995) Third Position akin to the Gemeinschaft oriented community.*

For the non-Indigenous settlers in the Wheatbelt, this relatively balanced Gemeinschaft model has tended to be fairly representative of early community life. The land management phases of colonialism and conservation at the collective (as discussed in Chapter One Conceptualising the Country Side) were characterised by a collectivist community oriented culture. There was a mutual dependence that came out of not only physical isolation but also with the expected psychological and social pressures associated with being an initial settler bestowed the responsibility of establishing new communities and agricultural markets. This was particularly
complex given that the settlement in the Wheatbelt occurred prior to the existence of modern conveniences such as telecommunication services and the motor car. Analysis of these phases of land management, specifically the phase of neo-liberalism, marked an observable change not only in land management practices and governance arrangements, but also the way in which the communities themselves operated and the beginnings of a shift from a relatively balanced Third Position.

6.2.2. Erosion of the Gemeinschaft Community

In accordance with Newbrough (1995), the analytical process aligns with the notion that each of these metaphors serve a significant role in community life. Building on this however, is the question as to the reality of whether it is possible to balance these metaphors in a complex, post modern world whose orientation is convincingly and increasingly directed at liberty, or the individual. The paradox of the one and the many was rampant in the research settings of this thesis. Of particular interest was the manner in which rural communities are marred with the social stereotype of collectivism when these settings appeared to be more cognisant of individualism. This acts only to highlight the assumptions we hold as researchers, and more broadly bureaucrats, media, etc., when entering a community. The triangle in Newbrough’s (1995) depiction of the Third Position is used to describe a sense of balance between the metaphors. The triangle has not been inverted to suggest a hierarchy indicating the metaphors that dominate (in bold font) with the single overlooked metaphor at the apex. This is in part supported by the discussion of paradox in Chapter Five whereby tensions were observed resulting in psychological stuckness (Smith & Berg, 1997). In Figure 10 the first set of what will be called metaphoric tensions, are posed relating to Fraternity and Liberty.
Figure 10. Model of erosion of the Gemeinschaft Community.

This set of metaphoric tensions conveys the erosion of the Gemeinschaft community and also represents the paradox of the Gemeinschaft and the Gesellschaft as discussed in Chapter Five Paradox and the Unconscious. This diagram is particularly representative of some of the specific tensions which were most readily experienced by some of the participants in the Wheatbelt. Again, the paradoxical situations that emerged related to the way in which there were tensions emerging between a community orientation (Fraternity) and a drive (within the subconscious deeper Myths and Worldviews) to act individualistically (Liberty) which manifested at the conscious Levels of the Litany and Social Structural through activities such as drainage or through town centralisation for example. This occurred within a broader social setting and value system that were traditionally based on notions of the Gemeinschaft and thus appeared contradictory and paradoxical. The tension is present because the Fraternity and Liberty are dominating simultaneously. While cautious not to lapse into dichotomies, the values that underpin these metaphors contrast, and when they compete for domination it results in tensions and paradoxes. Additionally, Equality is cast to the apex. This makes intuitive sense in that the tensions associated with mutual domination of metaphors with vastly different underpinnings creates a community environment which is confused and experiencing a complex social transition,
negotiating between historical ways of being with an emergent structure that has the capacity to feel contrary to how community life has felt.

6.2.3. The Gesellschaft Society

Developing this further, and in light of community life in Kununurra, there is a further way of conceptualising the metaphors of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity. In this sense, the dominating metaphors are Equality and Liberty as illustrated in Figure 11.

![Figure 11. Model of the Gesellschaft Society.](image)

The metaphors of Equality and Liberty are positioned against each other whereby equality is sought to ensure the wellbeing of the individual as opposed to the collective. In this situation Fraternity is cast away as the paramount concern in essentially regarding the wellbeing of the individual. This poses a highly complex social world, which is aptly characteristic of a Gesellschaft Society. Interestingly, this ‘community’ orientation is what is present in Kununurra, and thus the community dynamic present is relatively atypical to the socially constructed expectation regarding rural community life – namely one that is modelled on the metaphor of Fraternity. An example of this dynamic in Kununurra is through the reflections from irrigators that there is little willingness to help other irrigators in times of need,
another irrigators short fallings is of benefit as it relieves potential market pressures. Fundamentally, the farming operation is conceptualised as a business enterprise as opposed to an historically embedded family and community oriented farming approach. While there is not necessarily any direct animosity between irrigators, there is a level of business oriented competitiveness which comes at the expense of the collective good but to the gain (or loss) of the individual. Equality also dominates, and while this may at first seem counterintuitive, its positioning reflects the consequence of the individual ensuring that they feel a sense of justice, as opposed to there being motivation for a collective sense of justice. This account is not criticising Kununurra of not having a sense of community, as that would be quite the contrary. What it is saying is that Kununurra came about in a vastly different social climate than that of the Wheatbelt, the Wheatbelt itself is demonstrating some of the pressures of changing social and institutional processes and with it has come tensions as there is negotiation over their respective futures.

6.3. Implications for a Just Community

The ‘unbalanced’ scenarios posed in the above examples of the Third Position give rise to the question of whether a just community exists in light of Newbrough’s (1995) aims. Intuitively the term ‘unbalanced’ connotes a degree of negativity, however the domination of particular metaphors and the tensions that arise from them is arguably a good thing. “The dualism of modern science has created a dichotomy between people and their community” (Newbrough, p. 24) and it is this dualism which the Third Position attempts to alleviate, whereby the shifting definition and understanding of community life, if anything is an indicator of a community responsive to and mutually creating their context. The tensions that have been identified can instead be seen to act as ways that have the propensity to energise the community. Future research could address the extent to which the third position is stable or unstable and what the characteristics of communities are that have one or two characteristics dominating.
Epilogue

The aims of the research have been met. The twofold intention was to consider the complexity of rural farming culture in Australia, and secondly to develop a methodology that is responsive to a post modern contextualist research paradigm. The findings, summarised and explored in Chapter 4, the Discussion of Paradox in Chapter 5 and considering change and processes of rural cultural transformation in terms of the Third Position in Chapter 6 highlight the complexity of rural life. While across the two research settings there are diverse examples of rural culture, there is a high degree of congruity in terms of the messaging regarding the needs and ambitions within Australia’s rural communities and further, how rural communities change.

Understandings from this thesis regarding community culture, worldview, the role of mythology and paradox can help inform practice. It is the emphasis on process specifically which is central to this conclusion, and it is by understanding more fully and considering with greater critique the implications of process, for instance when engaging with rural communities, that the greatest learnings can be taken from this thesis. These considerations have come somewhat as by-products of attempting to conduct contextualist research. Chapter 2 Research Paradigm and Chapter 3 Ethical Considerations, challenge the way in which research is traditionally conducted within the social sciences and posed the relevance in critically examining the role of the researcher. Moving away from a value free, abstracted and observer role of the researcher, the benefit of developing an explorative interview relationship with the participant is argued. Doing so leads to the capacity for mutual learning to occur within a setting where traditional researcher-participant power hierarchies are dissolved. This is exemplar of the value of considering process, doing so resulted in reconsidering and developing contextually ethical research, identifying the researcher as part of the research process and the benefit of redefining the researcher-participant relationship to benefit both the participant and the research outcomes. The value of process is similarly expressed in Chapter 4 Findings, where
disparities between worldviews of the community as compared to Scientific, Government and Non-Government Agencies results in misunderstanding, mutual frustration and paradoxical problem solving as discussed in Chapter 5. Common to the research findings of both research settings was a sense of disparate values between city and country.

The overall message of reconsidering and revaluing processes of engagement can be overwhelming. Writers providing social commentary regarding the state of Australia’s agricultural communities have commonly provided insight into how challenges can be overcomes – whether by frameworks, models or principles. A useful example is the work by Vanclay (2004) who argues the case for agricultural extension programs to incorporate fundamental social principles into their design. While specifically speaking about extension, the principles emerge in response to the rural culture and the needs of rural people. Vanclay presents 27 principles that are claimed to be valuable insights when attempting to understand landholder reactions to agricultural extension and NRM. Central to Vanclay’s argument is for the appreciation of the role that social-cultural drivers play in farming. Critically, he argues that the way in which agriculture has been conceptualised is flawed in that it overlooks the inherently social element of agriculture, criticising the tendency within the literature to focus on the technical, stating “Agriculture is farming, and farming is people. The survival of agriculture is dependent on the survival of viable rural communities” (p.213). Vanclay’s paper, while not using the term, illustrates and attempts to challenge potentially misleading or ill-informed mythology regarding rural culture. This central argument, along with the 27 proposed principles are supported with the findings of this thesis, however, there is an area that this argument can be extended, and it is by framing such principles in terms of a process.

The principles currently act as an instructive mechanism as opposed to a transformative mechanism. More specifically, principles give direction as to what needs to be considered differently as opposed to how to think or engage
Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture
differently. Considering the how lends itself to critically considering process. In response to Vanclay (2004) perhaps it is time to begin to develop the concept of principles further, so that an ethic of engagement, and of researching rural communities can emerge.

Hence, in a bid to generate a process orientation, a set of values are proposed. Values are given as the findings conveyed a need to devise a form of practice that is not formulative, but responsive to the contextual needs of not only the community but also the bodies that engage with them. This marks a critical point, in that the what emerged out of the findings and interpretation is an absence in ethic in which all parties – farmers, irrigators, scientists and researchers (including myself) become responsive to the needs of others around them. There appears to be a disassociation between individuals when they interact and engage.

To this end, the aim is to develop a sound process to this driven relationship between actors, so to aid in mutual understanding of culture and context. Currently it appears the case that both the Gemeinshaft of rural communities and the influence of the Geselleschaft or city values have the propensity to be lost in translation, particularly in the Wheatbelt. Based on the findings of this contextualist research and the emergence of the grounded theory, the following values appear potentially valuable to managing some of the complexities of rural culture, and again it relates to reconsidering and challenging the way in which actors engage;

- The value of mutual empathy and respect or what Rogers (1961) refers to as ‘unconditional positive regard’.
- The value of appreciation of worldview, including developing an understanding of worldview that are different to your own.
- The value of a mutual context. The intention of developing a mutual context is so to provide a setting in which all actors have the capacity to learn from each other For instance, development of a mutual context between researcher and community members may aid in the process of engagement
whereby there is understanding in that when engaged, science is a part of the community as opposed to studying or looking into the community.
References


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture

Australia. In M. Augoustinos & K. J. Reynolds (Eds.), *Understanding prejudice, racism, and social conflict* (pp. 43-54). London: Sage Publications.


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


Worldview, Values and Mythologies in WA Farming Culture


