

# **A gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region**

PhD thesis submitted by

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## **Abstract**

### **A gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region**

This PhD thesis outlines a gendered analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region of north-west Victoria. In contrast to the usual focus on 'structural adjustment', it seeks to understand gendered social relationships in a changing agricultural industry context, and a political and economic context framed by climate challenges. The research is conducted with women and men – including couples – who are farming and / or who have left farming. Participants articulate gendered relationships and subjectivities, and comment on gendered social relationships in the context of multiple pressures including climatic changes, drought and declining terms of trade. The findings of this research highlight the multiple exits that are occurring in agricultural and rural restructuring and the numerous, often disparate, ways women and men leave farming. The experiences of restructuring and leaving farming are diverse and gendered. This research suggests that agriculture in the Mallee region is becoming further masculinised as a result of the differing ways participants are exiting farming. Further, as gender relations are renegotiated during this time of extraordinary changes, these in turn challenge discourses of family farming. Finally, in the local-global nexus of gender relations, many participants offer insights into managing the stresses and challenges of ongoing agricultural restructuring.



## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Josephine Lisa Clarke



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Chapter 2 includes text from the publication Clarke, J 2013, 'Renegotiating Gender as Farming Families Manage Agricultural and Rural Restructuring in the Mallee', in M Alston & K Whittenbury (eds), *Research, Action and Policy: Addressing the Gendered Impacts of Climate Change*, Springer, Dordrecht. Use of this text is acknowledged in a footnote.

This PhD was proofread by Sharyn Djuric.



## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This PhD research investigates how gender relations are being renegotiated in farming families managing agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region of north-west Victoria. The context to this investigation includes the recent experiences of drought and climate changes, and future scenarios both for agriculture and climate change. This PhD research offers a gender analysis of agricultural industry restructuring, and is a feminist qualitative investigation into the experiences and impacts of industry and rural restructuring for those farming and those who have left farming. In this thesis I describe and explore the social significance of gender-based differences occurring in the agricultural industry, and how women and men embody and articulate 'agricultural restructuring'.

This PhD research is situated within the broader context of an Australia Research Council research project titled 'Rural adjustment or structural transformation? Discovering the destinations of exiting farmers'. The overarching research project aims to track the spatial and livelihood destinations of exiting farmers in Victoria. The prescribed original PhD topic was focused on undertaking a gender analysis of outcomes for farming families who exit farming as part of agricultural structural adjustment.

### ***Background to undertaking PhD research***

At the time when I responded to an advertised PhD topic to investigate 'A gender analysis of outcomes for farm families who exit farming as part of a structural adjustment process' I was working as a Research Worker for Women's Health Loddon Mallee. I had returned to work after having a child and was undertaking a Literature Review of the Health Impacts of Climate Change and Drought on women in the Loddon Mallee region. Through my work for Women's Health Loddon Mallee I had heard and read about the social and health impacts of drought. I had taken up the Research Worker position after living and working in Alice Springs, Northern Territory, for several years. I have spent most of my adult life living and working in remote and rural Australia.

While working for Women's Health Loddon Mallee I attended a day-long forum held in Melbourne, focused on women and climate change issues. The forum was organised by the

Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability Research Unit at Monash University. As I live in a rural town in Central Victoria I took the train down to Melbourne. On the way to Melbourne the train stopped its service – I can't remember the reason for this – and I remember waiting in the sun for quite some time for the replacement coaches to arrive. Eventually the coaches arrived; I boarded one, and continued to travel to Melbourne. I was sitting next to an older woman and we started an easy conversation for the rest of the journey. This woman described her work farming, the difficulties managing numerous changes including drought, and expressed her concerns for the future of rural communities. Eventually we arrived in Melbourne and said goodbye. As I arrived late at the forum I made sure I walked in through a door towards the back of the conference room. I sat down at a table and in front of me was an advert for this PhD and scholarship. That day when the train terminated and I met the woman who shared so much about her daily life and managing change – along with the day's event focused on gender and climate change issues for women – inspired me to take on the challenge of undertaking research that responded to what I consider to be a relevant and timely PhD investigation.

During the course of doing interview work for this PhD I have frequently been asked by participants what my reasons are for doing this research, and whether I am from a farming family. I remember having a conversation with my mother where I told her about this and she promptly replied, "Jo, you've always been obsessed with food!" It is true that I have always had a keen interest in food system issues and, while not from a farming family, until I was nearly twelve I grew up (in the UK) in rural communities and was exposed to many farms. Further, I grew up with my mother at times working on farms. Yet it wasn't until I was undertaking the PhD that I remembered these early influences that I now realise weave into a passion for understanding opportunities for gender equality in livelihoods that support managing agricultural and rural restructuring, including changes in food production.

### ***Defining the research problem***

Farming in Australia and family farming in particular continue to be transformed: economic, technological, climatic, environmental, government policy and demographic changes are resulting in agricultural as well as rural restructuring (Barr 2005; Beer, Maude & Pritchard 2003; Cocklin & Dibden 2005; Gray & Lawrence 2001; Pritchard & McManus 2000b). Overall, in

Australia, agricultural production has been managing the impacts of declining terms of trade, changes in government policy intentions, the development of neoliberal economics, and the demise of statutory marketing arrangements (Productivity Commission 2005).

In recent years agricultural producers – who include the individuals, families and communities that make up this effort – have also been managing the impacts of a major drought. Moreover, people are now considering information about climate change including future predictions. This research undertakes a gender analysis of how women and men are experiencing the transformation of the family farm and rural communities given the multiple recent, current and predicted challenges of industry restructuring.

Barr and Karunaratne (2002, p. 2) define the ‘farm family’ as ‘any family with at least one member describing his or her major occupation as farming’. Following substantial agricultural restructuring in recent decades the number of family farms and farmers in Australia has declined. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003) describes how farming families numbers in Australia declined by 22 per cent between 1986 and 2001. More recent national statistics provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012b) describe how ‘Over the 30 years to 2011, the number of farmers declined by 106,200 (40%), equating to an average of 294 fewer farmers every month over that period.’ Despite these changes family farms still dominate the number of farms in Australia: the Productivity Commission (2005, p. xxxv) reported that ‘99 per cent of Australian farms are family owned and operated’.

The decline in the number of farms in Australia varies across regions and commodities and over time. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012b) recent figures also describe how between 2006 and 2011 the number of farmers declined by 11 per cent or 19,700 in this five year period. Further disaggregation of recent data also notes the ‘proportion of female farmers has fallen slightly in recent decades (from 30% in 1981), even as the proportion of women in other occupations has increased (from 37% in 1981 to 47% in 2011)’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012b). There has been population out-migration from many agriculturally dominated regions as farms and farmers have adjusted to change including economic and climatic events.<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> For example, ABS data notes the farming workforce declined 15 per cent in one year during the 2002–2003 drought (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012b).

population changes have substantially impacted upon the demographics of rural towns and regions (Geldens 2007).

Another development in agricultural production in recent decades has been the rise of corporate agrifood production (Barr 2009; Lawrence & Gray 2000). With the decline of statutory marketing arrangements and other industry and commodity specific supports, there has been an increase in contract farming. The Productivity Commission (2005, p. 44) describes how the latter has 'given farmers more control over how their output is marketed and sold', however such change in agricultural production is also critiqued. Lawrence and Gray (2000, p. 36) pose the important question, 'What is 'control' when to remain viable contracts must be signed which allow external business entities to regulate on-farm production?'. These different positions regarding the outcomes of changes in agricultural production begin to reveal the complexity of issues central to Australia's food production including government policy intentions as to its role and the benefits of neoliberal economics and free trade. Further, this is a matter fundamentally about the sustainability of food production – socially, environmentally, politically and economically. Given the place and spatial location of food production in the rural context, I argue this PhD research provides the opportunity to investigate matters pertaining to sustainable rural communities, relationships and people's wellbeing.

Developments in food production have been followed by a long held critique that in Australia agricultural production has often existed in a 'peripheral' production space that continues to undermine land viability (Lawrence & Vanclay 1994, p. 77). The future of food production is following a trajectory of closer alignment with corporate food production goals whereby the future of land productivity becomes isolated in maximum yield projections and is a dominant neoliberal economic discourse. This PhD research investigates to what extent this is a discourse supporting sustainable relationships as women and men manage agricultural and rural restructuring.

Structural adjustment is a term used to reference and define farm viability options such as in situ adjustment including increases in the size of farms, new commodities and uptake of new technologies, or farm 'exits'. Beyond the immediate emphasis on agricultural production / product is the notion of the 'future' agricultural and rural landscape. Not only is there the need to consider the gendered work / life social impacts of adjustment but there is also the need to

review how the experience and discourse of climate change are now impacting upon agriculture, and the rural social and physical landscape. There are also broader macroeconomic and health concerns with respect to food security and agricultural restructuring.

Some key features of Australian agricultural production include the decline of the place of agricultural production in the Australian economy in '*relative terms*' while at the same time in recent decades there has been an increase in the 'real output' or yields from agricultural production (Productivity Commission 2005, p. xiii). The state of Victoria has followed the broader Australian trend in farming with a decrease in the number of small farms and an increase in the size of farms. Farm numbers have declined although small farms still dominate the number of farms as well as generating the lowest farm incomes (Barr 2002; Barr & Karunaratne 2002; Productivity Commission 2005). Higher concentrations of agricultural production are associated with larger farms and the often cited picture of agricultural production is that '10 per cent of Australian farm businesses now produce over 50 per cent of output. In contrast, the smallest 50 per cent of farms account for just 10 per cent of gross farm output' (Productivity Commission 2005, p. xxiv). This scenario also describes Victorian agricultural production (Barr & Karunaratne 2002, p. 3).

Multiple changes in recent decades to farming and industry conditions, industry and rural demographics, environmental and climatic conditions, coexist with changing land tenure, livelihoods and social relations. Farmers are overwhelmingly described as an ageing cohort, largely male, and their numbers are decreasing as are the numbers of farms given agricultural restructuring has resulted in substantial farm aggregation and increases in farm size (Barr 2005). Moreover, these changes in family farming are the consequences of 'productivist' (Gray & Lawrence 2001) agriculture and declining terms of trade where terms of trade refers to the reduced farm income – and hence farmer and household income – due to the changes in the difference between commodity value and the costs of production.<sup>2</sup>

Gray and Lawrence (2001, p. 8) succinctly describe how 'The productivist model, based on the use of synthetic fertilisers, agrichemicals, agricultural biotechnologies, and sophisticated

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<sup>2</sup> Higgins and Lockie (2001, p. 178) describe how 'Terms of trade (the ratio of prices received relative to the cost of production) have been in decline since the 1950s, placing constant pressure on farmers to increase productivity in relation to labour and capital by expanding landholdings and increasing the intensity of production.'

machinery, encourages labour displacement. Farm labourers are retrenched, and those farmers who cannot compete are told to 'get big or get out'. This description and critique of productivist agriculture is a contrast to depictions of agricultural restructuring as output-focused and evidence of 'sustainable' agricultural production – thus indicating the *social tensions* in perspectives on the outcomes of changes to agricultural restructuring since WW2.

Within this discussion of agricultural restructuring is the inextricably related mapping of changes in rural communities and rural social relations. An industry-focused research project informed by the opportunity to undertake feminist rural social research, can contribute to understanding the social experiences of current restructuring trajectories. The emphasis on 'structure' that is inherent in a gender analysis of agricultural restructuring extends to consider the reflections, feelings and values experienced as women and men manage changing relationships and livelihoods.

Farm exits are a component of agricultural and rural restructuring and structural adjustment. While there is some Australian research into farming families' transition out of farm ownership (Bryant 1989; Ginnivan & Lees 1991), there is little demographic or longitudinal research exploring the outcomes for those individuals and families as well as the social impacts for rural communities. For example, it is possible some farmers may remain working within agricultural production in a different capacity. The relationships and employment profiles of adults in farming families may dramatically change as part of the adjustment process. There is also little research describing the demographic shifts of those who leave the farm / farming, whether they remain within the rural area they farmed or out-migrate elsewhere. Qualitative research can support understanding the social experiences of leaving farming and the social equity and gender equality issues that arise.

Some farm exits are prompted by the uptake of exit financial packages offered by governments, and these packages usually have conditions attached. For example, the Australian Government's Exceptional Circumstances Exit Grant (Australian Government Department of Agriculture 2013; Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2010) which commenced in 1999 and formally closed in August 2011, was available to those located in an area declared as 'Exceptional Circumstances' for the purposes of receiving drought assistance, and required farm owners to sell the farm business and not

own / operate another farm for five years. This is one example of a policy-inspired definition of 'farm exit,' however; there are many situations that can be understood as 'farm exit'. For example, leaving the farm may not necessarily mean that the farm land is relinquished by the owner(s), but rather the land use changes from productive to non-productive either temporarily or permanently. Alternatively, land may be leased and farmed by neighbouring family farmers or corporations. There are other scenarios that potentially confuse a reliance upon policy defined agricultural adjustment processes such as older farmers who withdraw from farming but remain living on their property, and the increasing incidence of farming families who live 'in town' and 'the farmer' commutes to the farm.

There is a historical context to State and Federal Government policy initiatives that support agricultural restructuring and specifically, farm exits. For example, at a Federal Government level since the 1970s some of the structural adjustment policies supporting industry restructuring include the Rural Adjustment Scheme, Farm Help, Exceptional Circumstances Assistance Package and the Murray Darling Basin Small Block Irrigators Exit Grant Package. For another example, Lake (1987) describes how in 1933 legislation was passed to pay those unprofitable farmers who were part of the Soldier Settlement Scheme to exit their farms. Exploring the historical context to government agricultural and rural policy provides the opportunity to explore the *powerful* discourses that evolve and define agricultural 'production' and 'farm viability', and name the political structures that imbue contemporary neoliberal understandings of sustainable agriculture (Higgins 2004). Moreover, macro agricultural and rural restructuring policies also influence Australia and analysis of these can assist in describing and critiquing the social relations supporting and transforming production (OECD 2006).

Farm exits may also occur during profitable times: as the ABS (2003) reports 'The decline in the number of farming families from 145,000 in 1986 to 120,000 in 1991, was partly influenced by favourable economic conditions. The lower commodity prices in broadacre industries throughout the 1990s resulted in some farmers delaying their decision to retire, leave farming, or hand the farm over to their children.' This information raises the issue of how leaving or exiting farming is a complex process where many issues are negotiated by farming families in managing industry restructuring. The decision of farmers and family members to exit farming is one response to agricultural restructuring as structural adjustment includes on-farm developments and responses.

There are a plethora of experiences of farming and adaptation strategies in response to agricultural and rural restructuring: planning for and making change, strategies to maintain farm viability, changes to 'traditional' occupational identities (Bryant 1999), decision-making practices, farm exiting and even 'currently not farming' – all involve dynamic gendered relations in a rural social landscape. This is an overt disruption to the binary industry and governance strategy and policy line of 'farming' and 'farm exit' that masks the complexity and diversity implicit in rural livelihoods, relationships and experiences. This is also to critique a focus on 'structural adjustment' as a matter isolated to farm income or viability, farm structure and supports or strategies to facilitate farm exits. As the research literature indicates, the social impacts of industry restructuring are gendered and so any analysis of both structural adjustment and industry restructuring is imbued with diverse lived experiences.

Australia has a history of extreme climatic events including droughts, and when this PhD research commenced in 2010, many regions and inland farming communities in Australia – including the Mallee region – had been experiencing drought for over a decade. This recent pattern of drought has been described as the 'Millennium Drought' or the 'Big Dry' (see Kiem et al. 2010). Drought impacts on food production, agricultural restructuring and rural communities. Drought has been described as compounding an array of changes in farming including low commodity prices and terms of trade. Drought conditions affect water availability and other natural resources, employment opportunities in farming as well as rural communities and can contribute to rural out-migration (Kiem et al. 2010). Further, it is anticipated climate change will result in additional climate variability and that will impact on agricultural production as well as other primary industries (Garnaut 2008; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group II 2014; Marshall 2010). In 2011, substantial rainfall fell across the region – extreme rainfall in many localities – and the drought ended (in terms of weather conditions).

This research assumes that climate change<sup>3</sup> is occurring. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (Hennessy et al. 2007, p. 512) asserts that climate change is occurring and that:

In Australia, dryland salinity, alteration of river flows, over-allocation and inefficient use of water resources, land clearing, intensification of agriculture, and fragmentation of ecosystems still represent major stresses. Further, the IPCC identifies specific geographical 'hotspots' where the impacts of climate change – including upon agricultural production – will be significant, resulting in increased vulnerabilities for 'rural livelihoods'. The Murray-Darling Basin is identified as one of those hotspots (Hennessy et al. 2007, p. 530).<sup>4</sup>

Previous social research has documented how industry structural adjustment, agricultural and rural restructuring informs the gendered social experiences of drought and climate change. Concurrently, social research explores the gendered social impacts of drought and climate change as well as considers how dynamic gender relations potentially inform the restructuring process (Alston & Whittenbury 2012; Bock 2006a). Further, social research also explores the social constructions of drought and climate change: the latter extends empirical considerations to investigate the sociocultural, political and governance contexts informing the social experiences of managing drought and climate change with respect to coping and wellbeing issues, as well as adaptation strategies.

Future scenarios inform predicted changes in agriculture, food production, family relations and life in a rural context. Anticipating the 'future' is located in time and space, and this PhD research into how gendered social relations are being renegotiated as farming families experience agricultural restructuring, considers various discourses of sustainability (economic, social, environmental) that indicate the need to further understand the social and discursive context of climate change.

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<sup>3</sup> *Climate change* 'is the result of changes in our weather patterns because of an increase in the Earth's average temperature' (Definition of climate change taken from <http://www.climatechange.gov.au/en/climate-change.aspx> Viewed 11.02.10). Further, as defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Hennessy et al. 2007, p. 510), climate change is caused by 'both natural variability and human activities'.

<sup>4</sup> See also the latest IPCC report for climate change projections (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group II 2014, p. 5). Further, climate change science is evolving.

## *Agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region*

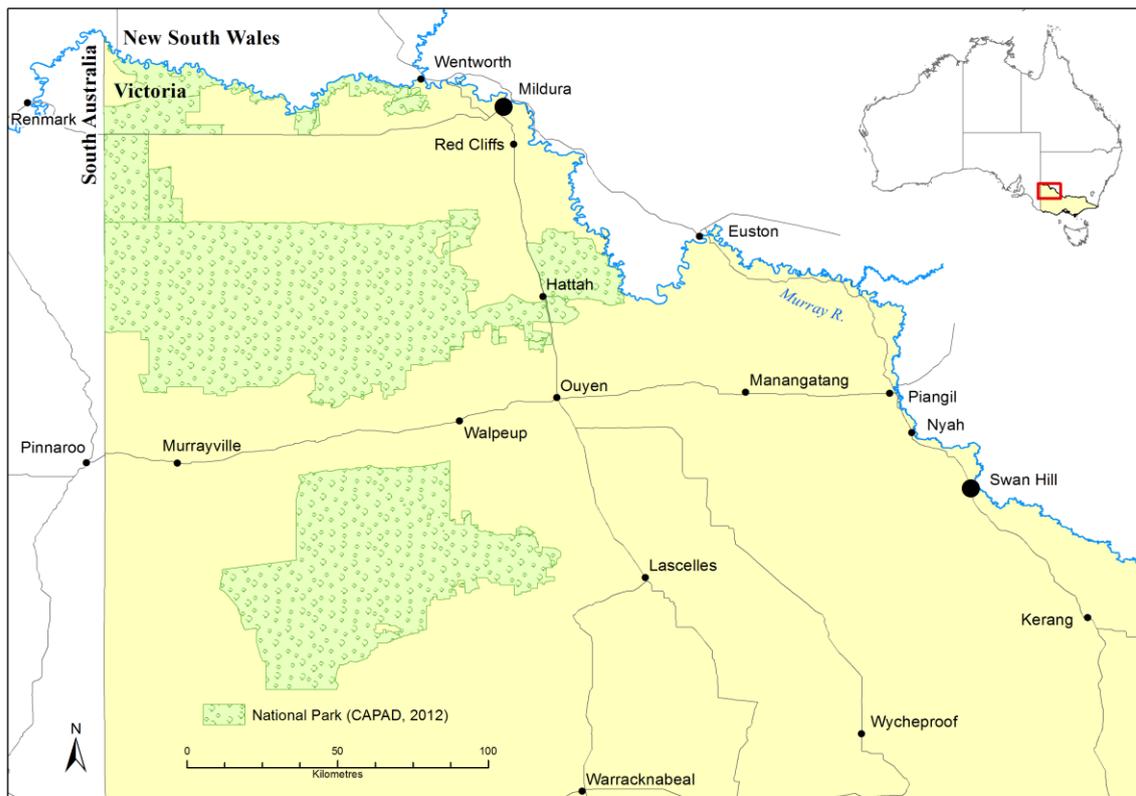


Figure 1 Approximate indication of the Mallee region in north-west Victoria

The Mallee region is a low rainfall region in the north-west of Victoria, Australia.<sup>5</sup> It includes a large area of dryland broadacre crop and sheep farming as well as irrigated food production (nuts, dried fruit, table and wine grapes, citrus) areas following the Murray River (Department of Primary Industries 2009; Mildura Development Corporation 2009, pp. 9–10). Many areas typically receive less than 350mm of rain on average.

The Mallee region resists a singular definition and within the Mallee there are sub-regions, for example, the northern Mallee. The irrigated horticultural production area close to the Murray

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<sup>5</sup> The Mallee region extends beyond Victorian state borders, however, given the ARC Linkage project this PhD is attached to, the research focus is contained within Victoria. However, as described in the methodology chapter, I used a purposive and snowball strategy and as a consequence did work with a few participants who did not live in Victoria.

River is known as Sunraysia. The Mallee region can be defined by an interplay of local assertions of regional identity, demographic statistics, agricultural industry indicators and strategies, and government service provision regional strategies – to name a few ways in which the Mallee is defined and redefined. The region also includes a number of National Parks adjoining farm land. Beer et al. (2003, p. 41) describe how ‘A region is a group of adjoining areas or places that have something in common.’ Further, regions and thus regional ‘identities and boundaries’ are open to change contingent on economic and demographic changes, for example (Beer, Maude & Pritchard 2003, p. 44). Given the Mallee is a large region, in this thesis I have chosen to work across a region acknowledging that place and rurality matter in agricultural and rural restructuring. Further, I interpret this as an opportunity to work with people who identify as being from the Mallee region.

The history of agricultural production in the Mallee is one of various stages of land settlement and settlement schemes, including closer and soldier settlement in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> The historical narrative of opening up the Mallee region for agricultural production on occasion references the historical fact of colonisation. Yet the historical overview provides in the main a production trajectory precarious at times, as women, men and farming families managed droughts, rural and remote living conditions, and fluctuations in production and commodity prices.<sup>7</sup> In historical perspective, there are stories of women’s hardships, challenges and joys in living Mallee farming and family life (see Ford 2011; Torpey 1986). Elsewhere Lake (1987) describes WW1 soldier settlement life for women and children and emphasises hardship and deprivation as a feature of settler life.

North-west Victoria is a region that has experienced past and recent droughts. It is also a region where it is predicted to become drier due to the impacts of climate change. Dryland broadacre<sup>8</sup> production and irrigation food production has been challenged by the impacts of changing terms of trade, and irrigation farming has also been managing changes in water allocations. The number of farming families has been in decline (Barr & Karunaratne 2002). In the Mallee region

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<sup>6</sup> See Lake (1987) for an excellent historical overview of land settlement and specifically, soldier settlement.

<sup>7</sup> Lake (1987, p. 133) describes how Samuel Wadham, Professor of Agriculture at Melbourne University wrote in 1930 that Mallee land should not be pursued for wheat farms as it is a district with ‘low and uncertain rainfall’.

<sup>8</sup> Dryland farming includes broadacre cropping and farms with crops and sheep. In recent years there has been a transition from tillage farming to no-tillage farming (Department of Primary Industries 2009).

in Victoria, Barr (2005, 2009) describes that while populations in small towns have been declining, there has been the growth of regional centres, for example, Swan Hill, Robinvale and Mildura. Overall there has been population decline in the decade preceding June 2011 in the north-west of Victoria (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012a).

Small farms dominate the number of farms in Victoria and many are located in the Mallee region with a higher concentration along the Murray River due to horticultural production (Barr & Karunaratne 2002, p.5). There has been a decline in the number of farmers, although family farms still dominate the total number of farms. Further, there has been a decline in the number of women counted as farmers in the Mallee region and it is predicted that dryland farming will become more male-dominated (Barr 2005, 2011). Overall dryland farmers are also described as an ageing cohort (Barr 2005, 2009). There has been a decline in the number of farmers in the Mallee and Sunraysia regions, as well as a decline in employment in the agriculture sector. These trends follow ABS Australia-wide statistics for farming families (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, 2012b).

The experiences and impacts of drought and climate change are occurring as is a plethora of restructuring pressures including the low numbers of people entering farming. For example, Barr (2002) describes low numbers of entry into farming and this is particularly the case in cropping farming areas. Elsewhere, Conway (1995) describes how since 1926 no new farming families have entered the Hopetoun area in the Mallee region. IPCC (Hennessy et al. 2007) climatic data analysis concurs with Victorian State Government climate change predictions – the Mallee region is expected to become drier due to climate change (Department of Primary Industries 2009). Yield productions may be affected.

The description of rural decline in terms of depopulation and out-migration now occurs alongside the coping and wellbeing issues embedded in managing declining terms of trade – and these factors are potentially further stressed with the experiences of climate change. There has been research by the Birchip Cropping Group (2008, p. 188) that considers the impacts of drought and climatic variations on farming families, and findings note the need for more research into the needs and experiences of women. It is important for this research to consider how women and men farming are imagining the future, and integrating and responding to information about future scenarios such as climate change.

## ***Research approach: valuing diverse experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring***

As a researcher I developed a strategy to work with women and men currently farming and practicing restructuring and those who have 'exited' farming in the Mallee region. This includes working with women and men – including couples – who remain living on the site of their former farm and / or within a region in close proximity to where they farmed. The emphasis is then on finding out not only what are the outcomes for women and men after they leave (or while currently not farming) in terms of their livelihood strategies, but also their sense of place and community in an agriculturally dominated rural community. While some research emphasises agricultural restructuring as a process that includes the development of corporate agriculture, there are also changing relations and dynamics within agriculturally-dominated rural communities when family farms subsume other family farms – the latter is less explored in rural social research.

Foucault's (1990) theorising of discourse assisted querying the power dynamics that represent a specific agricultural restructuring trajectory that demands farm exits as exemplified in the literature review and policy analysis. Haraway's (1988, p. 585) notion of situated knowledge argues for a 'practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction'. I interpreted the opportunity to undertake a gender analysis of agricultural restructuring as one that should accept – and therefore seek – diversity of social experience in order to gain knowledge about industry restructuring in a specific region. This research was undertaken with a focus on understanding dynamic gender relations, social inequalities on the basis of gender difference, and gaining insight into the discursive nexus of the social experiences of gender, industry and structural adjustment and climate change(s) in the Mallee region.

The research approach critiques an 'outcomes' and 'exits' focus per se and argues that the scope of research is an opportunity to explore how managing restructuring is complex and a socially diverse experience. Assisted by feminist rural research and theory, analysis of relevant research indicates that there are a multitude of experiences and discourses that define agricultural and rural adjustment. The policy expectations of 'exits' and structural supports for exits on offer are another discourse of 'family farming' that requires investigation in

representing the story of changes in gendered social relations that respond to and enable / transform agricultural production. The farming / exit farming policy boundary is thus critiqued.

To simply focus on farm structure and structural adjustment expressed as industry trajectory informing and promoting farm viability is to ignore the gendered lived experiences that express multiple engagements with industry social norms. These may include social alternatives in farm practices and understanding the household as the site of diverse values regarding livelihood strategies. In other words, I am concerned that an emphasis on farm structure and family farm structure precludes important conversations regarding gender relations and resistances to industry social norms. This PhD research aims to understand diverse experiences and gender relations given the multiple social changes occurring, and embodied in, agricultural restructuring.

This PhD is an inquiry into the social and gender impacts and experiences of managing agricultural restructuring. Theoretical and methodological frameworks support undertaking research that seeks to avoid a focus on farm and industry restructuring isolated as a structural and business engagement that ignores gendered experiences, perspectives and alternative priorities in managing changes in family farming. To problematise an emphasis on both 'farm structure' and industry restructuring as business and / or governance discourse requires further consideration of the gender politics of restructuring, globalisation and neoliberalism.

This PhD research responds to existing literature by strategically developing research that supports an inquiry into the gender relations at work in discourses of agricultural restructuring. This PhD explores ways in which women and men are feeling empowered, innovative and / or vulnerable with new opportunities, livelihood changes and the withdrawal of past practices. I am in agreement with Gray and Lawrence (2001, p. 3) who support 'people-centred analysis of rural change' and I hope this PhD research contributes to this social research tradition with an emphasis on considering the social equity and gender equality issues at work in agricultural restructuring and structural adjustment. The social research literature indicates the need for

further feminist analysis of the gender relations concomitant with industry restructuring as a space fundamentally involving family members and changing social relations.<sup>9</sup>

This research prioritises a consideration of the gendered social experiences of farming women and men managing adaptation and structural adjustments as well as the renegotiation of gendered identities and relationships in farming households and rural agricultural communities. This research asks how are gender relations in farming households being reworked, and what are the power dynamics at work in revised gender orders as women and men manage agricultural and rural structural adjustments? This research considers the experiences and outcomes for women and men involved in farming who have exited farming as well as those who continue to farm.

This research builds upon Australian and International feminist research that has critiqued the gender order in farming families and agricultural industries (Alston 1995, 2000; Bock & Shortall 2006; Kelly & Shortall 2002; O'Hara 1998; Sachs 1983, 1996; Shortall 1999). It adds to the existing research by investigating changing gender relations in an Australian agricultural rural region, the Mallee in north-west Victoria, where there has been little social research into the gendered social experiences of farming women and men managing substantial change including the experiences of women and men leaving farming.

### ***PhD research question(s)***

The main research question is:

How are gender relations renegotiated as farming women and men in the Mallee region manage agricultural and rural restructuring in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future predictions?

Subsidiary research questions are:

1. In the Mallee region what are the diverse experiences of exiting farmers and those who remain farming?

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3.

2. How are gender relationships in farming family households changing as farm viability is challenged by social, climatic, political and economic changes?
3. How are farm women and men imagining their future?
4. How are women and men undertaking decision-making at a time when agricultural and rural discourses emphasise sustainability, adaptation given climate change future scenarios and Australian Government agricultural policy objectives.

### ***Structure of the thesis***

Following this Introduction, the Literature Review (Chapters 2 and 3) draws upon existing research to further understand the challenges experienced in agricultural restructuring and the gender-based issues in support of this PhD research. The literature review is divided between two chapters: Chapter 2, the first part of the literature review, explores the social equity issues in agricultural restructuring in Australia. This chapter considers research describing and exploring issues in agricultural restructuring, neoliberalism and globalisation, with an emphasis on Australian-based research. This chapter revises the notion of structural adjustment and specifically draws on the work of the Productivity Commission to critique a dominant productivist-focused notion of agricultural structural adjustment. This review also considers the social equity issues implicit in understanding the intersections of drought, climate change and agricultural restructuring. Finally, this first part of the literature review explores relevant literature on agriculture and rural decline and considers key research approaches and industry-based discourses that engage with the notion of 'sustainability' and what this means for rural communities.

Chapter 3 is the second part of the literature review. This chapter reviews feminist social research that examines women's position in family farming and the gendered impacts of agricultural restructuring and leaving farming, including in response to drought. This chapter also considers the social equity issues in managing climate change as well as the gendered impacts of climate change.

Chapter 4 discusses the feminist methodological framework used to support this PhD investigation. While acknowledging the interrelationship between methodology and theory, this chapter argues for the importance of undertaking a gender analysis of agricultural and

rural restructuring in the Mallee region. Building upon feminist methodology and epistemology, this research involves working with women and men. It is argued that gender analysis is a research strategy appropriate to the gendered social experiences of managing agricultural and rural restructuring.

Chapter 5 details the theoretical framework used in this research. This PhD uses Foucault's notion of discourse and Haraway's notion of situated knowledge to assist the literature review work, methodology and interview data analysis. This chapter also explores the key concepts of gender, gender relations and embodied subjectivity used to support the scope of this research.

There are four findings chapters. The first findings chapter, Chapter 6 'Gendered agricultural production and restructuring in the Mallee region: new exclusions in and out of family farming' discusses the experiences and impacts of restructuring for those participants who are currently farming. There are two parts to this chapter. Part 1 'A gendered industry and rural social context' establishes the gender order imbued in both agriculture and hence agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region. Part 2 'Restructuring trade and gender relations in the local-global agricultural interface' discusses findings that demonstrate how gender relations in agricultural restructuring necessarily involve understanding relationships with trade and other aspects of our current food systems. Gender relations, masculinities and femininities, impact on industry restructuring as well as there being the experiences of gender orders in trade and other restructuring processes.

Chapter 7 'Leaving farming in the Mallee region: gendered perspectives' considers findings that articulate experiences of leaving farming. This chapter is structured in two parts that separate the reasons for leaving farming and experiences of leaving farming for the purposes of understanding leaving farming as a process, and responds to the priorities participants expressed.

The third findings chapter, Chapter 8 'Coping and wellbeing in family farming and agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region' demonstrates the importance of participants' emphasis on coping and wellbeing issues that arise in managing industry restructuring – both for those farming and those who have left farming. Participants critique farming practices, and experiences of managing restructuring problematise the social sustainability of farming

including the sustainability of the gender order in the local-global industry restructuring interface. Further, critique also includes advocacy for the value of food production and family farming in the Mallee region and Australia.

The fourth findings chapter, Chapter 9 'A gender analysis of intersecting challenges to agricultural production in the Mallee: restructuring and the context of climate change' explores the experiences and meaning of managing agricultural restructuring in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future scenarios.

Chapter 10 is the 'Discussion' chapter that argues for the significance of the PhD findings and outcomes. The chapter commences with a Summary of key findings.

Finally, Chapter 11 provides a Conclusion to the thesis. It includes a consideration of the limits to the scope of research, recommendations drawn from the research findings and suggestions for future research.

## ***Conclusion***

Thus to return to the original focus guiding this PhD research – an investigation into the outcomes for farming families who exit farming – in introducing this research I argue that it is a priority to research the gendered experiences and issues women and men describe through their experiences of industry restructuring *and* leaving farming. This PhD investigates the experiences and impacts of leaving farming and managing restructuring to prompt a revision of a focus on researching the outcomes of exiting farming at the expense of not learning about the interconnected nature of how restructuring is – at times – a socially tense space. This PhD is a feminist political engagement with investigating and representing a gender analysis of agricultural industry restructuring in the Mallee region.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review Part 1: Agricultural restructuring and the context of climate change, uncertainty and future scenarios**

### ***Introduction to the Literature Review***

This PhD research asks how is the ‘gender order’ (Connell 2009) and gender relations in farming families being reworked, as women and men manage agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region? This research considers the experiences for women and men previously involved in farming who have exited as well as those who continue to farm. These matters are considered in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future scenarios for agriculture. This literature review draws on rural, social and feminist research to inquire into the key issues informing the research.

The literature review is divided between two chapters. This chapter titled ‘Agricultural restructuring and the context of climate change, uncertainty and future scenarios’ considers literature defining and explaining agricultural restructuring and structural adjustment, and explores the relationships between these discourses and climate change, uncertainty and future scenarios. The second part to the literature review is ‘Chapter 3 Literature Review Part 2: Gendered experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring’.

### ***Agricultural restructuring in Australia, globalisation and neoliberalism***

Since WW2 agricultural restructuring has involved both industry and rural restructuring, and structural adjustments, in the context of the rise of globalisation and neoliberalism. This section considers these key concepts in order to frame trajectories in changes to family farming and the discourses of family farming that prevail, with the expectation that managing change – with respect to further restructuring and structural adjustment – is both anticipated and inevitable. This review of the literature and key concepts underpinning descriptions of industry change will be related to representations of ‘the farm’ and ‘farm structure’ relevant to a gender analysis of agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region.

The literature that describes changes in agricultural production and agricultural industry restructuring in Australia also notes substantial adjustment occurring from the 1970s onwards. Beer et al. (2003, p. 1; 193) describe the period post-WW2 until the 1970s as the 'long boom' and note the expansion of other industries including manufacturing, and how during this period government investment occurred in industry, infrastructure and service provision including in regional services. This period is described as profitable for both agriculture and rural communities in Australia (Beer, Maude & Pritchard 2003; Gray & Lawrence 2001; Lawrence & Vanclay 1994). Following this period an economic and political culture grew from the 1970s that supports privatisation, deregulation and a reduction in trade tariffs and protectionism for Australian agricultural produce. This period is characterised by industry and rural restructuring: 'The term restructuring is commonly used to characterize shifts in the economic trajectories and political strategies of advanced nations following the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s' (Tonts 2000, p. 53).<sup>1</sup>

Agricultural restructuring is fundamentally connected to rural restructuring and both are informed by changes in the role of government, policy intent and globalisation. Analysis of industry and rural change depicts how at various times Australian governments have promoted family farming and then withdrawn their support to move towards structural adjustment incentives in accordance with neoliberal economic principles.<sup>2</sup> As both the value of agricultural production has declined with respect to the decline in terms of trade (Barr 2005), so has the value of the 'country' and 'rural'. It can be concluded that, following Tonts (2000), restructuring processes are informed by economic and political intent.

Concurrently, in recent decades there have been a raft of changes in rural policies and rural service delivery – trends that have redefined rural sustainability as a community-specific responsibility in contrast to government intentions that once prioritised investment in infrastructure and service delivery in rural Australia (Davison 2005; Gerritsen 2000). Further, in particular since the 1980s multiple services have been withdrawn – government and non-

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this paragraph are published in Clarke (2013).

<sup>2</sup> There are numerous excellent texts that describe the history of agriculture and family farming in Australia, and agrarianism – this includes from colonisation to yeomanry and closer settlement to post-WW2 restructuring. See Alston (1995), Lake (1987) and Gray & Lawrence (2001).

government – from rural communities which in turn contribute to rural depopulation and the loss of employment opportunities in rural areas (Argent & Rolley 2000; Tonts 2000).

Herein is a tension in agricultural and rural restructuring as the discourses and practices of reduced government supports to industry coexist with government supports for structural adjustment. Yet past and current policies frame and enact neoliberal intentions and are repeatedly represented as non-interventions. Withdrawal of state support for the agricultural industry is named as necessary in the act of removing restrictions that impede industry competitiveness.

Agricultural restructuring – positioned *as a response to declining terms of trade* – needs further unpacking. First, the economics of agricultural restructuring, where the business of agricultural production is named as a global and neoliberal undertaking, can be problematised. For example, Pritchard (2000, p. 96) describes how trade liberalisation and free trade are introduced as economic policy, and yet the people involved are absolved ‘from the social and political implications of the policies they promote’. Australian farmers are told they must operate businesses without support from the government and yet governance – and thus trade policy – is framed in a neoliberal economic context (Pritchard 2000). This line of critique of agricultural restructuring returns a research focus *to people* and the people involved in economic policy reform and industry restructuring initiatives. Agricultural restructuring and structural adjustment is thus populated, embodied, social and gendered.

‘Globalisation’ and ‘neoliberalism’ are two terms that together are commonly used to describe the multiple changes informing agricultural restructuring. Globalisation is a social and cultural as well as technological phenomenon in terms of new technologies and information flows that support new trade patterns and capital moving between countries (Gray & Lawrence 2001; Lawrence 2005). Sometimes described as working with or within globalisation, neoliberalism is commonly described as an economic theory. Harvey (2005, p. 2) offers a useful definition:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.

Neoliberalism is a ‘market rule’ concept (McMichael & Lawrence 2001, p. 154) that has effectively reorganised commodity production, reduced labour costs and pricing, altered rural

spaces, labour divisions, gender and social relations and structures, and so consequently, neoliberalism substantially impacts on family life and evolving gender orders (Connell 2011; see also Connell 2014).

In terms of a broader notion of 'industry restructuring' that informs the history of numerous industries in Australia, the rise of neoliberalism and globalisation is frequently described as a move away from a Fordist-style economy which can be defined as 'a system of mass production based on the development and sale of standardized commodities to undifferentiated national markets' (Lawrence & Vanclay 1994, p. 91). In turn, labour organisation has and continues to be restructured as the agricultural industry and rural communities restructure, where attachment to place and space is less important and 'spatial mobility' (Gray & Lawrence 2001, p. 17) is promoted. Moreover, as Beer (2012) points out, a national economic discourse of neoliberalism coexists with regional variations in industry restructuring. In this 'post-industrial' economy, space and locality *do* matter as there are significant variations in the experiences and impacts of managing restructuring.<sup>3</sup>

Refocussing social research on the important matter of rural places as researchers engage with globalisation is discussed by Woods (2007). In his article discussing the potential 'emergent global countryside', Woods (2007, p. 494) asks the key question 'how are rural places remade under globalization?'. Woods (2007, p. 495) argues that globalisation is negotiated in rural places and thus rural place-making is a 'hybrid' social engagement involving humans and non-humans as well as 'the rural and non-rural ... the local and the global'. Rural places are also politically and socially dynamic sites interacting with globalisation.

It is important to understand the social equity and gender equality issues arising for women and men involved in family farming and managing agricultural and rural restructuring. Drawing upon the work of Massey, Woods (2007, p. 503) writes of the 'challenge to geographers and social scientists to rethink and re-engage with the geographies of globalization in rural contexts'. Thus there is the challenge of researching rural gender orders and changing gender relations, as they are dynamic rural spaces-places.

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<sup>3</sup> There is a history to neoliberal economic theory and both the theory and its application in practice have developed over time and in various countries / localities. Woods, for example, describes how both Australian and New Zealand governments have 'pursued radical policies of economic liberalization and deregulation to prepare for competition in the global economy' (2007, p. 500).

## ***Structural adjustment and the farm problem***

Given the intersection of agricultural restructuring, neoliberalism and globalisation, it is useful to further consider the meaning of structural adjustment. 'Structural adjustment' is a key concept supporting agricultural restructuring and farm exits. Structural adjustment is a set of discourses within industries and governments that focus on developing policy frameworks and financial incentives – the latter provided by Commonwealth and State governments in Australia – and targeted towards unviable farmers to leave the agricultural industry, or to assist farmers to remain farming.

Researching structural adjustment must involve understanding multiple accounts of managing on-farm changes and leaving farming, as what is implied in agricultural restructuring and structural adjustment is both farm exit and potentially leaving rural places. Any inquiry into 'structural adjustment' needs to consider not only the uptake of government and industry-specific supports but also experiences of those leaving. Consequently, structural adjustment is reconsidered as a discourse of agricultural restructuring coexisting with other local gendered perspectives that offer the 'truth' of managing multiple changes in family farming.

Understanding structural adjustment as a specific government financial support to leave farming, or remain farming, prioritises a focus on the fiscal imperative of agricultural restructuring over the social experiences of managing changes and the decision-making practices involved, and precludes social alternatives emerging in potential conversations with interviewees. Considering the literature review work I have undertaken it seems there is good reason to critique the social and gender equity issues implicit in structural adjustment supports on offer. Further, the dominant discourse of 'structural adjustment' is demanding a focus on what does not work rather than opening dialogue on the details of the diverse social experiences and potential alternatives for all involved.

Structural adjustment, understood as leaving farming due to a lack of farm viability and low farm income, is inferred in government policy intent. Previously it has been explained as the lack of adoption of new technologies (see National Farmers Federation cited in Gray et al. (1993). Discourses of structural adjustment also express government social and welfare responsibilities regarding managing the social impacts of low farm income, for example, as well

as supports for industry restructuring. Further, in Australia, agricultural restructuring and structural adjustment has evolved in response to drought and other climatic variations. In turn, an analysis of structural adjustment and the role of government includes how challenges to terms of trade including drought, for example, are defined and redefined along with changing definitions of the role of government in supporting the agriculture industry and farming families.

Elsewhere (Clarke 2013) I have analysed a recent Victorian Government 2008–2012 agricultural policy document titled ‘Future farming: productive, competitive and sustainable’ (Department of Primary Industries 2008). Drawing upon the policy analyses framework developed by Carol Bacchi (2009)<sup>4</sup>, I demonstrate how this policy effectively names *some* primary producers as more sustainable than others on the basis of a government agricultural policy anticipation that family farming will continue to decline given adjustment requirements ‘being driven by economic, climate and market forces largely outside our control’ (Department of Primary Industries 2008, p. 7). Moreover, this policy future scenario advocates that farm restructure will continue to involve changing labour conditions as increasingly ‘non-family labour’ provides the necessary on-farm work, as well as people increasingly commuting to the farm (Department of Primary Industries 2008, p. 17).

This critique of the social and gender equity issues written into a specific past Victorian Government policy, highlights the interplay of scenarios framed by neoliberalism that represent restructuring as an inevitable adjustment trajectory. This reduced attention to government and policymaker responsibility for supports that may assist opening up inclusive conversations about new *social* possibilities in family farming and potential alternatives (this can include discussions regarding how and when to leave). The policy ‘voice’ is authoritative, (re)establishes the farming / exit farming binary opposition in claiming support for productivist industry as ‘sustainable’, and avoids responsibility for promoting alternative terms of trade and social sustainability in the milieu of climate change-globalisation-neoliberalism. The policy does reference farmer health and wellbeing, and details some support for the organic industry but it

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<sup>4</sup> Bacchi draws on the theory of Foucault to inform her public policy analysis framework.

does not engage with the notion of agricultural restructuring that it is recommending as a potentially tense social space.

Botterill (2000) undertook public policy research and provides an overview of Commonwealth supports for agricultural structural adjustment from 1935–2000. In her discussions of how effective policy developments have been in supporting farm exits, Botterill (2000, p. 10) makes the important point that a historical overview of public policy on this matter indicates that 'The way in which the farm adjustment problem has been framed has not been static over time ... When they [i.e. adjustment supports] were introduced they were focused on alleviating personal hardship rather than attempting to influence farm exit decisions.' This transition in policy intent is further explained as reflecting prior societal values regarding rural life and farming where once agrarianism was highly valued in Australia. Further, in a policy analysis of Commonwealth Rural Adjustment Schemes, Cockfield and Botterill (2006) argue that the schemes have had minimal success in achieving the goal of uptake of the Commonwealth offer of either loans or grants supporting farm exits.

What has occurred in policy developments over time is that some farms – and so farmers and farming families – have been defined as inefficient and unviable. In the context of an argument that makes the point that adjustment is an ongoing process in the agricultural industry it is useful to consider an earlier perspective on this issue. Harris (1970, p. 113) writes that 'It could also be argued that society has a concern, if not for the farmer himself, at least for children of low income farm families. Low income levels may tend to reinforce low income aspirations and to perpetuate reduced perception of adjustment needs.'<sup>5</sup> In his paper Harris is arguing that agricultural adjustment has been 'too slow' for the industry (changes in farm size, farm aggregation, export and import opportunities, for example). Industry adjustment needs are argued alongside welfare and social concerns for farmers (who are represented as male) and their families. Further there is an 'economic efficiency' argument that 'the economy would benefit by using the resources elsewhere' (Harris 1970, p. 114). A welfare and economic argument justifies state intervention for further adjustment which is fewer farmers notwithstanding that Harris notes data indicates increasing farm size does not automatically

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<sup>5</sup> Thank you to Dr Sally Weller for drawing my attention to this article.

correlate with increased farm efficiency, and that uptake of adjustment incentives needs to be voluntary.

Harris (1970) offers a historical perspective: family farming is articulated as problematic and this 'problem of low income farms in Australia' demonstrates the ways in which the 'problem' is represented and constructed (Bacchi 2009) in policy at a particular point in time often associated with substantial change and agricultural restructuring post WW2.<sup>6</sup> In her overview of public policy, Botterill also raises the issue of how there is often a lack of uptake of structural adjustment supports to exit farming and her explanation includes recognising that there is a difference between the values at work with people within farming and those held by policymakers. Further, as Cockfield and Botterill (2013) argue in their historical overview and analysis of rural and agricultural policy developments, from the 1970s there has been an emphasis on self-reliance in policies while policies have continued to reflect a concern for farmer wellbeing. Further, the authors argue this policy focus on industry self-reliance is specific to Australia.<sup>7</sup>

Structural adjustment has been critiqued as a dominant policy narrative and governance priority promoting an industry restructuring trajectory consistent with neoliberal economics. Yet critique of policy is diverse: for example, Cockfield and Botterill (2006, p. 78) in their analysis of Commonwealth Rural Adjustment Schemes that offered an array of financial incentives to support people to exit farming, note how 'in popular discussion of rural adjustment there is often an implication that all those who leave the land do so reluctantly, whereas at least some are seeking greater economic and social opportunities'. Further, the authors also put forward the argument that structural adjustment supports are uneven and specifically target land owners and farmers rather than the rural workforce.

In contrast, Gray and Lawrence (2001, p. 53) describe structural adjustment as a 'cleansing process' where inefficient farmers are defined and dealt with. Thus varying critiques of restructuring and structural adjustment 'supports' indicate that there is also the need to

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<sup>6</sup> See also Higgins (2001) who critiques the work of Harris.

<sup>7</sup> This discussion is focussed on understanding structural adjustment in Australia yet these processes are not only occurring in Australia. For an international perspective on agricultural restructuring and related policies see Brasier et al. (2012) who discuss trajectories in the UK and US.

understand how family farming is positioned in research. For example, it may be positioned as a business structure, or as policy and governance strategic intent.

Further, in unpacking government policy intentions regarding agricultural restructuring and structural adjustment, it emerges that discourses of governance pertaining to sustainable agriculture are complex. As Shortall (2006b, p.219) asserts, the state itself 'has not so much a coherent strategy, but rather is a site of contest and conflict'. However, despite acknowledging policy complexities, policy is realising the difficult social and health impacts of agricultural restructuring as it persists with promoting a 'sustainable' restructured agricultural farm practice that advocates for industry structural adjustment. The overall policy intention remains consistent and is a driver of agricultural and rural restructuring consistent with neoliberalism. Further, the recent emphasis on supports for 'decision-making' can be critiqued as another government discursive trajectory arguing for structural adjustment with a specific political and economic intent that promotes farm exits.<sup>8</sup>

In their analysis of government structural adjustment policies, Higgins and Lockie (2001, p. 180) focus on how both 'expert' and political discourses define 'farm adjustment, how it should take place, and who it is that should be 'adjusted''. Similar to Cockfield and Botterill, they map the use of the notion of 'self-reliance'. However, Higgins and Lockie place more emphasis on noting how policies in support of structural adjustment are also advocating for the decoupling of farmer 'cultural attachment' to the land being farmed, devalue local knowledge in managing climatic variations, and argue for a continuation of a specific and now dominant type of farming – previously described as productivist. The authors express their concern that 'Labelling farmers as poor managers as they gradually fall from this treadmill does little to develop resilient, productive, equitable and sustainable production systems.' (Higgins & Lockie 2001, p. 190). This again raises the issue of how structural adjustment policies are expressions of hegemonic governance and industry intent and not inclusive of processes in support of social and farming alternatives (which can include how to leave farming).

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<sup>8</sup>See also Whittenbury (2009) who in her work on irrigators' decision-making practices with respect to adopting water saving technologies, critiques the 'adoption approach' as expert knowledge and extension services whereby economic factors are the primary driver in approaches to decision-making. Whittenbury critiques assumptions that decision-making is a formal process, and the role of government is to support industry profitability.

Elsewhere, Higgins (2001) notes the historical discursive construction of the 'expert' in support of structural adjustment policies. In his article on how the 'Low-Income Farm Problem' has been established, Higgins draws on the theory of governmentality to understand how this policy problem has been established as a 'truth' informing agricultural restructuring. Higgins critiques the binary oppositions at work in policy developments that often draw on statistics representing farm debt, farm size and farm income. He goes on to emphasise that a critique of the discursive construction of the farm 'problem' reveals that discourse is (historical) practice. This relates to Shortall's point made above, that policy developments are practices, are diverse, open to change and are contested. Indeed, in another publication considering the failure of the Rural Adjustment Scheme, Higgins (2004) writes how policy development and implementation is complex and involves many people in various locations, and that policy intent to regulate farm exits may be unsuccessful.

Any discussion of agricultural restructuring and structural adjustment involves consideration of the social experiences of women and men in family farming. This involves considering the discourses at work that indicate policy intent, social practices and other expressions of 'industry'. Previous research exemplifies the complexities in the way agricultural restructuring intersects with structural adjustment policy incentives, particularly since the 1970s, and are informed by neoliberalism and globalisation (Gray & Lawrence 2001; Higgins 2001; Higgins & Lockie 2001). Farm exits also occur without the uptake of government structural adjustment supports. Understanding the social impacts of restructuring where industry restructuring is represented as an homogenous industry-led trajectory has been substantially critiqued. Further, 'the rural' has recently been theorised as diverse social experience in a dynamic interaction with globalisation (Woods 2007). The social experiences and impacts of restructuring are spatially uneven (Beer 2012) and in turn, notions of 'industry' and 'neoliberalism' have been critiqued as discursive practices that are open to conflict and change.

Notwithstanding complexities, structural adjustment and agricultural restructuring is continuously represented in dominant discourses as an inevitable future scenario in support of increased commodity production (Clarke 2013). Detailing the social significance and social experience of what this may mean for women and men either involved or previously involved in family farming is an aim of this PhD research. I argue for a feminist research strategy that allows definitions of 'restructuring' and 'farm exit' to emerge from interview work with women

and men. This approach can assist in addressing concerns regarding the power ascribed to neoliberal and global discourses that infer the economic and political structures are more powerful than the 'local' social context and interweave critique with hope.

### ***Drought, climate change and agricultural structural adjustment in Australia***

The work of the Australian Productivity Commission illustrates how dominant economic discourses of structural adjustment have evolved since WW2 and more specifically, since the 1970s. A focus on this policy-based discourse assists in understanding the way Australian governments define their role in managing and promoting industry change as well as their responsibilities.

The Productivity Commission undertakes research, analysis and provides recommendations to the Australian Government for future policy change. The Productivity Commission (2013) has guidelines including to 'facilitate adjustment to structural change'. Therefore, structural change is expected and is a component of promoting productivity in the Australian economy. The work of the Commission is framed by 'Operating Principles and Policy Guidelines' which includes the key principle 'to have overarching concern for the well-being of the community as a whole, rather than just the interests of any particular industry or group' (Productivity Commission 2013). Hence a concern for overall community wellbeing and a notion of public good and benefit informs the Commission's work.

In 1998 the Productivity Commission published *Aspects of Structural Change in Australia* (1998). This research paper provides an overview of key changes in the Australian economy, in particular since the 1970s. It describes changes in sector size and value, labour and other descriptors of structural change as well as metropolitan and regional differentials. It is useful to note how the paper defines structural change and considers the role of government:

Structural change refers to changes in the overall size and make-up of an economy in terms of the distribution of activity and resources among firms, industries and regions.

A variety of market-related influences (including technological advances and changes in spending patterns and trade) and government-related influences (such as reforms to infrastructure services and labour market regulations) combine to create pressures for adjustment and structural change. These pressures vary over time and across countries, as well as between different regions and industries within countries. (Productivity Commission 1998, p. xiii)

The Commission recognises that government action informs structural adjustment in combination with market activity. The research paper goes on to problematise the role of government in supporting industry structural changes and, in turn, structural adjustment. The report identifies three ways the government can have input into managing and supporting structural adjustment: first, by managing 'the pace of change'; second, supporting community 'capacity to adjust'; and third, by providing compensation when losses are identified (Productivity Commission 1998, p. 3).

In 2001 the Productivity Commission (2001) published the research paper, *Structural Adjustment – Key Policy Issues*. From the outset this research paper acknowledges that there has been criticism of microeconomic reform. The paper (Productivity Commission 2001, p. 8) subsequently goes on to assert the benefits: 'Microeconomic reform is about improving living standards for Australians. Reforms achieve this by improving economic efficiency and productivity.' Again, a notion of *national* wellbeing is asserted in justifying supports for structural change and adjustments. This paper also considers structural adjustment and equity issues guided by economic efficiency arguments. It details types of adjustments that can be implemented by a government, the various benefits and costs to consider as well as factors that potentially impede benefit and cost assessment in considering policy reform.

In referencing past work of the Productivity Commission I wish to emphasise that understanding agricultural restructuring is part of a broader economic discourse which focuses on arguing for necessary and ongoing structural adjustment. The work of the Commission highlights that the notion of 'structural adjustment' is problematic, situated and debated in the policy development process consistent with revisions of the role of government in supporting not only industry but specifically, productivity. These reports assist understanding agricultural and rural policies, including national drought policies developed since the 1990s.

In 1999 the Commonwealth Government introduced Exceptional Circumstances (EC) policy as a component of the National Drought Policy which commenced in 1992. This policy included two key financial supports for farmers and small business: household income support and interest rate subsidies for business debt. At the time I commenced my PhD studies, the EC policy provided support to businesses and farmers experiencing substantial hardship during 'a rare and severe climatic or other event' (Australian Government Department of Agriculture

Fisheries and Forestries 2010, p. 3). The assistance available is dependent on the recipient living in an area that has received an EC declaration whereby 'A rare event is one that occurs on average only once in every 20 to 25 years.' (Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestries 2010, p. 3). Further to this definition of the climatic event, the effects of the event must be substantial income loss for more than twelve months 'that cannot be managed by producers using normal risk management practices' (Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestries 2010, p. 4). The EC policy clearly makes a distinction between its role in providing short-term supports for farmers and small business during an exceptional climatic event and the responsibilities of farmers and business to plan for managing risk. The EC policy (Australian Government Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestries 2010, p. 3) defined the role of government as 'to assist farmers enhance their skills in key areas of risk management, business planning and natural resource management.' Further, the EC Handbook clarifies that EC is not a structural adjustment policy and EC supports will not be provided to those who are experiencing difficulties due to the need for structural adjustment.

In 2008 a Drought Policy Review Expert Social Panel Final Report titled *It's about people: Changing perspectives on dryness* was provided to the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Forestries and Fisheries. The Report, along with a joint Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO report (Hennessy et al. 2008) titled *An assessment of the impact of climate change on the nature and frequency of exceptional climatic events*, together inform the Productivity Commission's review of drought supports and Exceptional Circumstances policy and in turn, provide recommendations to the Australian Government's review of drought supports.

The Expert Social Panel detailed the significant social distress for women, men and children in managing drought conditions. The health and wellbeing issues include stress, anxiety, fatigue, social isolation, decline in community participation and volunteering activities, as well as increased demands on children to assist with farming and consequently stress regarding their schooling activities. The Review also details increased workloads for women either on-farm and / or increased off-farm work to assist with income generation. In its report the Expert Social Panel substantially critiqued Exceptional Circumstances policy framing drought 'as a crisis' (2008, p. 12).

In its Review, the Expert Social Panel offered a number of conclusions. I wish to emphasise three: first, given the health and social impacts and stresses of farming life that were detailed to the Expert Panel, these considerations informed the position that 'while farming can be a great way of life for many, it can be a health hazard for others'. (Drought Policy Review Expert Social Panel & Commonwealth of Australia 2008, p. 12). Second, in critiquing Exceptional Circumstances policy and supports for farmers managing drought as an extreme event, the Expert Panel (2008, p. 6) made the point that 'future policy should seek to move people towards an acceptance that future dryness will occur and is not a crisis, and that planning for dryness should be about personal, family, farm and community wellbeing.' Third, the Panel recognised that there is often a significant disparity between government structural adjustment policy intent and farmer perspectives and values regarding the benefits of farming and attachment to the land (the Expert Panel also writes that this is often a male farmer priority at the expense of the wellbeing of family members) (2008, pp. 13–14). In its final recommendations the Expert Panel addresses the central importance of family wellbeing issues.

The Hennessy et al. (2008, p. 19) report revises trends in climatic variations, as well as climatic future scenarios, to conclude that 'In summary, this study suggests that the existing EC trigger definition is not appropriate under a changing climate. Future drought policy may be better served by avoiding the need for a trigger at all.' The Expert Panel report in combination with the BoM / CSIRO 2008 report, inform the Productivity Commission's 2009 report *Government Drought Support: Productivity Inquiry Report No.46* which recommends to the Government terminating some EC supports as well as the EC Exit Grant (largely unused). Building on the information provided by these two reports, the introduction to the Commission's 2009 review of drought supports describes the following:

Climate change will bring with it significant challenges for Australian agriculture. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency, severity and length of drought periods in future.

Australian primary industries ministers have agreed that current approaches to drought and EC are no longer the most appropriate in the context of a changing climate. They agreed that drought policy must be improved to create an environment of self-reliance and preparedness, and encourage the adoption of appropriate climate change management practices. (Productivity Commission 2009, p. iv)

The Commission's report rationale is dominated by the (ongoing) discourse of self-reliance in farmer responsibilities for managing climatic variations and climate change predictions. Yet now the discourse of self-reliance extends to this notion of 'preparedness' that is a risk

management strategy situated in changing understandings of managing climatic variations, climate change, agricultural structural adjustment, farmer responsibilities and the role of government.

Agricultural structural adjustment continues to be defined by a specific economic efficiency argument in the Australian context. This notion of adjustment with the review of drought supports demonstrates how climate change adaptation strategies and responses to climate change supported by government are dynamic, and intersect with a prevailing notion of a very specific industry trajectory previously described as intensive and productivist.

Towards the end of the Commission's Inquiry into Government Drought Support, The Report recommendations focus on drought support policy reform promoting self-reliance and preparedness to achieve the following:

- agricultural production being slightly higher than it would otherwise be.
- farm families and rural communities, in the longer term, suffering less acutely from the effects of drought because they would be better prepared for the variability and change in Australia's climate. (Productivity Commission 2009, p. 267)

Agricultural production as increased output is the explicit goal and this is immediately associated with necessary farm family and rural community structural adjustment. This particular discourse of structural adjustment continues to focus on the policy-problem of family farming. The importance of policy processes that recognise the incredible social significance of climate change adaptation and investment in multiple supports for adaptation practices are not discounted.<sup>9</sup> My critique here is of the collusion of powerful policy and governance narratives that re-present climate change as a discursive practice linked to further structural adjustment whereby the conclusion is there will potentially be more farm exits in the name of continuing an ongoing industry structural change process that has a specific Australian political and economic rationale. Moreover, that rationale does include a utilitarian argument for farmer and farm family wellbeing. The policy principle at work here relies on a non-corporeal national

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<sup>9</sup> See Recommendation 8.1 – the Commission (2009, p. LII) also recommends directing funds to new research and extension in supporting agriculture to manage climate change.

identity that evokes an homogenous industry reform in response to drought and climate change as gender-neutral.<sup>10</sup>

However agriculture and agricultural restructuring is fundamentally a gendered experience with significant social inequities in women and men's access to resources and opportunities. Prior research also demonstrates there are gender-based experiences of drought and managing the impacts of climate change in rural and agricultural communities (Alston & Kent 2004; Alston & Whittenbury 2012). It is important to draw attention to both the gender and social equity issues in the way a dominant narrative of climate change is redefining drought, and supports a type of restructured agriculture. For example, Lockie (2000, p. 25) critiques the production of agri-science knowledge writing how 'The industrialised model of agriculture on which this way of knowing is based in one alternative for agriculture in Australia and one alternative for agriculture-dependent communities in Australia. But as the dominant alternative, it is one that is highly supportive of economic and agricultural primacy within discourses of rurality.' Part of the policy-problem is that social equity and diversity, and hence social alternatives, are not recognised in policy that impacts on agricultural and rural communities in a policy review process that appeals to this notion of national good / benefit informing drought support reforms.

Imbued with this emphasis on self-reliance, preparedness and risk management the Commission recommends that an appropriate response to climate change is to abolish household drought relief payments – known as EC Relief Payments – and instead have farmer household income support equivalent to that which is available for all Australians and no longer specific to a geographical area or climatic event. However, the Commission's recommendation is respectful of farm structure and recommends a Farm Family Income Support Scheme. The Commission's recommendations also include a process to end EC Interest Rate Subsidies and EC Exit Packages as well as review other grants and assistance that support farm restructuring and leaving farming.

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<sup>10</sup> Further understanding of the gender equality and equity issues at work in public policy and in turn, industry definitions, will be further addressed in the Literature Review Part 2, section titled 'A gender analysis of agricultural restructuring'.

In specifically addressing the matter of agricultural adjustment and the matter of leaving farming, the Commission refers to the findings of its consultation process:

The current drought support measures are seen to help keep non-viable farmers in the industry. Indeed many submissions argued that this is, or should be, the principle rationale for drought relief, because their imperative is to maintain the number of farmers in Australia and the small country towns that have been servicing them. However, retaining all farmers currently in the industry and maintaining country towns should not be the driving objective of drought or climate variability policy ... Such an approach is inconsistent with the objectives of improving self-reliance and preparedness. (Productivity Commission 2009, p. 239)

Thus the Commission acknowledges the interplay of policy reform, governance, industry restructuring and managing (as well as imagining) the impacts of climate variation and climate change. Consequently the Commission accepts the case for limited government supports for decision-making tools i.e. advice, with specific reference to those farmers receiving household income supports.<sup>11</sup>

The work of the Productivity Commission is an expression of policy-as-process, and is historically situated. The work of the Commission illustrates government intent in supporting dominant economic and industry trajectories which given the history of structural change in Australia, include attending to this notion of 'industry restructuring'. In this section I have drawn on recent policy-based literature to further contribute to a more detailed notion of agricultural restructuring, and have chosen resources that explicate how these key concepts are further revised in the context of climate change. Future scenarios regarding climate change and drought clearly inform notions of restructuring and structural adjustment which include strategies referencing further farm exits as restructuring discourse integrates climate variability and climate change. This highlights the need for further research on agricultural restructuring and the context of change.

### ***Agricultural and rural decline***

Rural social research that describes agricultural restructuring and the social experiences of managing multiple changes, frequently describes the detrimental social impacts of both agricultural and rural restructuring. This literature describes how industry changes continue to socially exclude farming families. There are an array of statistical descriptors that map significant rural out-migration patterns, the decline in the numbers of farming families and

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<sup>11</sup> The Commission recommends ending EC grants for professional advice (see Recommendation 6.7).

farmers, population decline in rural towns, the loss of key services in rural areas, significant social and wellbeing issues for women and men managing industry and rural change.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, managing droughts and climatic variations have presented many challenges for rural communities notwithstanding the rise of climate change future scenarios now also informing both predicted challenges for rural communities and industry risks. Researchers also note rural, regional and urban wealth disparities (see for example Beer 2012; Pritchard & McManus 2000a).

Yet social researchers have explored the extensive and diverse social impacts of agricultural and rural restructuring often with a view to engage in social alternatives and make recommendations regarding both industry and rural policies. Lockie (2000, p. 22) takes issue with how 'Discourses of rural crisis are thus incorporated within the neo-liberal rationality of governance just as easily as discourses of economic rationalism; the primary responsibility of governments being to remove impediments of the movement of capital and ensure that people are equipped to participate in this movement.' An example occurs in the inquiry into EC policy. The Drought Policy Review Expert Social Panel (2008, p. 21) draws on ABARE data to note how 'Small towns of less than 1000 people which are highly reliant on broadacre farming are most likely to be in decline.' Demographic, industry and government community consultation data collate to inform as well as promote a specific industry and rural community development without the consideration of alternative industry, family and social options.

The work of Herbert-Cheshire (2003, p. 454) critiques the 'rural crisis discourse'. In research exploring community power and resistance, Herbert-Cheshire (2003, p. 455) uses Actor Network Theory to understand policy as 'a series of interactions that take place between the state and local people'. This framework supports Herbert-Cheshire's challenge to the binary opposition of powerful structures versus local actors without power in rural communities. Drawing also on the work of Foucault, Herbert-Cheshire challenges the structuralist notion of power as 'power over' and emphasises that the state is not singular nor stable but made up of actors. Herbert-Cheshire's rural-based social research emphasises the value in working with people in making sense of rural places and peoples' diverse experiences of managing restructuring and change.

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 1 Introduction.

## ***Sustainability matters***

‘Sustainability’ is a complex and contested notion in a plethora of discourses and social research that describe agrifood production and food systems, rural communities and future scenarios in (re)imagining how they can manage an array of contemporary challenges in rural social life (Beer, Maude & Pritchard 2003; Black 2005; Cocklin & Alston 2003). As Black (2005) describes in his consideration of sustainable rural communities, the notion of ‘sustainability’ implies continuous renewal and typically considers the interrelated economic, social and ecological aspects of sustainability.

### **Sustainable development**

It is useful to commence a discussion of sustainability by considering a landmark report that has influenced describing and theorising sustainability – the *Our Common Future* (1987) report undertaken by the World Commission on Environment and Development. This report explores the notion of sustainable development, international responsibilities and nation interdependency in managing changes in ecological, social and economic system interaction. With a ‘global’ focus and detailed discussion of sustainable practices as integral to supporting responsible actions that will support the needs of ‘future generations’ as well as for present needs, the notion of sustainable development is further defined as a concept that must also address ‘concern for social equity between generations, a concern that must logically be extended to equity within each generation’ (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 42).

### **Sustainable rural communities**

Cocklin and Alston (2003) present research findings from investigations into rural community sustainability by drawing on the notions of five types of capital – natural, human, social, institutional and produced. The scope of the research is an inquiry prioritising the ‘social’ aspect of sustainability and cautions against arguments that define rural community sustainability in terms of population size. The authors depart from a broad-based ‘systems’ perspective per se to emphasise that in framing discussions regarding sustainability it is useful to consider sustainability as a ‘relative’ concept (as well as contested) and investigate local understandings regarding the significance people place on environmental, social and / or

economic resource and relationship matters in understanding both rural community vulnerability and resilience (Cocklin & Alston 2003, p. 2). The findings raise a number of important considerations in not only researching and mapping what is 'sustainable' in a rural community context but how to extend the notion of 'sustainability' to assist this core notion of 'equity' embedded in the notion of sustainability. In the conclusion the authors attend to issues of power by asking 'sustainability for whom' (Cocklin & Alston 2003, p. 203).

The rural community studies detailed in Cocklin and Alston's publication emphasise the social equity issues within rural communities. Thus 'the rural' is important but also it is crucial to consider social diversity between and within rural communities in exploring local values and perspectives on 'sustainability'. For example, in their study of 'Tumbarumba' in New South Wales, Wilkinson et al. (2003, p. 156) draw on the notion of social capital which they define as 'In general, the term social capital is used to refer to social organization and relationships based on trust arising from social interaction within a community' but also point out that social exclusions operate within communities. For example, those based on 'macho' cultures or those perspectives and relationships that marginalise people such as 'new' farmers or Indigenous people.

In their summary, Cocklin and Alston (2003, p. 204) propose an alternative notion of rural sustainability that is not arguing for the sustainability of all small rural towns but is focussed on 'a wider rural sustainability, which extends beyond individual settlements and communities'. This argument recognises the diversity and social equity issues implicit in further developing sustainable rural communities as well as arguing that the 'rural' and rural places matter in understanding the complexities of how people are managing an array of changes. Ultimately this is a research position that values the 'rural' and local knowledge in understanding and working towards community sustainability. Such investigations into rural community sustainability draw attention to the multi-layered aspects to relationships – including gender relations – that structure rural communities: understanding 'community' involves a consideration of social diversity in order to inquire into the social and gender equity issues at work in managing change and promoting sustainable communities.

## Social sustainability

In discussing the notion of 'sustainability', and its usefulness in considering the gender and social equity issues pertinent to agricultural and rural restructuring, it is also important to further consider the 'social' aspect to sustainability. As Black (2005, p. 25) writes in his discussion of definitions of sustainability, the 'social dimension of sustainability has to do with the extent to which social values, social identities, social relationships and social institutions are capable of being maintained into the future'. As noted above, this dimension is addressed in the concept of social capital.

In 1995 the journal *Australian Geographer* published articles engaging with the concept of 'social sustainability'. For example, Smailes (1995) considers a definition of social sustainability applicable to a 'national level' as well as considering key considerations – for example, gender roles – to build socially sustainability into rural systems. Smailes (1995, p. 144) argues how it is important to take the time to 'identify and seek to conserve what is essential about the current system'.

This emphasis on social sustainability is a challenge to the structural change discourse in Australia as well as farm structure trends and specifically, changes in family farming. Considering social sustainability highlights the *limits* to agricultural and rural restructuring. One final point to note is that Smailes (1995, p. 147) argues that given spatial changes emerging in rural communities and agricultural production, these changes do not discount the importance of 'the need for the local in the formation of group identity, and for a sustainable rural system to allow for the spatial regrouping, rather than demise, of localism'. This indicates that social sustainability is useful for highlighting social needs in considering perspectives on managing change and what people wish to sustain as well as the relationships and rural system that will engender a renewed 'local' and 'rural' in the restructured space-as-locality.

The latter point Smailes argues is similar to the discussion by Jones and Tonts (1995, p. 139) who also recognise that if rural communities suffer from population loss then social sustainability can be promoted by 'the development of increased linkages sideways to surrounding shires and towns and upwards to higher levels of government may provide them with their only future options'. Here Jones and Tonts overtly state the role of government in

promoting social sustainability for rural communities experiencing restructuring. Further, similar to the conclusion offered by Cocklin and Alston (2003), Jones and Tonts conclude that the 'sustainability for whom' question is integral in broader discussions of rural sustainable development. Given my previous policy analysis of Department of Primary Industries *Future Farming: Productive, Competitive and Sustainable* – a Victorian Government policy dated from 2008–2012 – I also argue that the notion of a sustainable agricultural industry is used to support specific policy directives to facilitate agricultural restructuring with key gender and social equity issues that remain inferred and unaddressed. Indeed, the 'sustainability for whom' question needs to be a major consideration in not only understanding how people are managing restructuring but developing future scenarios and addressing the gender and social equity issues that challenge the limits to industry restructuring.

As Jones and Tonts (1995) identify that there is a role for government(s) in engaging with the social sustainability of rural communities, Smailes (2003) in a later article also considers and suggests policy supports that may assist regional policy to recognise the national interest in sustaining rural communities. Similar to his 1995 article, Smailes (2003, p. 86) argues for social sustainability on a national level and this is informed by a systems perspective: 'from a national point of view the spontaneously evolved network of local communities is worth sustaining as a social-spatial *system*'. Further, this is another research perspective valuing rural places, communities and on this occasion, advocating for the value in government investment in 'place-based communities' (Smailes, PJ 2003, p. 81). This in turn challenges the decoupling of labour and place inherent in agricultural restructuring as a component of Australia's structural change economic trajectory.

While not specific to a discussion of rural or agricultural restructuring, McKenzie provides a useful overview of recent theorising regarding 'social sustainability'. Similar to Smailes, McKenzie recognises a role for governance processes to recognise and support local priorities in 'sustaining' what exists as well as discussions and decisions regarding what can be achieved. One definition McKenzie (2004, p. 12) provides is that social sustainability is 'a life-enhancing condition within communities, and a process within communities that can achieve that condition'. I interpret this definition to recognise wellbeing as integral to social sustainability. Further, McKenzie emphasises understanding social sustainability as an ongoing process, locally configured and responsive.

This emphasis on local-level understandings of social sustainability concurs with the ethnographic work undertaken in rural communities in Mangakahia Valley in New Zealand by Scott et al. (2000) who describe the diversity between rural communities as well as the multiple differentials at work within communities (class, race, ethnicity, gender, for example). In their research the authors explore what 'community' means at the (rural) local-level, and similar to McKenzie, they refuse a singular 'fixed' definition of social sustainability: 'We envisage 'social sustainability' as having a local, historically defined content which will include elements of livelihood, social participation, justice and equity' (Scott, Park & Cocklin 2000, p. 443).

In summary, the concept of 'social sustainability' is useful to inform understanding how rural social research is able to critique discourses of rural decline and work with people in understanding local values as priorities in managing multiple social, economic and ecological changes. The notion of 'social sustainability' supports a research focus attending to social experiences of restructuring and also notes the opportunity to seek local knowledge in understanding women and men's perspectives on what is important to sustain<sup>13</sup> in managing change as well as ideas for future scenarios that can assist with promoting gender and social equity. Further, social sustainability promotes the importance of recognising and understanding social diversity. It assists a research practice where process is just as valuable as outcomes and local experience as important as hegemonic national agricultural policy and global pressures on restructuring (Scott, Park & Cocklin 2000). It is a useful concept to guide this research into seeking to understand the diversity of experiences for women and men managing agricultural restructuring and changing rural communities, as well as to advocate for socially sustainable agricultural production and rural communities.

### **Sustainable livelihoods**

The concept of 'sustainable livelihoods' is an important concept in the context of this discussion. Often applied to developing countries, the notion of sustainable livelihoods can be described as follows: 'A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base' (Institute of Development Studies cited in Black 2005, p. 33). The notion

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<sup>13</sup> See also McKinnon (2008).

of 'sustainable livelihoods' is relevant where agriculturally-dominated rural communities manage drought, substantial climatic variations and climate change, as this concept potentially challenges the notion of labour as a resource base conceptually detached from place. It is also useful for providing insights into women and men's social experiences of managing agricultural and rural change given the kinds of labour and work-life dimensions that are described in family farming, and which emphasise the social significance of place and the rural. Notwithstanding restructuring and substantial changes in 'farm structure' and household labour contributions to food production, it is worth considering what the notion of 'sustainable livelihoods' adds to this discussion.

In the Australian context sustainable livelihoods has been applied to understanding Aboriginal peoples' livelihoods in the arid and semi-arid regions of Central Australia (Davies & Holcombe 2009; Davies & Maru 2010). Davies and Maru reason that the uptake of livelihood approaches has been prompted by the attention given to pluriactivity and relationships between people and family members, as well as non-financial gains in livelihood strategies. The authors go on to describe how sustainable livelihoods emphasise how 'people, places and environments are related and mutually constituted' (Davies & Maru 2010, p. 19). Further, recent revisions of the applicability of sustainable livelihood approaches emphasise opportunities to promote wellbeing in remote communities. It is useful to consider how Davies and Maru contest the applicability of the livelihood approaches with its limited focus on understanding Aboriginal livelihoods. The authors argue that as sustainable livelihoods is a 'people-centred approach' (Davies & Maru 2010, p. 21) it is worth considering how it may assist understanding livelihood strategies across Australia.

### **Sustainable agricultural production**

The notion of 'sustainability' is frequently applied in discussing food production and other aspects of food systems. For example, the 'Our Common Future' report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) also discusses food security and agricultural production. It addresses the need for 'sustainable food security' that ensures secure arable land is available to support global food production needs, that the land 'resource base' is sustained, accessible and environmental degradation is avoided, as well as raising the need for equitable food distribution. These components to establishing food security require

international and government cooperation. Further, the social equity issues in food security include considering land reforms and recognising the role of women in food production.

A focus on 'sustainable' food production as alternative production practice can possibly be critiqued for not attending to the social significance of changing food systems. With the rise of the use of the word 'sustainable' in government and industry discourses regarding food production, it can be argued these discourses (in Australia) are focused on productivist and input-intensive food production rather than a serious engagement with alternative sustainable production strategies and therefore social alternatives. Moreover, in recent years both food security and food sovereignty have emerged as discourses that have the potential to map another turn in the rural crisis discourse *as well as* new developments in conceptualising and working towards sustainable food systems.

Drawing on the work of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Lawrence et al. (2013, p. 30) define food security as the condition when 'all people at all times have access to the sorts of foods that allow them to lead active and healthy lives'. The authors go on to consider current and emerging issues of food insecurity given the dominance of productivist production and neoliberal governance and industry priorities. While Australia's food production to date has contributed to significant domestic food supply and overseas via export markets, current trends are challenged by an array of factors including other markets such as mining and coal seam gas, climate changes, access to water, a variety of soil degradation issues, increased foreign land ownership, and consequently 'available arable land' is insecure (Lawrence, Richards & Lyons 2013, p. 31). The authors also describe current food security issues as including inadequate nutrition and other public health issues as well as supply issues in remote areas, for example. The concept of 'food sovereignty' has developed as a direct challenge to a neoliberal-inspired understanding of 'food security' that ignores – indeed, promotes – social inequities in food systems (Lawrence & McMichael 2012). For example, Lawrence and McMichael (2012) describe the development of how in 2012 the FAO officially introduced using the term 'food sovereignty' in response to campaigns to reassert national control of food stocks produced within a country as well as determine distribution needs. The authors go on to describe food security as a 'trade-based' concept in contrast to the emergence of food sovereignty as a 'rights-based' concept.

While this research focuses on changes in agricultural restructuring with attention to food production, it recognises the important and changing relationships occurring in food systems both intra-country and on a global or international level given substantial changes in markets and food distribution systems. This research focuses on agricultural restructuring in terms of meaning for those still farming or who have left farming.

## ***Conclusion***

Overall, in Australia, agricultural producers have been managing the impacts of declining terms of trade, changes in government policy intentions, globalisation and the development of neoliberal economics. In recent years agricultural producers have also been managing the impacts of a major drought and climate variations, and future scenarios. It is in this context that this research adopts a gender analysis of how women and men from farming families are experiencing the challenges of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region.

This research investigates relevant 'sustainability' discourses through empirical research. This enables exploration of the social meanings and impacts of changes in food production practices, and the changes in livelihood practices as people continually explore what is sustainable for themselves, their family and community.

I investigate changing gender relationships at a time of intense change and critical decision-making pertaining to farm viability and sustainable food production. I investigate what is socially sustainable for women and men involved in agricultural restructuring and rural communities. This research provides the opportunity to work with people to gain insight into how the future is being (re)imagined and worked with an emphasis on sustainable relationships between women and men.

In this chapter I have considered research literature that describes agricultural restructuring and structural adjustment, particularly since WW2. The next chapter will focus on the feminist rural social literature that considers gender equality and social equity issues in family farming, and agricultural and rural restructuring.

## **Chapter 3 Literature Review Part 2: Gendered experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring**

Part 2 of the Literature Review considers women and agriculture, rural femininities and masculinities, and the gender politics imbued in gender relations. This chapter also considers gender-based differentials occurring in climate change responses. Finally, the conclusion discusses the outcome of the Literature Review for the scope of this PhD research.

### ***Women in agriculture***

Much feminist social research has critiqued the hegemonic masculinity that has dominated agricultural production, omitted recognition of farm women's contribution to production, and promoted a rural gender order that divests women in farming and rural communities of power, property and opportunity (Alston 1998, 2000; Bock & Shortall 2006; Kubik 2005; O'Hara 1998; Sachs 1983; Shortall 1999; Whatmore 1991). Earlier feminist social research had a 'counting women in' focus: researchers such as Sachs (1983, 1996), Alston (1995), Whatmore (1991), Shortall (1999) and O'Hara (1998) mapped the presence of women on the farm. The literature reveals social research strategies that challenge the farm as the unit of analysis and instead, prioritise working with women for the purposes of understanding their perspectives. Women were included in the story of agricultural production and the details of their experiences and livelihoods revealed the inequality implicit in the gendered discourses, institutions, organisations and practices that limit recognition of women's work on the farm and in farming.

This literature challenges the economic and dominant paradigm that isolates agricultural 'production' and a focus on the 'farm unit', to consider the social context to agricultural production. This body of research describes, situates and critiques this social context as fundamentally gendered, that is, women and men have different roles and responsibilities. There is a gendered differential at work in access to resources, inclusion in decision-making, and therefore the power dynamics at work in the nexus of relationships and structures that support agriculture. Agricultural production is described as overwhelmingly male dominated

and women are denied recognition, income from their on-farm work (Shortall 2006a), land and opportunities. Indeed, the focus on production *per se* is one aspect of gendered food systems (Allen & Sachs 2007).

### ***The Women in Agriculture movement***

The 'Women in Agriculture' movement can be described as a social movement that offers women in agriculture the opportunity to advocate for public recognition of their work in agriculture production. The movement also offers the opportunity for women to express common interests and advocate for industry changes that reflect their interests and priorities. Further, in Australia this movement has a formal and informal organisational component. It advocates for women to be included and thus adequately represented in agricultural and rural political and industry structures, and organisations. In her PhD research into the women in agriculture movement, Liepins (1996, p. 1) describes how the movement 'establishes the gendered and political nature of farming' as well as challenges this through 'a collective political agency'.

As Alston points out, it is important to recognise that 'women are not completely dominated and never completely powerless' (2000, p. 165). Indeed, elsewhere Alston (2003) has described some of the history of women's achievements in agriculture in Australia and revised women's involvement, recognising how women have been entrepreneurial in the past, and continue to be so, as women in agriculture further participate in and innovate agricultural production. Thus the women in agriculture movement is a direct challenge to the legacy of women's work not being recognised, and ongoing invisibility as women manage increasing workloads both on and off the farm in response to adjustment pressures (Alston 1998). However, in her discussion of women's organisations and collective actions, Alston (2000, p. 167) notes the tension inherent in women seeking recognition and power when 'While women's organizations favour support for women's issues, at the same time, they call for support for family farming, a system that has never given women primacy and is the source of their unequal position.' This is an important issue for feminist research and theorising in working to support women's equal position in agriculture (Alston 2003).

In her research into the women in agriculture movement in Australia, Liepins (1996, p. 66) describes how the movement is partly a response to a sense of 'crisis' in family farming. This movement is also advocating for a practice of sustainable agriculture that includes women, provides opportunities and redefines agriculture 'as more than an economic activity' (Liepins 1995, p. 121). Liepins identifies how the movement is also attending to environmental, political and social concerns and establishing a discourse promoting a social alternative for women in agriculture that is committed to a sustainable future. As both Liepins and Alston demonstrate, feminist research has also considered women's efforts to promote their opportunities in agriculture and their self-advocacy work.

### ***Gender relations, industry restructuring and family farming***

The body of literature about women, agriculture and agricultural restructuring is diverse. Feminist social researchers have also undertaken government policy analysis and revealed the gendered implications of agricultural restructuring initiatives as well as the capacity of the state to support gender equality and gender mainstreaming (Alston 2009; Gorman 2006; Pini & Shortall 2006), and changes to key resource distribution patterns that underpin agricultural production e.g. water (Alston & Mason 2008). This body of research also considers women's roles in agricultural production as migrant and waged workers relocate within and between countries, and the changing spatial / global politics of food production (Bain 2010; Bock 2006a; Preibisch & Grez 2010).

Industry restructuring involves substantial labour, natural resource, state-based policy and demographic restructuring, and there are many social issues as a consequence. Given this PhD research focus on industry restructuring and what this means for women and men managing changes in family farming – in and out of farming – this section considers some key themes that pertain to the social and gender impacts of restructuring. It will also consider literature that enquires into the gendered impacts and experiences as they pertain to experiences for women *and* men. This is a departure from the previous focus on feminist social research literature that describes social equity and gender equality issues for women in agriculture and women on the farm, to further understand the lived experiences of 'restructuring'. Finally this section will discuss coping and wellbeing issues as well as critique the discourse of family farming.

## **Changing livelihoods and renegotiating the rural gender order**

Feminist rural social researchers have considered changing livelihood strategies and decision-making practices that develop as women have increasingly worked off-farm as the source of household income has diversified (Brandth & Haugen 2010; Gorman 2006; Oldrup 1999; Pini 2004). Feminist rural social research has located farm and rural women's experiences in the cultural geography of the 'rural', moving a diverse and complex feminist research trajectory beyond the farm gate to deconstruct and challenge rural gender relations (Bock & Shortall 2006; Grace & Lennie 1998; Haugen & Villa 2006; Little & Panelli 2003; Whittenbury 2003). This body of work prompts a consideration of whose work holds more value in making / managing changes in agriculture and livelihoods. Further, does the masculinist discourse of 'the farm' remain the reference point with the rise in women and men working off the farm?

All the key texts included in this review of women in agriculture consider women's work off-farm. These critiques focus on the family farm as an economic unit and site of production that excludes women and denies them power and recognition. This body of literature also engages with pluriactivity and interprets women's off-farm work as an income generating strategy that effectively supports the continuation and survival of the family farm. It is both an adaptation and a 'survival strategy' (Shortall 2002) given the stresses of managing restructuring. Kubik (2005) argues women's off-farm work is effectively subsidising the farm, food production and food prices. In the context of Australia, off-farm work has been reported as a gendered coping strategy in response to droughts that compound the impacts of restructuring and changing terms of trade (Alston 2006a, 2006b).

It is worth considering a definition of pluriactivity:

... the pluriactivity of households is deeply rooted in: the financial predicament of the household... the different motivations of household members; their understanding of the household and family circumstance; the constraints on the household and on individuals to undertake different kinds of work; the capacity of household members to keep up new patterns of domestic and income generating work; the success or failure of past coping strategies; the range of local labour market opportunities; and the growth or decline of particular industries and enterprises. (Le Heron 1991, p. 27)

Further, pluriactivity has been described as something that developed in the late twentieth century and is an experience occurring in rural and urban contexts (Le Heron 1991). In the context of a literature review looking at restructuring and specifically changes to family

farming, pluriactivity has often been described as an undertaking by women although some authors also describe men working off-farm to support the farm. Alston (1998, p. 27) describes how for women in Australia 'pluriactivity has become a way of life. They juggle the expectations of family, community, farm and off-farm labour in an uneasy and often turbulent relationship.' In Ireland, Shortall (2002) undertook focus group research with women to discuss their experiences of off-farm work.<sup>1</sup> Shortall describes how women understand their work as directly contributing to family farm survival. Thus while farm viability is highly problematic as the farm loses money, rural gender ideology enables women to undertake off-farm work to continue to support the farm. While women may potentially benefit from earning income off-farm and developing work skills – and there is the potential for household gender relations to be transformed – what occurs is that women support their male partners to continue with their 'work status' and women's efforts are supporting 'maintaining the perception of farming as the primary household activity' (Shortall 2002, p. 172) as well as supporting their family wellbeing.

One of the research questions that O'Hara (1998, p. 3) asked is: 'how exactly are women involved in family farming'? O'Hara conducted an investigation into the changing livelihoods of women on, and in, farms, and this question involved a consideration of women's off-farm work as well as how both paid and unpaid work such as voluntary and reproductive work contributed to both farm productivity and rural community development. However, it is also problematic to assume women's non-farm work is off-farm. For example, Machum (2006, p. 55) challenges this binary to point out that women may well generate their own income from undertaking work on the farm – examples are women may own a farm business or 'farm diversification project'. This is certainly an important consideration and what is also compelling about Machum's work is her argument for the benefits of a commodity-specific approach to understanding farm women's work. Through her Canada-based research Machum worked with women in potato and dairy farms. She concludes that their choices and work routines are substantially informed by specific commodity production.

Elsewhere Oldrup (1999) describes how there are few studies of women working 'outside the farm' as the focus of research so often is the gendered division of work on-farm. In her

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<sup>1</sup> See also Kelly and Shortall (2002).

work with Danish women associated with farming, Oldrup describes how farm women's identity is being reconstructed by modernisation reducing labour requirements on-farm as well as changes in women's educational backgrounds and livelihood identities. As Oldrup (1999, p. 344) argues 'there are different ways of being connected to farming as a woman – i.e. as a housewife, as a professional farmer, as a waged worker etc. – and therefore many 'farm women's identities'.' Oldrup also describes how women's work remains a significant contribution to sustaining 'the farm' and there remains (albeit an evolving) gender division of labour within the household whereby women are mostly responsible for the household. Yet Oldrup also indicates there are differences between women and remains committed to a research position that seeks to understand women's experiences in farming as well as how women reconfigure rurality.

To return this discussion to the Australian context, some aspects of Oldrup's findings correlate to an extent with those documented by Pini (2004) who reports on the details of off-farm work undertaken by women involved in the Queensland sugar industry. Pini describes how the women she worked with undertook off-farm work in addition to household and on-farm work and that their off-farm work did not result in any renegotiation of household labour and domestic responsibilities. Pini (2004, p. 61) describes how participants 'stressed that movement into and out of the workforce was mediated primarily (or even only) by the needs of the farm and family'. Again, both Oldrup and Pini's work demonstrate how women's off-farm work is in a gendered and powerful relationship with supporting the dominance of 'the farm', and as Pini emphasises, upholding rural community ideology.

The literature investigating women's changing relationships and work on the farm, as well as the diversification of livelihood strategies also indicates the substantial changes occurring in rural communities. This insight can extend this PhD investigation to also consider the changing livelihood strategies undertaken by those who have made the decision to leave farming. Further, there is scope for this feminist rural social research to work with men in understanding developments in rural gender relations given agricultural restructuring processes.

## **Inheritance, succession and the opportunity to enter farming**

Family farming has developed as an overwhelmingly patrilineal practice in developed countries including Australia, and this continues despite restructuring (Alston 2006a). In their work describing irrigation succession practices in Australian Murray Darling Basin southern regions, Wheller et al. (2012, p. 268) make the distinction between inheritance as the practice of transferring assets, and succession which can be described as a complex and lengthy process involving transfer of business ownership and management, typically from one generation to the next. In their literature review work the authors note the literature focus on the interplay of farm size and type, age and values informing succession practices and they also identify the need for gender-based research to fully understand changing practices.

In her Australian-based work with five mothers and daughters with a farming background, Muenstermann (2010) investigated experiences and perceptions of farming and identifies another gender-based aspect at work in family farming culture that can impede women's potential to be considered in inheritance and succession. Muenstermann found that the daughters she worked with were clear about the difficulties their mothers experienced and contemporary challenges in Australian farming, and she also found that mothers will steer their daughters away from farming. Further, Muenstermann (2010, p. 36) poses the question that if farming culture shifted and women were further included in decision-making practices, 'would the family farm have a chance to survive local and global pressures if young, educated women, including daughters-in-law, would be granted greater power?' This research and question is framed by positioning the 'family farm' as a precarious social and gendered engagement, and is useful for pointing out social alternatives that may support women entering farming if power is shared so that family farming equally includes women. Further it is a concern that farm family relationships, policy and industry processes and cultures – including the culture of family farming – are not engaging with the possibility of establishing pathways for women to equally enter farming whether through inheritance or marriage. Muenstermann's work further contributes to the 'women in agriculture' and 'family farming' discourse as well as highlighting the complexities of how women may not support daughters to consider farming and this I interpret as another type of farm exit occurring.

Recent research by Linda Price (2010a, 2010b) provides insight into the challenges men experience as a consequence of patrilineal inheritance practices in Welsh farming communities. Price undertook research with both women and men and multiple generations of farming family members and she argues that this is a deliberate feminist research strategy: working with men offers the opportunity to extend feminist insights into patriarchy in order to challenge the gender relations it is supporting. Price reports on her research: women experience patrilineal farming practices and contribute to farm survival through practices that restrict their expectation they will adopt the livelihood identity of 'farmer', nor do they have expectations they will receive partnership recognition or financial benefits from their work. Yet, also by working with men and women, Price (2010b, p. 84) identifies how *both* may suffer a lack of choices and opportunities due to patriarchy, and for men kin relations in family farming 'can limit men's subjective life choices and emotional geographies, creating a sense of identity and belonging to place so strongly fixed as the male "farmer" that when the farm is threatened so also is their sense of themselves'. Price offers a challenge to feminist rural social research to work with women and men and clearly this methodological framework and choice of method is appropriate given the gender relations composing family farming.

Understanding the family farming tradition and restructuring challenges raises the matter of differences between men as well as the lack of equal opportunities for women to gain entry to farming, the opportunity to farm, and how women are positioned on-farm. Additionally, as the work of Price indicates, there can be substantial stresses for men in the experience of patrilineal inheritance and succession. Price (2010b, p. 84) makes the important point that 'agricultural geography has tended to 'ghettoise' feminist approaches away from economic and policy discussions towards a focus on familial gender relations'. There is the opportunity for this PhD research to focus on the diverse and gendered social experiences of 'restructuring' rather than a specific focus on family relationships *within* family farming.

### **Detraditionalisation**

Lawrence and Gray (2000, p.40) describe how the 'family farm' is an operation mostly undertaken by a family that includes family members, sometimes employees and a key feature is that it is dependent upon a flexible source of labour, usually women and children,

and 'a willingness to suffer periodic poverty'. Lawrence and Gray also describe the increasing development of corporate agricultural production that works with the farming family model of agricultural production while changing production and environmental practices to the detriment of long-term land viability and farm profit. The 'culture' of farming and thus rural communities is altered by a process of 'subsumption' whereby the relationship between the family dominated farm businesses is restructured towards an increased dependence on food and agricultural businesses e.g. seed sources, chemicals, new technologies (Lawrence & Gray 2000).

Further, Lawrence and Gray describe how detraditionalisation is occurring as family farming is challenged: market and industry changes demand substantial changes on-farm as well as the social impacts resulting in people leaving farming. Changes have occurred in farmer and family relationships to commodity production and markets, and changing terms of trade emphasise what the authors interpret as a 'retraditionalisation' occurring on the basis of increased individualism (Gray & Lawrence 2001, p. 169).

Further, Bryant carried out research in South Australia with farming women and men and describes how restructuring challenges traditional gender identities as both work and social life, and therefore occupational identities, are reconfigured given market rearrangements in farming. Yet as Bryant (1999, p. 250) reports, work roles and occupational identities can be revised 'in the context of new understandings associated with gender, work and marriage'. Thus family farming continues while undergoing restructuring processes and as previous research indicates, it remains a policy-problem and social undertaking – both of which are gendered.

### **Agricultural restructuring and leaving farming**

Feminist social research has highlighted the way women's work in farming and on the farm has been inadequately recognised. As women have demanded recognition – and social research has participated in this process – women have made gains in agriculture, food production and family farming. Research describes how women's increased off-farm work is often in response to a crisis. As well as their lack of involvement in farming (and this can occur whilst financially supporting the family farm) women may also resist the patriarchal

system of farming by deciding to leave (see Alston 2006a). Women involved in farming may not support their daughters becoming involved. Thus feminist and other social research together with overarching family farming statistics represent family farming as declining and challenged by changes in gender relations, terms of trade, policies and, in Australia as in other countries, by drought and climate changes.

Multiple gendered social exclusions are at work in this evolving social engagement which is agricultural restructuring. There is a history of out-migration from rural areas in Australia and this includes families leaving farming. It is also occurring as women not only work off-farm but are forced to relocate for work as reported by Alston (2006a) in her analysis of the gendered impacts of drought.

Further to this point is the fact that farm exits continue to occur. The social impacts of 'farm family displacement' may include relationship stress, housing issues, underemployment and isolation as described by the research undertaken in the 1980s by Bryant (1989) who worked with twelve families from the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. Bryant describes a situation where farm exits were financially supported by a State Government grant and followed several years of drought. All participants in Bryant's research were 'involuntary migrants' and Bryant explored the outcomes of exiting for this cohort, as well as the decision-making processes that culminated in farm exit stages. As part of her research Bryant undertook a literature review of related American studies. Following this review work Bryant (1989, p. 21) makes the points that research tends to have a limited focus on economic outcomes for people, and as well there is a gap in research that needs 'to explore the reactions of the community as much as the reactions of families who are actually going through displacement'. In her study Bryant also critiques a focus on 'displacement' and the factors that lead to the decision to leave farming and advocates for a need to understand the (potentially diverse) experiences of leaving that include considering what happens after leaving farming.

Further, in their research Ginnivan and Lees (1991) identify voluntary and involuntary farm exits. They also describe how some people will completely leave agriculture but others may partially or gradually withdraw from the industry. Through their literature review work the authors also note that decision-making processes are often made in a stressful context.

Bryant's insights are useful for emphasising the fact that those farmers who may leave farming often remain part of a rural community, as well as the point that impacts of farming exits extend to the wider population. Further, as the work of Ginnivan and Lees reports, there are multiple ways people may 'leave' farming. This indicates that what constitutes a 'farm exit' is complex and that behind the broad-based statistics regarding family farmers are potentially diverse reasons and strategies for 'leaving farming'. For the purposes of this PhD, what is important to understand is how decisions are made as well as attending to diverse social experiences that constitute agricultural *and* rural restructuring.

As the literature review work highlights, family farming is a highly gendered social and industry engagement. Thus this PhD research seeks to understand changing gender relations, and this includes the opportunity to gain information about decision-making strategies and experiences, as well as recognise the interplay of relationships and identities shaping and responding to industry changes.

### **Revising the 'family farm': discursive practices and social alternatives**

Understanding agricultural restructuring requires a consideration of multiple challenges to family farming. Yet 'family farming' is a contested and complex array of discursive practices that are imbued with gender and kin relations and these are (re)negotiated in an evolving economic and rural social paradigm. Indeed, Liepins (1996, p. 24) describes it as a 'social space' – the emphasis on space reiterates the importance of both 'the rural' and rural communities informing restructuring processes and practices.

Brandth (2002a) in her article 'Gender Identity in European Family Farming: A Literature Review' argues that 'the discourse of the family farm' has focused on the gender order in farming operations, the hope for women's inclusion in farming and recognition of their work, and yet this needs to be challenged by an alternative research strategy that 'stresses the multiplicity of farm women's positions in farming'. Brandth also identifies how farming has become more masculine as many women have withdrawn from farming, and thus there is the need to research changing masculinities as well as femininities as detraditionalisation occurs. Brandth emphasises that while changes in family farming and gender relations occur, and there are also changes to rural identities as agriculture loses its dominance in the

rural order, the hegemonic discourse of family farming prevails. Brandth's insights are useful as they assist identifying gaps in research, and point out the usefulness of working with the notion of discourse which accepts multiple articulations of gender and power relations through undertaking empirical research as well as policy analysis.

By embracing the nested discourses of family farming – on the farm, leaving the farm and off the farm – in policy and governance objectives that may or may not be singular and coherent, there is the opportunity to gain further understanding of agricultural and rural restructuring and the changing gender relations embedded in such experiences. The latter are more than the 'gendered outcomes' of restructuring and adjustment – by researching experience and establishing the time and space for narratives to emerge that describe and reflect upon the activities and processes involved in managing changes in livelihoods and relationships, there is a reduced focus on the outcomes of restructuring to enable and encourage women and men's priorities and diverse experiences to come to the fore.

The scope of research is also influenced by O'Hara's (1998, p.13) comment that 'studies of agrarian change have, in the main, been concerned with the disintegration and restructuring of family farming rather than its persistence'. This is one influence on my decision to work with people who have exited farming as well as those who remain farming – both manage and contribute to changes in agriculture and rural communities. It has also assisted my revision of how 'outcomes' are defined *in the research process* – the research questions need to work with people's priorities and reflections on managing changes to date. This strategy also reflects researcher intent to undertake research that challenges the farming / exit farming policy paradigm and investigate gendered experiences of industry by respecting the diversity of social experiences that contribute to a representation of family farm restructuring.

### **The economy and farm structure**

There is a tradition of feminist rural social research that has resisted the dominant research focus on the business farm unit. This is a resistance to the patriarchal and patrilineal dominance of 'the farm' over women where women's labour and contribution to the

survival of the family farm is overlooked, unacknowledged, frequently unpaid and women have often been excluded from contributing to farm decision-making.

In response to these issues my research investigates how gender relations are being renegotiated as women and men involved in family farming manage agricultural and rural restructuring. The emphasis is on accepting that gender relations are fluid – as the literature suggests. My research also engages with the notion of industry restructuring. The latter is now further considered with respect to understanding what it means to research ‘the economy’ and ‘industry’, and to engage with the gender politics of locating ‘industry’ for the purposes of extending feminist rural social research and promoting equal opportunities for women and men in and out of family farming who are managing agricultural restructuring.

First, it is useful to consider the feminist political economy perspective. Feminist political economy theory emphasises ‘social reproduction’ and the interaction of gender relations, processes and institutions (including the household, industry, state) that produce and maintain people and generations in order to support economic production (Bezanson & Luxton 2006). Social reproduction involves sustaining a labour population on a daily basis, for example, ensuring food, housing and clothing needs are met, as well as ‘the development and transmission of knowledge, social values, and cultural practices and the construction of individual and collective identities’ (Bezanson & Luxton 2006, p. 3). Further, social reproduction is achieved in a dynamic way and responsibilities shift as economies change. For example, in their analysis of political economy theory and labour issues in Canada, Bezanson and Luxton describe women’s increased labour market participation and revisions to male-female roles, and thus some aspects of social reproduction – for example, childcare – may become valued by the market although they may in turn be feminised. Thus feminist political economy theory is committed to critiquing the dominance of the economic-production-market and works to recognise the gender-based power differential in this economic space, and understand women’s diverse experiences, in the various components of the work (actions, values etc.) that continuously re-establish social reproduction for the purpose of meeting an economy’s changing labour requirements (Luxton 2006).

The political economy perspective has influenced feminist research on women's position in family farming. Further, much of this work has specifically targeted investigating the structure of the household and the relations within notwithstanding the unique work-household-farm-reproduction intersection occurring in family farming when the family lives on the farming property. This social arrangement challenges any conceptualisation of 'the economy' as outside the home and household in a unique way. Hence, feminist social researchers have advocated the benefit of focusing on the household to understand gender and social relations in agriculture and food production (see Shortall 2006a). However I argue it is important to expand this investigation beyond the household. After all, there are now a plethora of changes occurring in agriculture operating at the 'global, local, and household levels' and all are imbued with power and gender relations (Sachs & Alston 2010, p. 278).

One of the challenges in social research is to work reflexively with the key terms relied upon to describe research intentions. In Anderson, Bechhofer and Gershuny's Introduction to *The Social and Political Economy of the Household* (1994) the authors make the point of distinguishing between the opportunity to focus on individuals within households and the organisation of the household. The authors express their concern that a focus on individuals is at the expense of gaining insight into household power relations – hence their decision to focus their research on 'issues of the *organization* of household economic behaviour' (Anderson, M, Bechhofer & Gershuny 1994, p. 4). This is an important distinction as it highlights the possibility of researching gender relations and agricultural restructuring in a manner that enables useful articulation of 'gender' and 'gender relations' can occur in a variety of ways. However, for the purposes of this PhD given the focus on restructuring which involves working with people who have left the family farm household, I recognise that it is important to first not assume a heterosexual household construction or that the household has remained consistent. It is also important to recognise and value individual expressions of their priorities in describing the household *and* industry restructuring; and, given the point made above regarding multiple changes at the global-local-household interface, seek experiences representative of this intersection.

I seek to research gender relations as they pertain to agricultural and *rural* restructuring. In their work investigating rural livelihood transformations in the Philippines, Gibson et al. (2010) note that substantial changes are taking place in how the rural and economy is

theorised and represented. Indeed the authors note the relationship between the theoretical choices researchers make as integral to the process of constituting the 'economy'. The authors argue:

The space of decision that is the economy includes the decisions theorists make when they represent the economy to themselves and others, as well as the decisions local people make as members of communities that are always becoming, evolving, breaking down and reforming. (Gibson, Cahill & Deirdre 2010, p. 251)

I interpret this nominated reflexive approach as an opportunity to engage with 'industry restructuring' and recognise the discursive practices at work that can support multiple narratives including local / national economic / researcher, and thus produce a dynamic understanding of industry restructuring.

Finally, this research does not seek to isolate a focus on 'the family' or 'work' or 'labour' as it is influenced by the point that empirical research needs to engage with the influences of gender cultures and 'the larger social and political contexts that affect the interaction of work, family and community' (Pocock, Williams & Skinner 2011, p. 5). Existing literature reveals industry structural change and agricultural restructuring are powerful discourses that need to be supported by empirical work.

### **Gender, rurality and the rural social landscape**

As Gray and Lawrence (2001) describe, there is no one 'rural'. Rural social life is diverse and dynamic. As previously noted in this section, rural life is gendered in the subjective, household, local community, industry social experiences and embodiment of agricultural restructuring. Given that 'the rural' is evolving along with substantial economic and social changes, it is important to further consider what this then means for undertaking feminist rural social research.

When considering the gendered social experiences of rural social life this immediately references the importance of place and location. There can exist regional identities – and the 'Mallee' is one example – as well as rural communities. Rural communities have been described as 'communities of location' (Black 2005, p. 21). However, as Davison (2005) describes, the notion of 'rural community' can infer a city / country disparity but there are also differences within and between rural communities: for example, there can be differences between farmers and those people living in rural towns. Further, rural

communities can have differing and changing expectations in managing and responding to agricultural and rural restructuring (Smailes, P, Griffin & Argent 2005).

'Rurality' is frequently described as a rural-based ideology that informs the social construction of identities, femininities and masculinities, relationship and organisational networks, community structures and power differentials in rural spaces. Importantly, rurality and 'the rural' are often defined in an oppositional relationship with 'the urban' although this difference is a dynamic discursive space and lived experience (Cloe 2006). As the 'rural' social experience is evolving thus rurality has been described as constructed 'over a range of different spatial scales, shifting subtly in emphasis over time' (Little & Austin 1996, p. 102). Elsewhere, Cloe (2006, p. 24) describes diverse theoretical trajectories in rural studies, and how a recent 'cultural turn' recognises and redefines rurality as 'a complex interweaving of power relations, social conventions, discursive practices and institutional forces which are constantly combining and recombining'. Further, Little and Austin argue that rural ideologies promote a rural life that represents a 'rural idyll' that is fundamentally gendered and based on ideas of a woman-centred home and family rural lifestyle. Elsewhere, rural life has been described as imbued with additional 'risks' for women such as social isolation and domestic violence, and which challenge the 'rural idyll' (Bock 2006b).

As Bock (2006a) notes, with the crisis in agriculture it is likely that rural spaces will become less dependent on agricultural production and this highlights that it is important to not simply conflate 'the rural' as an agriculturally-dominated space but recognise that it is both a dynamic discourse and lived experience. Importantly, Bock emphasises that not only does agricultural and rural restructuring impact upon gender relations but also, gender relations influence restructuring. Hegemonic rural social orders and gender relationships in rural spaces are also contested, resisted and revised as agricultural and rural restructuring continues (see Little & Panelli 2003).

As Grace and Lennie (1998) assert, it is important not to conflate 'rural women'. Rather, rural women's diversity should be acknowledged and there are also significant differences for women who live rural or remote, for example. This point is also emphasised by Bryant and Pini (2011) in their recent work exploring gender and rurality and drawing on the feminist theory of intersectionality. Further, Grace and Lennie note the complexities in the

terminology used to describe 'rural women' or 'farm women' for example, and caution against representing rural women as 'other' in contrast to urban social norms. Ideally, descriptors need to be inclusive and respectful of diversity. This is a challenge for feminist social research when as Brandth (2002b) points out, rural feminist research goals are not necessarily consistent with those women (and I would add men) who researchers work with. As many feminist social researchers have indicated, rural and farm women will work hard to support family farming and prioritise their family health, wellbeing and asset-base.

Recent research has also considered changing rural masculinities and femininities (Alston & Kent 2008; Coldwell 2009; Price 2010b). Coldwell critiques the limitations in the assumption of 'hegemonic masculinity' and argues that research that considers masculinities as well as femininities can assist further understanding of practices that result in social exclusion as well as promote opportunities for sustainable agriculture and sustainable relationships with other materials and species. Coldwell contributes to a theoretical refocus that can assist this research in undertaking a gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring that considers gender relations by working with women and men – as previously mentioned the latter point is also promoted by Price (2010b).

Finally, I wish to return to the question raised at the start of the previous section regarding respecting rural social diversity and undertaking research that attends to gender-based power differentials. Gray and Lawrence (2001, p. 49) write: 'If we accept that there is a rural society we must accept its own reflexivity and, moreover, the necessity for the researcher to work reflexively within it.' This quote highlights an alternative perspective on rural life that promotes the opportunity for feminist empirical research to accept women's and men's ability to define their priorities. I also accept the need for a critically reflexive feminist research practice. I also understand that rural life is extremely diverse. For the purposes of this PhD research it is invaluable to have the opportunity to work in a rural context – the Mallee region – and represent women's and men's diverse experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring processes.

## ***Restructuring, drought and climate change: wellbeing and coping issues***

As previously described, social experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring are gendered. In Australia, the many changes that have occurred are also understood through investigations into the social experiences of drought and increasingly, other extreme weather events and climatic changes. Additional to critiquing 'rural decline' is the emerging social research describing how agricultural restructuring and changing terms of trade now incorporate responses to drought and climate change, which have significant implications for family and personal wellbeing, and equitable gender relations.

There is a substantial amount of social research literature that describes the coping and wellbeing issues experienced by women and men in managing agricultural restructuring and the impacts of drought. Research describes the social and health impacts of restructuring compounded by drought, for example, that can result in financial stress, anxiety, social isolation, social exclusion and challenges to existing gender relations and social structures (Alston 2006a, 2006b; Alston & Kent 2004; Sartore et al. 2008). For example, Alston (2006b) has described the gendered impacts of farming families managing drought whereby women have increased workloads, off-farm work that may also involve women moving away from both the farm and local community in order to undertake paid work and contribute to the survival of the family farm at the expense of women's health.<sup>2</sup>

Mental health issues associated with farming families and rural communities managing drought also involve increased risk of suicide, which has been analysed as a particularly significant issue for rural and farming men given hegemonic rural masculinity can be detrimental to men's health (Alston 2012; Alston & Kent 2008). As Fritze et al. (2008) report, mental health issues are occurring due to climate change, and are anticipated to occur with climate change predictions which may include the immediate distress caused by a natural disaster as well as potential anxiety regarding the future due to the uncertainty and 'threat' of climate change.

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<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere Stehlik et al. (2000) reports findings where some women experienced stress and increased workloads as well as others reporting benefits in undertaking off-farm work – suffice to say the experience and reasons are diverse as Alston also reports.

In considering the social impacts of the drought Alston (2006a) has also queried the potential for gender and power relations to be 'destabilised' by a crisis such as drought, or are drought responses configured in accordance with patriarchal social norms? More recently, Alston and Whittenbury (2012) have also discussed research findings considering the potential for gender relations to be revised as farming families manage changing terms of trade and climate change including declining water availability, in communities in the Murray-Darling Basin. In their work these authors ask the question: How are gender relations transformed with changes in food production including changes as a consequence of climate change? However, they critique that gender relations are changing – on the one hand women may be more empowered working off-farm, on the other hand their off-farm work remains a strategy to largely support the farm and male farmer.

### ***Climate change, gender and social equity issues***

While there is a global dimension to the discourse of climate change where changes are frequently represented on a whole-of-planet level, it is clear that there are diverse and localised impacts of climate change. As Barnett (2006, p. 115) describes, climate change does not equally affect all people (between and within societies) and 'vulnerability is itself determined by political-economic processes that benefit some people and disadvantage others'. Climate change can be a source of multiple vulnerabilities and conflict, and hence climate policy developments must consider social equity issues as well as those issues pertaining to managing biophysical changes and vulnerabilities (Adger et al. 2006; Leinchenko & O'Brien 2006; Preston & Stafford-Smith 2009).

Climate change adaptation<sup>3</sup> strategies and relevant decision-making practices need to be socially inclusive and gender-sensitive. This is a matter for climate change mitigation and adaptive strategies developed in policy and industries, as well as for 'local-level' gender relations and rural gender orders. Climate change and increasing extreme weather events are anticipated to exacerbate existing gender and rural-based vulnerabilities including the

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<sup>3</sup> Climate change adaptation and vulnerability, adaptive capacity, adaptive strategies and resilience are key terms, discourses and approaches used in defining and managing climate change and *the risks*. For a useful discussion of adaptation and adaptive capacity see Preston and Stafford-Smith (2009). For an example of discussion of climate change and resilience in Australia see Barratt et al. (2010) and for a discussion of using resilience theory applied to primary industries in Australia see Marshall (2010).

well-documented issues of women's lack of access to resources and participation in decision-making processes (Milne 2005; Terry 2009b). Terry (2009a, 2009b) makes the distinction between long-term adaptation and short-term coping and argues that 'gender justice' must be a goal in climate change adaptation strategies including climate change policy that supports the inclusion of women and gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, climate change is a challenge to agricultural production, food and water security and gender relations that currently exist which in Australia in recent years, have also been challenged by drought and changing terms of trade (Alston 2007, 2010). Given that the Mallee has been identified as a 'hotspot' with respect to climate change, how are women and men integrating this information about the future? What are the opportunities for women and men to equally participate in the decision-making processes that address future scenarios? Importantly, whose 'future scenarios' are being constructed and challenged (Milne 2005)?

### ***The sociocultural context to climate change***

A reading of Stehlik's (2003) analysis of the social construction of drought prompts consideration of the sociocultural context to climate change and what this means for agricultural and rural restructuring in Australia and importantly, gender relations. Climatic variability and climate change predictions have implications for policy development, industry strategies, as well as local and subjective meanings. Here, 'climate change' is understood as an expanding discursive experience: it is science, policy, future scenario, local knowledge and historical perspective. Climate change is also a gendered social experience.

'Climate change' is experienced as located discursively and politically 'elsewhere' and this indicates the sociocultural and political repositioning of climate change which is informing mitigation and adaptation strategies in Australia. That climate change may be located in the future or is not currently impacting on social life are challenges addressed in climate change political discourses that in turn *effect* agricultural restructuring as neoliberal and thus predominantly economic discourse. This again removes responsibility for considering

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<sup>4</sup> See also FAO (2010) for another discussion of the differences between 'coping' and 'adaptation' and the gender-based differentials at work.

alternative opportunities and aspirations that value social sustainability, in the renewed output-focussed policy-based restructuring trajectory. Further, as Israel and Sachs (2013) argue, understanding climate change science as situated knowledge assists in the development of equitable and diverse interventions in response to climate change.

Thus this contemporary 'context' to agricultural restructuring is one where an array of future scenarios is significant to decision-making. Decision-making in itself is a strand in the ongoing discourse of agricultural restructuring and now includes attention to climate change adaptation which involves restructuring as economic and policy strategy to build on the continuum of productivist agriculture. Yet if the future predictions include both that agriculture will become further male-dominated, as for example is predicted with cropping (Barr 2005), and the available research has already demonstrated the significant social distress of managing changing terms of trade and drought, it is important for this PhD research to ask women and men how they are making decisions and managing the future.

More specifically, the emphasis is on how people are feeling (Farbotko & McGregor 2010) through asking how people are managing change – including restructuring and climate change – and letting them articulate their priorities. As Cradock-Henry (2008) points out in respect to his PhD research with farmer perceptions of risk and vulnerability to climate change in New Zealand, 'climate scenarios' are frequently depicted as having a 'top-down' impact on people and yet farmers are constantly engaged in decision-making practices. For the purposes of this research it is important to consider how climate change impacts *upon women and men* with gendered impacts and further, there is the research potential to investigate climate change as a discursive context articulated and experienced in diverse ways. This understanding of the 'context' of climate change also responds to the difficulties researchers report in naming and discussing 'climate change' (Cradock-Henry 2008; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2010; Whitmarsh & O'Neill 2011).

If, as Adger et al. (2009) argue, the 'limits' of climate change can only be understood if we consider values and ethics, knowledge, the risks, as well as potential changes to – or loss of – places and cultures, then indeed for the purposes of this PhD the opportunity to consider the 'context' of climate change is to consider restructuring as open to change in revising and understanding gender relations. Following Adger et al. (2009) this is to reposition

understandings of climate change as well as responses and hence adaptations to climate change as actioned 'within' society rather than to understand climate change limits as defined external to society. Critically important in this highly politicised and contested context-space of 'climate change' is access to information, decision-making, roles and responsibilities. This PhD research proposes that a gender analysis of climate change is a crucial component to understanding agricultural restructuring and provides new insights into women and men's perspectives on the environment, climate and restructuring as socially sustainable practice.

### ***Conclusion to the Literature Review Part 2***

In concluding, this PhD draws upon the feminist tradition of challenging the dominance of 'the farm' as a masculinist and patriarchal undertaking. However, it also recognises the opportunity of the theoretical engagement with 'discourse' and so withdraws from an emphasis on farm or household or economic structures to position the PhD research emphasis on relationships and the renegotiations in gender relations as women and men manage industry change. This PhD research seeks to describe and explore 'structural adjustment' as a complex and embodied set of practices with multiple localities – and not all are rural-based – and establish a research process and opportunity of representing women and men's diverse experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring.

'Climate change' with its social, political, economic and historical context informs restructuring as does a range of other future scenarios – succession, farm exits, what to do after leaving the farm, and aspirations for relationships. Climate change is a powerful discursive practice. It informs policy development and increasingly prompts rural and agricultural structural adjustment initiatives. With respect to agricultural restructuring in the Mallee, how is the instability of the climate and climate change informing our governance and social structures and how is the 'gender order' being reworked at this time? The scope of this PhD research responds to these questions which identify gaps in existing social research.

By working with women and men – those farming as well as those who have 'exited' (and there are many complexities in the diverse experiences of managing agricultural and rural

restructuring), this PhD undertakes a gender analysis of agricultural restructuring given the current context of 'climate change' coexisting with other uncertainties such as income and commodity prices, for example. This PhD research provides the opportunity to further understand the gendered impacts of restructuring and how gender relations are renegotiated in response to changing livelihoods.

There is the opportunity for this feminist rural social research to further investigate the politics of how industry is located and represented in the course of inquiring into gendered experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring. Empirical and qualitative-based research working with women and men is a strategy to assist understanding the gender order and gender relations in and out of family farming. The next chapter goes on to discuss the research methodology and methods used to answer the PhD research questions.



## **Chapter 4 Methodology: feminist methodology and gender analysis**

The point is to make a difference in the world, to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others. To do that, one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean. Knowledge-making technologies, including crafting subject positions and ways of inhabiting such positions, must be made relentlessly visible and open to critical intervention. (Haraway 2004, p. 236)

### ***Introduction***

This chapter discusses a feminist methodology that makes explicit the research processes and methods used for my PhD research. This PhD research is qualitative and exploratory (Alston & Bowles 2003). The methodological approach used for gathering data supports understanding of how gender relations are renegotiated as women and men manage agricultural restructuring, and draws on well-established feminist research methods and theory. In addition to articulating feminist research methodological principles useful for this scope of research, this chapter describes how through the research process itself, that is, through the 'action' of the research, a gender analysis of women's and men's experiences of agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region has been undertaken that is specific to this research engagement. Intentionally locating the research processes and methods involved in gathering information contributes to a reflexive research practice that assists interpretation and analysis of research findings and outcomes, as well as invites the reader to critically reflect upon the scope of research.

### ***Feminist methodology***

In feminist epistemology the split between methodology and theory is problematic as it is often the political intent of feminist research to promote the action in research: research is a process which includes a critique of the object-subject relationship *in* research. Ontology, that is, 'what's out there to know' (Grix 2002), is critiqued by feminist epistemological and methodological priorities that argue for knowledge production processes and techniques regarding the politics of what can be known, how we know, who gets to know, and the representation of knowledge. In short, feminist epistemology and methodology argues that there are multiple social equity issues in undertaking social research.

It has been many years since feminist methodology named and challenged the traditional masculinist production of knowledge whereby the researcher is all-knowing and in a position of power producing findings (Haraway 1988; Harding 2004b; Lather 1993; Oakley 1981/1988; Smith 2004). Further, this attention to the research *intent* continues to be important for validity i.e. naming the intent behind / in front of the research project. Researcher political and advocacy intent may well shift and the researcher (this researcher) is not always able to find the words to voice explicit up-front intent as what is known may then become unknown and then learning is reworked as knowing and so on.

So in this introduction to feminist methodology and the theory of a framework to accumulate knowledge and find out certain issues, I draw on a body of knowledge that is feminist methodology and epistemology. Methods and techniques for gathering information are embedded in feminist epistemological commitments to linking the knowledge-building activities of theory and practice: here we arrive at feminist methodology and feminist standpoint theory (Sprague & Kobryniewicz 2004).<sup>1</sup> Feminist research is embodied and the feminist researcher is in conversation with the women and men they are working with.

The ongoing and dynamic tradition of feminist methodology – notwithstanding that there are many ‘feminisms’ (Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser 2004; Olesen 2003) and theoretical paradigms – has some consistent priorities in challenging a male-dominated social order and working to create equality of opportunity for women:

- research by women for women
- research to support women telling their story and an emphasis on creating space for women's 'voices' and 'perspectives' in order for women's priorities to come to the fore in social life
- a commitment to recognising and valuing women's experiences, work, activities and specific knowledge(s)
- focus on women's lived experience and understanding and accepting diversity of lived experience

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 5 Theory for further discussion of feminist standpoint theory.

- critique of dominant (masculinist) research paradigms. Developing research strategies and techniques that promote collaborations between people, organisations and sectors in knowledge production
- promoting researcher reflection and reflexivity in the research process, and addressing the potential power dynamic imbued in the researcher-subject relationship. Researchers are encouraged to name their 'position' and research intent as well as practice a critical reflexivity regarding their place in research processes (Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser 2004) and relationships with people they work with
- scope of research is political and relevant to participants
- interview experience as ethical, respectful, empowering and transformative
- interviewer and interviewee collaboration in the construction of knowledge and meaning.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Gender analysis as methodology and method***

In this research a consideration of 'gender' is a priority category of research focus and is embodied in this research. Gender matters with respect to both methodology and methods, and methods include undertaking interviews with both women and men. Further, the gender of researcher matters in the research process. For example, in undertaking interviews the gender of the researcher may impact on interview content and the power dynamics experienced within an interview (Pini 2005; Sallee & Harris 2011).

Gender analysis in research provides insights into rural masculinities and femininities and power dynamics. Undertaking a gender analysis is a dynamic process. Gender analysis as a feminist research strategy provides the opportunity to assist this research intent to critically engage with dominant agricultural discourses in order to challenge gendered social norms. For example, gender analysis is developed at the time of coding interviews where comparative analysis can take place in work undertaken where members of couples have been interviewed separately. It is also developed through comparative analysis between women and men. It is further developed through policy document analysis. Gender analysis therefore involves

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<sup>2</sup> Several references inform this list (see Bell 2011; Brooks 2007; Daley 2010; Devault 2004; Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser 2004; Oakley 1981/1988; Reinharz 1992; Smith 2004; Sprague & Kobryniewicz 2004).

methods that in turn develop the outcome of a gendered analysis. Gender analysis in this PhD is both method and methodology.

This PhD research strategy is influenced by the work of Connell (2005) who argues that men have a role to play in promoting gender equality. A gender analysis of industry restructuring that works with women and men is a commitment to feminist research. It promotes social change as the scope of research explores the rural gender social order through engagement with women and men, thus gaining both perspectives on the local and global nexus of the gender order and gender relations in industry restructuring. This thesis locates subjectivity within discourses of restructuring that now include managing multiple changes including changed market conditions and climate change, for example.

Gender analysis, that is a research strategy that is committed to working with women and men and understanding femininities as well as masculinities, can assist in working towards sustainable social relations and understanding as well as challenging existing patriarchal power relations both in and out of farming.

Gender analysis:

- works with women and men to understand power relations
- can draw on sex-disaggregation of data
- attends to the gender relations within the interview.

This thesis explores the social significance of gender difference in an agricultural dominated rural social context and this is a critique of powerful relationships constituting embodied subjectivities and industry as lived social experience.

### ***Gender analysis and challenging dominant discourses of agricultural restructuring***

I undertook a gendered analysis as I considered this appropriate given the existing knowledgebase. For example, Alston and Kent (2004) consider and problematise rural masculinities, Price (2010b) in the UK has worked with Welsh farming families including women and men, and recently the work of Coldwell (2009) has focussed on extending rural social research to revise rural masculinities. There is an increasing body of research exploring and

challenging the rural gender order by working with both women and men, and gaining insights into masculinities and femininities.

Gender analysis, as I describe here, is an opportunity to explore gender differences in social experience and relationships. I argue that gender analysis is a component of feminist research. Gender analysis is an evolving process within feminist research and draws on existing tools of feminist analysis as well as extending this analysis. Further as Price (2010b, p. 82) argues, 'the lives of men have rarely been examined or integrated within *feminist* research'. Further, as Price's (2010b, p. 82) research has shown, 'farming men can also suffer distressing impacts of a patriarchal way of life'. This is also argued in Alston and Kent's (2008) work. If we understand methodology as a framework for gathering knowledge (Grix 2002) then undertaking gender analysis informs both methodology *and* methods for information gathering and analysis of that information.

### ***Developing the research question(s)***

In 2011 I commenced undertaking interviews by initially interviewing six key informants. The key informants are people working in the Mallee region whose work and community profiles meant they had knowledge about the social impacts of agricultural and rural restructuring in the region. Key informants were able to provide overview and descriptive information to guide and check research priorities including recruitment strategies. A further four preliminary interviews were conducted with two couples (husband and wife couples). One couple were farming and the other couple were retired farmers. These four interviews assisted me to assess the relevance of the questions proposed for interviews. The majority of these interviewees went on to assist with interviewee recruitment. Of the six interviews with key informants a number of these were also either currently involved with agricultural production or had left farming.

Following transcribing and analysis of the initial ten interviews I revised interview questions and referred back to my research question and subsidiary questions. The main research question remained but I reduced the number of initial subsidiary questions I had developed. I modified an initial focus on the 'northern Mallee' to simply 'the Mallee'.

Feelings and emotions are at the forefront of this PhD research. Asking research questions that promote an exploration of feelings as well as descriptive facts is frequently integral to feminist methodology (Hesse-Biber 2007). Shifting to a more exploratory research focus is one that has *developed* during the research process, as has the political intent of the work in response to the interview-conversations this PhD research facilitated. Indeed the scope of the initial interview schedule and the selection of the method of semi-structured interviews was partly an outcome of ‘testing’ the Farm Destination Survey for the larger ARC Project this PhD is attached to. One survey respondent made the comment to me that an important question is ‘How are people feeling about farming?’ Not only did I go on to use this question in the interview questions I prepared, this matter of *feeling* I recognised as of paramount importance to the line of inquiry regarding what is of social significance for people and in their relationships, in managing agricultural and industry restructuring.

Many researchers write about the importance of expressing empathy in the time and space of the interview and ensuring the interviewer is respectful of what the interviewee is articulating and their authority (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Neumann 1994). This does not dissolve the differences that may emerge during the interview between the interviewer and interviewee and this is widely discussed in feminist methodology (Oakley 1981/1988; Reinharz 1992), and within the post-structuralist theorising of gender differences and multiple, dynamic subjectivities (Baxter 2003; Grbich 2004; Weedon 1987).

### ***Site selection***

Initially I proposed to work in the Loddon Mallee region which is located in central and north-west Victoria. This initial research proposal was informed by my previous employment as a Research Worker for a Women’s Health Service that worked throughout the Loddon Mallee region. Initially the northern part of the Mallee region was identified as an important site to undertake this research considering the long-term drought at the time the PhD research commenced. As explained in the literature review, this PhD aim is to address gaps in social research and to explore the gendered experiences for women and men managing agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region. Given climate change predictions, the PhD research was viewed as an opportunity to explore the impacts of climate change as integral to the context of change and multiple changes informing agricultural restructuring. North-west

Victoria is the driest part of the state and current data, as well as future scenarios, represent climate changes and drying in the Mallee region.

Initial interviews conducted challenged a focus on the northern Mallee. It was hard to define the area, and indeed local definitions varied. It was more useful to simply aim to work with women and men who were in, or had been involved in, farming within the 'Mallee region'. The regional notion of the Mallee is asserted in many contexts including as a demographic statistical division, a primary production landscape, and a sociocultural regional identity that follows the geographical landscape known as the Mallee. This correlates with how Markey et al. (2010) describe the 'rural' as an identity, as well a statistical region, for example. I did not define absolute geographical boundaries for the initial and subsequent recruitment. After preliminary interviews and those with key informants, I relied on participants self-identifying as being from the Mallee region. So despite working across a large geographical region, the rural regional identity of the Mallee was well understood and confirmed in the interview work I conducted.

The benefit of being flexible with geographical boundaries informing this PhD sampling strategy is that much was learnt about the regional social and cultural identities that women and men prioritise. It also assisted with recruitment of interviewees. Further, as the research progressed I also learnt about movements within the region, e.g. from living on the farm to living and being based in regional centres, as a response to agricultural and rural restructuring. Thus the 'Mallee region' is flexible and covers a large geographical area (indeed, the Mallee goes into NSW and SA). Importantly I worked with people who identified themselves and identified others as living and farming, or having previously done so, in the Mallee region.

The Mallee region is dominated by dryland broadacre agricultural and horticultural productivity. Horticultural production follows the Murray River that supports irrigation. As I undertook initial interview work it became clearer that horticultural production supports a distinct rural identity named Sunraysia. This research did not aim to be commodity specific. Rather, interview work was exploratory and committed to *opening up the conversation* about the gendered experiences and social impacts of agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region. I wish to note though that while the Mallee region and Sunraysia intersect, the Mallee generally is associated with dryland broadacre farming.

This PhD adopts a place-based approach to developing a relevant qualitative methodological strategy (Markey, Halseth & Manson 2010). This requires an awareness of data that emerges that is specific to the type of farming or commodity. However, I took a regional approach (the Mallee 'place' being a region with a specific rural sociocultural identity) to assist with encountering diverse discourses and subjective experiences regarding agricultural and rural restructuring. However, as my sampling evolved given recruitment processes, challenges and opportunities, I mostly interviewed women and men either currently involved with or who had left dryland broadacre farming in the Mallee region due to the challenges in recruiting those involved in irrigation farming.

### ***Sampling strategy***

Miles and Huberman (1994) write how one type of qualitative sampling strategy is one that develops as fieldwork commences. The authors also describe how sampling can be 'theory-driven'. In this research both these strategies were used. I drew on the work of Haraway and Foucault to assist initial literature review work that informed and developed the research question(s). This means that the sample 'limits' (Miles & Huberman 1994) were not exactly specified in the early stages of research. Interview conversations were 'saturated' and there was a time when I finished interview work but this research sample practice did evolve: it fitted the exploratory nature and feminist epistemological intent of the work which included awkward moments and lack of clarity at times. The research 'action' indeed became messy.

A sampling strategy that works with gender difference, and seeks gendered perspectives is a strategy to connect diversity of social experience yet not make a claim for an homogenous cohort in the representation of that social experience (Grbich 2004). A challenge is understanding how to work *within* powerful discourses<sup>3</sup> of agricultural restructuring, and leverage a feminist research space to inquire into the social and powerful dynamics at work. This required research methods that involved opening the sampling strategy to critique, and being up-front about how as a researcher I too work with power, and within the discourse of agricultural restructuring. Further, reflexivity is not an add-on method within methodology.

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<sup>3</sup> This point is informed by Foucault's (1980b, p. 141) argument about power, and how power is 'always already there' therefore one can't be 'outside' power, however, this is not to say power is simply experienced as power over. Power relations include resistance (Foucault 1980b, p. 142).

Rather, there is the opportunity to write-in the 'action' (Haraway 2004) at every stage. This includes researcher responses to a purposive and snowball sampling strategy that reveals the difficulty of opening up conversations that would, in turn, answer the research questions.

In summary the initial selection criteria for participating in research became:

- women and men, including couples, currently involved in family farming in the Mallee region – broadacre and irrigation
- women and men, including couples previously involved in family farming in the Mallee region – broadacre and irrigation – and who made the decision to leave farming
- adults over 18 years.

With respect to working with couples I asserted a strong preference to interview both women and men separately however I acknowledged this is not always appropriate, nor possible. I did not define a definitive timeframe for leaving farming rather I referenced the recent drought (and the drought ended during the time of my fieldwork). The timeframe of the recent drought is not consistent as people in turn had diverse views over how long the drought had been going on. Further, many interviewees challenged my reference to 'the drought' and renamed it as recent 'drytimes' and also challenged the description of drought as a continuous decade-long event. Notwithstanding these learnings as interviews progressed, I commenced fieldwork with the understanding a drought had been occurring for at least a decade.

I was aware from previous research that there are multiple reasons for exiting farming: retirement, drought and climate change pressures, succession planning, debt pressures, for example. I explained my research interests to participants with an emphasis on interviewing those people who were leaving due to restructuring pressures, including the impact of the drought and within the context of predicted climatic changes.

In this research the gendered individual is the starting point for the interview, and from there engaging with the gendered social experiences and impacts of agricultural and rural restructuring. I assume gender difference without assuming a fixed gendered subjectivity nor categorical unity of 'men' or 'women'. Alternative starting points to focus gathering knowledge could have been a specific locality e.g. postcode, farm business unit, or a commodity. However as this research undertakes a feminist critique (with political intent) of dominant agricultural

narratives and gendered subjectivities, I selected a purposive and snowball strategy. I wanted to undertake research strategies that enforced that as a researcher I participated in multiple conversations that contextualised local and interviewee discourses. I also consider it an important issue to support validity in research: it is less likely that someone is going to recommend another person to be interviewed unless through their experience they have considered the scope of my research useful and relevant.

Purposive and snowball sampling directs that the researcher explains their research – sometimes in person, or on the phone, and I developed a one-page ‘Invitation to participate in PhD research’ brief introduction to the scope of PhD research. Through these sampling strategies the researcher is also required to develop their own story, responding to questions such as: ‘Why are you interested in this research and in the Mallee?’ I was often asked was I from a farming family or farming background. These questions reveal the ‘outsider’ status I had while developing the research sample and in turn reveal the strength of Mallee sociocultural identity.

This also indicates a critical issue that I negotiated in doing this rural research: I needed to be clear with interviewees about my research intent and respond to queries regarding my rurality during the recruitment process. Woods (2010, p. 841) describes how ‘performing’ rurality includes how the researcher negotiates multiple identity indicators:

For research with rural communities, the identities framing researcher roles include not only gender, age, ethnicity, education and so on, but also the dichotomies of insider / outsider, rural / non-rural, farmer / non-farmer that position the researcher relative to the community and are drawn on in shaping the presentation of narratives.

This discussion about rurality at work in interviews is also addressed by Pini (2005) who provides a reflexive account of the nexus of gender and rurality at work in the interview and recruitment process whereby male interviewees often asserted power over Pini as a researcher.

### ***Interview details and summary information***

I interviewed women and men who are currently farming and those who have exited farming using purposive and snowball sampling. The initial strategy was to undertake semi-structured interviews although as interviews progressed I also conducted in-depth interviews. Initially I

planned to recruit up to sixty participants through self-referral i.e. through participants responding to an advertisement or information they received about my research through a third party such as a service provider or another interviewee. Specifically, I developed a working sample frame that allowed for up to ten couples or twenty adults who are currently farming within the Mallee region. I also allowed for interviews with up to ten couples or twenty adults who have exited / left / not currently farming in the Mallee region. Further, I understood it was possible these participants would no longer reside in the Mallee region. I originally planned to work with women and men who were or who had worked in irrigation or dryland broadacre food commodity production.

Out of a final total of thirty-four interviews, twelve couples in total were interviewed where women and men were interviewed separately. This strategy is a response to local narratives in the rural agricultural dominated social context in which I was working. This can be best described as the 'togetherness' of family farming which frequently (but not always) is dominated by a heterosexual unity supporting the farm and agricultural productivity. In turn it impacts on, and is impacted by, structural adjustment processes. However, as a researcher I was careful not to assume all interviewees were heterosexual or partnered. Certainly the 'togetherness' of farming was frequently articulated by interviewees and this is a strong local farming narrative. Further, in introducing myself to interviewees upon meeting them in person I found that taking the time to tell interviewees about my background e.g. rural living and family life, as well as previous living and working in remote Australia, assisted making an important connection and relaxing the intimate and unusual nature of the interview conversation situation.

A schedule of questions was developed to guide interviews and this was included in the original submission to the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee which granted permission to undertake interview work in March 2011.

In total I undertook thirty-four interviews ranging from approximately thirty minutes to two hours. As previously mentioned, I initially completed six interviews with key informants and four preliminary interviews.

## Summary of interview details (excluding key informants)

Number of women 14

Number of men 14

### Number of interviewees **currently farming**:

Dryland broadacre 14

Irrigation 2

This number includes seven couples.

### Number of interviewees who have **left farming**:

Dryland broadacre 10

Irrigation 2

This number includes five couples.

All participants were born in Australia.

With respect to all couples who participated, no objections or questions were raised by participants regarding my request to interview women and men separately. I consider this a validation of the strategy to interview women and men separately and it confirms the highly gendered context to agricultural restructuring.

## Characteristics of those farming<sup>4</sup>

All except two participants are owners or part-owners of the family farm property.

Of the sixteen participants current farming, eight live off-farm in rural towns and commute to the farm. This number includes participants who previously lived on-farm for many years prior to deciding to move off the farm.

Four participants (two couples) are organic farming.

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<sup>4</sup> Section includes information obtained from the Short Survey results.

**Table 1 Household income levels of participants currently farming**

<b>Income bracket</b>	<b>Number of women</b>	<b>Number of men</b>
\$25,000 or less	2	1
\$25,001 – \$50,000	4	5
\$50,001 – \$75,000	1	
\$75,001 – \$100,000		1
\$100,001 – \$125,000		
\$125,001 – \$150,000	1	
\$150,001 – \$175,000		
\$175,001 – \$200,000		
\$200,001 +	1	
Missing		

**Table 2 Age of participants currently farming**

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Number of women</b>	<b>Number of men</b>
18 – 24 years		
25 – 34 years	3	1
35 – 44 years	1	2
45 – 54 years	2	1
55 – 64 years	3	3
65 – 74 years		
75+ years		
Missing		

### **Characteristics of those who have left farming<sup>5</sup>**

Eight participants who have left farming remain living in the region where they had farmed. The remaining four participants left the region.

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<sup>5</sup> Section includes information obtained from the Short Survey results.

Four interviewees who have left farming are retirees. Two participants continue to work in farming as agricultural labourers.

Two interviewees (a couple) lease the land they farmed.

Two interviewees (a couple) retain some land ownership currently not in production.

The number of years since participants had left farming varied with all except one participant leaving farming within the last decade. It was unclear exactly when one participant left farming.

Additionally one female participant identified as having never been a 'farmer's wife' as she described her situation as one whereby she had developed her relationship with her husband while he was making the decision to leave farming.

**Table 3 Household income levels of participants who have left farming**

<b>Income bracket</b>	<b>Number of women</b>	<b>Number of men</b>
\$25,000 or less		
\$25,001 – \$50,000	2	3
\$50,001 – \$75,000	1	1
\$75,001 – \$100,000	2	2
\$100,001 – \$125,000		
\$125,001 – \$150,000		
\$150,001 – \$175,000		
\$175,001 – \$200,000		
\$200,001 +		
Missing		0

**Table 4 Age of participants who have left farming**

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Number of women</b>	<b>Number of men</b>
18 – 24 years		
25 – 34 years		
35 – 44 years	2	2
45 – 54 years	1	
55 – 64 years	1	1
65 – 74 years		2
75+ years	1	1
Missing		0

## ***Recruitment***

Interviews commenced with key informants in February 2011. This timing coincided with an extreme rainfall event in Mildura and surrounding regions in north-west Victoria. There was substantial flooding severely impacting irrigation farming and this compounded the stresses people were managing due to the recent drought period and subsequent impacts on access to water as well as declining terms of trade.

I found it much easier to recruit people currently involved in broadacre farming. It was more difficult to recruit people involved in irrigation farming. The feedback I continued to receive was that irrigators were stressed by the impacts of the flooding on top of long-term drought.

Further to this was the fact that I found it difficult to recruit women and men who had exited farming – either irrigation or dryland broadacre farming – using snowball sampling. One couple I interviewed who had left irrigation farming offered to assist me by asking friends who had also exited irrigation farming: yet the outcome was that ‘they don’t want to talk about it’ and this feedback was repeated by others I met in the region as I tried to recruit participants.

By April 2011 I had completed six key informant and four preliminary interviews. By July 2011 I had completed a further twelve interviews. At this point I became frustrated at the slow rate at which I was recruiting participants and the difficulties I was having in recruiting people who had

left farming. I learnt that it was difficult for people to ask others who had left farming if they wish to be interviewed about their experiences of leaving. This was also the case with those currently farming. As one interviewee described to me, they knew people who had left farming but it was difficult to ask them as they themselves have remained farming. As a researcher I found that opening up the conversation about the social experiences and impacts of restructuring also required coming to terms with the silences, local taboos and the things people do not wish to talk about.

Further, people asked me if I wanted to interview retirees. Initially I did not want to as two preliminary interviews were with retirees, and I had revised the interviews to conclude that their decision to leave and experiences were not aligned with the scope of the research. That is, they had not left farming due to the pressures of restructuring demanding an unwanted or stressful exit. However, at the end of my fieldwork I did go on to interview two retirees and they were recruited through snowball sampling. They indeed described substantial social impacts of agricultural and rural restructuring and alerted me to the fact that 'retirement' is highly complex. Further, the gendered social experience of leaving farming, for retirees, warrants further research beyond the scope of this PhD.

Initially I displayed an A4 'Invitation to participate in PhD research' at two organisations. As no one had responded to these notices I had not pursued further advertising early on in my recruitment efforts. However, in August 2011 I advertised through a number of organisations, including through Australian Women In Agriculture (AWIA). Local Mildura ABC received a copy of my Invitation which led to the radio station contacting me and I was interviewed in October 2011. These advertising efforts did result in me being contacted by participants which in turn led to further interviews via snowball sampling. I conducted final interviews in February 2012.

An outcome of my recruitment strategies is that I have overwhelmingly worked with people either involved with or who have left dryland broadacre farming. As I also worked with two participant interviewees currently involved in irrigation farming and two who have left, I acknowledge differences in farming style when necessary.

## ***Sample size and saturation***

This research aims to understand dynamic gender relations and learn why and how people are leaving farming, as well as how people are managing restructuring pressures including those who remain farming. As I undertook interviews I listened carefully to how people were defining other people, as well as themselves. This technique informed the sample size I ended with and the changes in recruitment strategies as I progressed with the research.

After completing a total of thirty-four interviews it became clear that no other interviews were necessary as no new information was forthcoming. At times I found the topic of research quite difficult to manage. During the course of the year I completed the interviews I learned much and was quite surprised and distressed to hear on many occasions about how difficult it was for people to manage agricultural restructuring. This may seem surprising; after all, there is a range of literature describing industry restructuring, the out-migration from rural communities and the social impacts. There is a learning however, that occurs during the course of the research process that distinguishes the activity of literature review work and the research experience of completing interviews and the emotional responses to hearing and engaging with people's stories.

In interviews, conversation often focussed on the highly gendered local social order and many issues arose around what could be discussed and what was difficult to discuss. The plan for semi-structured interviews was just that – a plan – and as interviews progressed some interviews were much more in-depth. I needed to conduct interviews while being respectful of local social dynamics including gender dynamics. As these dynamics are learnt during the course of conducting interviews – notwithstanding initial efforts to orientate the scope of research – this re-orientation is negotiated with the 'researcher subjectivity' (Fine et al. 2003 p.195) that may also accept, challenge, contradict the local conversation given feminist and political intent. Interviewees also express multiple positions in the conversation that demarcates the 'interviews' as an insight into gendered subjectivities and the gendered rural social order.

'Saturation' means that point at which no new themes emerge from the data (Alston & Bowles 2003). Defining sample limits and developing recruitment strategies has been described in this

section as dynamic processes: it includes researcher responses to opportunities, managing the limitations to research capacity and design, as well as responses to the content of interviews and conversations, and the latter are discussed in detail in the next section.

### ***Interviews, conversations and discourses***

Two sets of questions guided interviews: one for interviews with people currently farming and the other for interviews with people who had left farming (see Appendices 2 and 3 for copies of suggested question prompts). All interviews commenced by asking interviewees to talk about how they became involved in farming. After initial interview work with key informants and preliminary interviewees, this question was developed as it easily led to conversation and relaxed both participant and myself. The set questions developed as a guide were often used. However, as interview work progressed, some of the interviews became more in-depth and unstructured. While it was useful to have prepared questions to ensure certain topics were covered during the interview, not all questions were directly asked if the question seemed inappropriate or irrelevant or if the interviewee prioritised alternative conversation topics.

As I completed more interviews and became familiar with a number of issues, I was able to rely less on the formality of following written questions and it became easier to sustain a conversation flow with participants. Hesse-Biber (2007, p. 118) describes in-depth interviews as seeking 'to understand the "lived experiences" of the individual. We are interested in getting at the "subjective" understanding an individual brings to a given situation or set of circumstances. In-depth interviews are *issue-oriented*.' As a feminist researcher it became less important to cover all the questions and prompts initially developed, and more important to work with the issues of importance to participants, and the subject matter they were comfortable talking about. Consequently, the PhD feminist interview practice developed and adapted as interviews progressed.

All interviews were conducted in-person with the exception of three completed by phone. All thirty-four interviews completed were digitally recorded with permission from the interviewee. The majority of interviews were conducted in the participant's home. I provided the option of organising an alternative space although it is my experience that participants seemed quite comfortable with being interviewed at home, and for many interviewees this made organising

an interview time easier given the distance they lived from a regional centre where I would potentially organise an interview time and space. Given the sensitive nature of interview conversation, I agree with Manderson et al. (2006) that the choice of interview site affects the interview dynamic, and in this instance working in an interviewee's home supported the interview focussed on disclosure of personal experience. The informality of the home setting eased some of the unusual and formal parameters of the research interview method.

Prior to commencing the interview, all participants were provided with an Explanatory Statement that outlined the scope of research and detailed guidelines with respect to the use and storage of data. The terms of interview privacy were also explained and this was an issue frequently checked by interviewees prior to commencing the interview, highlighting how important it was to interviewees that they would not be identified given the sensitive nature of the conversation. In all interviews I have used pseudonyms and de-identified transcripts prior to importing into NVivo. For example, I have removed mention of town names from transcripts.

In accordance with Monash University Human Ethics Committee approval, all interviewees provided written consent. I also asked interviewees to complete a Short Survey at the end of the interview to assist with collecting basic demographic, income and education information.

In interviews with couples, the interviews were conducted separately although I did not request a specific order i.e. woman first, man second. I was more concerned with being flexible and working in with people's availability. A consequence of interviewing couples is that the interview with the second partner is always informed by the content of the interview with the first. A critique of interviewing partnered women and men separately is that the interviewer does not have the opportunity to observe the couples' interaction (Reinharz 1992). I prioritised an interview method in support of the individual telling their story. While this includes a focus on the issue of gender relations and managing change, I make the distinction between a method to support observation of a relationship and a method to support the exploration of rural masculinities and femininities in a gendered industry and social order – from a subjective perspective. Alternatively I could have conducted focus groups which have been described as an empowering experience for participants. For example, Pini (2002) describes her focus group work with women in an agriculture sector as a source of empowerment for participants that follows feminist epistemological and methodological principles. However, as Fontana and Frey

(2003) point out, focus group work is not always appropriate for exploring particularly sensitive issues.

As previously mentioned, early on during my first year of candidature I tested the first survey for the broader project to which my PhD study is attached. One of the participants who completed the survey made the comment to me that what is important is to understand how people are 'feeling' about farming. This alerted me to the importance of 'feeling' in agricultural restructuring and I incorporated the issue into a question in the interviews I undertook. The very fact the comment was made aside from the survey also emphasised to me that one-on-one interviews were a more strategic method than undertaking a survey with respect to answering my research questions.

This issue of the place of feeling – and in turn the need for the researcher to *listen* – is also raised by Devault (2004) who considers how the interview facilitates and values 'everyday "women's talk"' in contrast to undertaking a survey (and I extend that to working with women and men and undertaking a gender analysis). Further, I also draw on feminist methodology and a feminist rural research trajectory that explores women's *experiences* of their position in the industry (Alston 1995; Sachs 1983). Hence I utilise feminist methodological commitments to exploring women – and men's – lived experiences of industry and managing change. I understand the household to be an acceptable site for conversations / interviews that explore how people are feeling about the changes they have experienced and are currently managing, as well as hopes and aspirations for the future. This reveals my attempt to work with the public / private binary opposition at work that so often – but not always – contains reflection, articulation of feelings, objections and expression of vulnerabilities in the domestic realm (Farbotko & McGregor 2010).

Upon reviewing fieldnotes, I noted that interviews were overwhelmingly held around the kitchen table. Many interviews were held after-hours in the evening. This is indicative of the one-on-one and quite intimate nature of the interview context where feelings and emotions are explored around managing restructuring and life changes. The interview space itself assists a type of conversation – in this case supporting articulating social experiences and reflecting upon relationships.

I did conduct one interview with a male farmer on the farm. I drove out to the farm to be immediately greeted with the compliment that I had managed to successfully follow directions and find the farm. As I prepared to start the interview, the interviewee was leaning on his Ute and it was a few minutes before I realised this was the site where the interview was to take place. In fact this went on to be an interview where upon reflection I worried about 'the farm' dominating the conversation. In retrospect I do think the location of the interview counts for much in supporting a particular line of inquiry and exploring certain issues. Certainly this issue of 'the farm' dominating conversations (including my conversation) is a matter that will be further discussed in the findings chapters.

Hesse-Biber (2007, p. 118) writes how 'Feminists are particularly concerned with getting at experiences that are often hidden.' Feminist research has a long tradition of working to ensure women's experiences are included in research practice and that women's experiences are validated to ensure women are both empowered and equally included in society. This is the modern tradition of feminist advocacy for social inclusion and equality of opportunity for women. In this PhD research I continue this tradition with a gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring and my method includes interview work with both women and men. This expands feminist methodology and includes working with the multiplicity of subjectivities that may or may not experience power or feel empowered. Further, subjective experiences are complex and diverse within the discourses of managing change and restructuring. My feminist intent is to work with men in order to understand and challenge the gendered social order integrating neoliberal industry restructuring. As Connell (2005, p. 1808) describes it is vital to include men (and boys) in gender equity reform given the benefits of the 'patriarchal dividend'.

While the interview strategy I selected is not an overt challenge or request to male participants to support gender equality, it is part of a work in progress. My aim is to conduct an inquiry in order to understand more about gendered perspectives on the issues, and to work towards equal opportunity in industry restructuring and managing change. I am unable to assume 'women' and 'men' categorically purport the same 'perspective' and the nuances of a gender analysis involve both overt challenges to the gender order during interviews as well as through analysis post-interview.

What is 'hidden' informs this line of inquiry and interview methods: the literature exposes gaps in knowledge regarding the contemporary experience of agricultural restructuring and structural readjustment with particular reference to 'farm exits'. The ongoing social experience of restructuring includes rural restructuring and changing rural communities as well as the decision to leave farming. Existing knowledge identifies gaps in scholarship relating to the impacts on social relationships including the impacts for women and men and gender relations. What is also 'hidden' is exposed during interview work. This may include finding out what one can ask or not ask as a researcher, what people are willing to talk about, and questions interviewees ask of the researcher which identify critical issues. In the interview situation assumptions are made that draw on the local social context – and this increases with interview work. Importantly the method of semi-structured interviews in this research supported learning about the diverse social experiences of those farming and those who have left farming and revealed the complexities of how to define an 'exit'. Moreover, those participants leaving or having left farming identify important issues impacting on those who are currently farming. Thus gender analysis of restructuring examining the complexities of social experience brings together knowledge and discourses of restructuring in the context of change while remaining respectful of social differences.

### ***Methods for researching the context of climate change***

In his work on farmer adaptation to climate risks and understanding vulnerability, Cradock-Henry (2008) notes that in his methodology he makes no mention of climate change in interviews and instead the focus is 'agricultural decision-making' at the 'farm-level'. A key informant advised me not to directly ask interviewees about climate change. This caution and advice regarding talking about climate change makes sense in terms of the local discourses I encountered regarding views on and experiences of climate change. For example, after completing my first cycle of coding I had the two codes 'talk climate variability not climate change' and 'cycles rather than climate change and local knowledge'. I found it difficult to accept this advice to not talk about climate change given that climate change predictions informed the research question and scope of research. To what extent did I want to downplay my research interests and the associations between issues I had made, whilst wanting to be respectful of local discourses around climate variability, including drought?

It is important to note that my engagement with climate change is also evolving. Similar to the work of Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2011), I was keen to use the interview as an opportunity to engage with interviewees over the issue of how they feel about climate change and what they know about climate change. This was driven by a political intent to promote discussion about climate change and I went into the research with a clear understanding of mitigation needs, global responsibilities and the gendered social experiences and impacts of managing climate change adaptation (Terry 2009a). Here a researcher's agenda meets local discourses regarding climate change and, in contrast to the advice of the key informant, I did proceed to ask interviewees about climate change on those occasions when it seemed reasonable to do so.

## ***Interview analysis***

### **Interview transcription**

Initial interviews with key informants and preliminary interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The rest of the interviews were externally transcribed. Prior to commencing analysis of the interviews I re-listened to the original audio file and checked the transcript for any obvious discrepancies. I focussed on ensuring the transcription text represented the speaker's original emphasis. I developed transcription notes to guide my interpretation of the spoken word and drew on the work of Poland (2001) to assist with the textual representation of changes in word emphasis and pauses, for example. Transcribed text is overwhelmingly verbatim with the exception of omitting some 'um's' and incomplete words on occasions to ensure easy readability and avoid any confusion in the final representation of interviewee and researcher dialogue.

Transcription is a highly complex activity and that the transcribed interview is not simply the 'raw' data: in the process of transcribing and reviewing transcribed interviews there is the opportunity for the researcher to make decisions regarding what is included or excluded in the transcribed document. While interview analysis typically focusses on what is included or excluded in the final representation of original data in findings (Fontana & Frey 2003) there also remains the important issue of the protocols guiding the production of the transcribed interview as text. Key to my transcription method has been the process of listening to every interview more than once including checking transcripts to ensure speaker intent is

appropriately represented. As Devault (2004) argues 'listening' is not only an activity that occurs at the time of doing an interview but also occurs in later replays of interviews including for transcription and checking transcriptions. (Re)listening is thus a component to the method of interview analysis.

## **Thematic analysis**

I have undertaken a thematic analysis of interview transcripts. I used NVivo software to code interview transcripts. Further, I used NVivo to code fieldnotes and the reflections I included during my research in my 'Log'.<sup>6</sup> Fieldnotes and reflections were then attached to the individual interviews in NVivo. Following Ely et al. (1997, p. 162) I approached the process of coding interviews as developing 'meaning units' that assist 'the analysing / interpreting interplay' (1997, p. 160). So while a theme is the outcome of coding (Saldana 2009) codes themselves reflected descriptive data, critical analysis and reflections on methods used.

As Ely et al. (1997, p. 206) write – and drawing on their earlier (1991) work – in thematic analysis 'themes' are 'a statement of meaning that (1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact.' I developed both of these types of themes. This also correlates with the political and advocacy intent imbued in the research feminist methodology which is in turn *negotiated* in the 'action' of research. Thus the interpretation and analysis activity of interview text draws on the value of re-listening and re-reading interviews to assist analysis. This process contributes to reflexivity in the method of analysis that acknowledges 'the *active* role' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 80) the researcher has in developing the themes selected for the final representation of findings. Further, it is a consequence of working with women and men currently farming as well as those who have left farming that I have generated themes that include using 'latent thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 84) that is to say that working with people who have left farming, for example, highlights issues for people currently farming. This has resulted in also working across the interview data to consider not just what is 'not said' in interviews but how

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<sup>6</sup> The 'Log' I kept as a Word document where I deposited fieldnotes, any thoughts and reflections, responses to literature, responses to emailed correspondence, as well as notes on daily activities, meetings and phone calls, for example. In short I used the Log to assist mapping my work and ideas.

silences reveal the dominant discourse of industry restructuring as well as the gendered social experiences and impacts of restructuring. There is an intertextuality in reading across interviews (and in re-listening and in writing-up findings) that provides knowledge about subjective experiences that provides the opportunity to revise and critique the gender order that is embodied industry restructuring.

### **Using the theory of discourse**

Foucault's notion of discourse<sup>7</sup> is often used in critical discourse analysis including overtly feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (Baxter 2003). Yet I wish to make clear the distinction that while this PhD draws on Foucault's theoretical notion of discourse to assist interview analysis, this PhD is not undertaking a sociolinguistic discourse analysis. Certainly there is excellent feminist discourse analysis scholarship (Baxter 2003; Lazar 2005). Further, discourse analysis – which is incredibly diverse and includes Conversational Analysis (CA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) – does have a commitment to connecting analysis of language to social structures and issues as well as political issues (Baxter 2003; Fairclough 1995; Gee 2011; Lazar 2005). However I stopped short of viewing the interviews as text for the purposes of a sociolinguistic textual analysis. I believe it is useful to draw on some of the methodological priorities addressed in discourse analysis without it being necessary to undertake a socio-linguistic analysis of interviews or fully adopt discourse analysis as my methodological framework (Bazeley 2007).

### **Challenges**

Initially when I began coding I worried about having three sets of data – those currently farming, exited and public policy documents. However, I have realised together these assist interpretation and analysis. What is spoken about, for example in interviews with those who have exited farming assists policy analysis. Here I am drawing attention to the complexities of tying together sources of information about gender and how it matters, given the diverse social experiences of managing industry restructuring or structural adjustment. At times gender is overtly referred to, in interview conversation, as important. At other times the information

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 5 Theory for further discussion of the concept of discourse.

gathered may appear gender-neutral – and the (previous) Victorian Government agricultural policy and the work of the Productivity Commission are examples. However, at all times social experiences, subjectivities and relations remain gendered. Hence, gender analysis in this research as a methodology, is focussed on assisting locating gender, gender relations and gendered subjectivities.

### **Gender analysis of interviews**

Expression of gender difference in interviews is revealed through:

- following thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) in analysing interviews considering what is said and what is not said by women and men
- considering phrases and expressions that are repeated across the interviews and the gendered context to their usage
- interviewee descriptions of their roles and responsibilities
- gendered perspectives with respect to interviewee priorities during interviews
- gender differences expressed between interviewer and interviewee
- expression of femininities and masculinities including relationships with social structures.

When working with couples, seeking ‘gendered perspectives’ means one person goes first, and so by the time I meet and interview the partner I have been introduced to the family and some issues. This impacts on what I ask a participant.

I found it hard to get some participants to reflect on their relationships and how they support their work (paid or non-paid). During some interviews I did use the discourse of farm viability to encourage interview dialogue relevant to my research questions. An example of this is how on at least two occasions when interviewing men currently involved in farming, the conversation was very focussed on commodities and economics and I was quite unsure how to return the conversation to my focus on discussing the relationships that support farming.

As I progressed interviews and I became informed of the local discourse that still predominantly describes farmers as male, I sought out an interview with a ‘woman farmer’. As

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe sampling can involve seeking 'politically important cases'. Further I also interviewed organic farmers through snowball sampling.

Interview analysis and practising reflexivity can also express the dynamic political and advocacy intent of the research. Again, as articulated in feminist standpoint epistemology, the research process involves moving back and forth between methodology and methods as feminist reflexivity demands (Harding 2004b; Sprague & Kobryniewicz 2004). There is a deeply personal response to the interview work and the gendered perspectives revealed to this researcher and it is in this space – of responsiveness – that advocacy and political intent of the research is also articulated.

Comparing the priorities and conversations of interviews with male and female partners is an opportunity to gain insights into gender relations positioned against / within the industry context of family farming (and whether farming or exited family farming is a reference point in this study). There is also the potential for gender analysis to assist understanding individual narratives that express rural masculinities and femininities and within this aspect of gender analysis, relations of power too can be explored. Thus gender analysis here informs research into changing gender relations and this exploration refers back to gendered narratives that confirm, contest and accept the rural gender order, and agricultural restructuring.

## ***Conclusion***

Existing knowledge, methodological and theoretical considerations influenced the decision to work with those currently farming and those who had exited farming. Guided by feminist methodology in this research, I have developed a strategy for undertaking a gender analysis to explore how dominant rural masculinities impact on men involved in agriculture as well as exploring rural femininities and women's experiences of industry restructuring and managing multiple challenges. Early on in this PhD research I adopted a critical feminist epistemological framework influenced by post-structuralist theory, particularly the work of Foucault and Haraway. Haraway's notion of 'situated knowledge' is useful to assist making connections between powerful discourses that reveal and challenge the patrilineal rural-agricultural gender order and gender relations. The next chapter will now explore the theoretical framework guiding this PhD research.



## **Chapter 5 Theory: gender, gender relations and embodied subjectivity**

### ***Introduction***

In articulating theory Foucault describes:

The role for theory today seems to me to be just this: not to formulate the global systematic theory which holds everything in place, but to analyse the specificity of mechanisms of power, to locate the connections and extensions, to build little by little a strategic knowledge. (Foucault 1980b, p. 145)

The theoretical frameworks used in this PhD research support feminist epistemology and explore gender, gender differences and gender relations. This chapter discusses how the gendered power dynamics at work in a rural context are central to the use of theory: 'theory' is a webbing of insights with an overt political and advocacy intent to research social experience and specifically critique the gendered social experience of agricultural and rural restructuring.

As noted in the previous chapter, the relationship between theory and methodology is significant. A consideration of this relationship continues in this chapter's focus on relevant concepts drawn from feminist theory including recent developments in theorising intersectionality which critique a categorical focus on gender. This chapter will also discuss the concept of embodied subjectivity and other theoretical resources used that assist analysis of gender difference and gender relations with reference to theorising 'the rural' and gender relations re/making a social order.

This chapter also outlines the use of Foucault's ideas of technologies of power and the discursive production of knowledge to assist the PhD research process. Foucault's emphasis on theorising discourse is useful to assist understanding of the significance of undertaking research within a discursive context with multiple issues and experiences, but I do not wish to split the action of research to emphasise the difference between 'industry' and 'lived experience'. Rather, the layers to research representation of an issue and indeed representing social change involve being both responsive to and respectful of the diversity of social experience.

Thus this thesis also draws upon feminist theorising of reflexivity in the research process and ethical considerations. Drawing upon Haraway's notion of situated knowledge, the theoretical

priorities are mapping a time and a place, and acknowledging the importance of social differences and diversity of social experience. This can contribute to an increasing awareness of the social experiences of industry restructuring in the context of major changes and challenges. Wherein lies the opportunity to work towards creating new opportunities and promoting social equity and gender equality given substantial rural and agricultural restructuring.

Thus I adopt a critical-constructivist feminist theoretical framework. Neumann (1994, p. 67) describes how critical social science aims to ‘empower people’. Further, feminist research involves a ‘Sensitivity to how relations of gender and power permeate all spheres of social life’ (Neumann 1994, p. 73). This epistemological framework has informed the development and framing of the research question: the significance of ‘gender’ is immediately acknowledged, and gendered social relations are viewed as dynamic.

Feminism is not a homogenous theoretical stance, and there are diverse feminist research practices (Olesen 2003). Post-structuralist theory is useful for emphasising the workings of multiple discourses in the production of knowledge and embodied subjectivity (McLaren 2002): thus I align this research with a theoretical perspective that is concerned with ‘language, meaning and subjectivity’ (Weedon 1987). Discourse is the way knowledge is temporal, and consolidated together with social practices (Weedon 1987).<sup>1</sup> Language locates subjective experiences. Discourse, as extensively researched by Foucault, is a theoretical tool that can assist this research into gendered social relations and how power works / shifts / is contested and resisted (Foucault 1990). The historical and social context to embodied subjectivity is acknowledged and researched. Importantly, it enables alternative scenarios to emerge as the current context and experience is revealed as a specific moment (McLaren 2002). Thus there is hope – and this indicates a personal agenda to use the research process as an empowering experience (Parker, Fook & Pease 1999).

Social relations are not static. This PhD draws on theory that helps to develop a research practice, and represent the outcomes, in a specific time and place. Theoretically, ‘discourse’ and ‘embodied subjectivity’ also assist understanding how *including* diverse relations and

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<sup>1</sup> See also Hall (2001).

experiences as a feature of agricultural and rural restructuring challenges agricultural and rural restructuring metanarratives (McLaren 2002).

Gender as a category of experience is now widely understood to be one indicator of identity and there are others including class, race, sexuality, age (Olesen 2003). The literature review made it clear that the social context to agricultural, the rural and climate change is gendered. As defined in critical theory, the researcher clearly has an agenda that shapes the research process (Morris 2006). Further, this agenda gets reworked in response to what is 'found out' in the research process: feminist political and advocacy intent is challenged in the conversation flow on multiple occasions. What gets fixed here in writing theory is knowledge making sense of the action of research, and how to reframe finding out processes in a way that lets the reader know I am acutely aware representation is subjective and subjectivities are diverse. This is an alternative reading of industry restructuring to promote the importance of considering the dynamic gender relations in agricultural restructuring and in leaving farming.

### ***Feminist epistemology and theory***

In this PhD I am undertaking a gender analysis into women and men's social experiences in managing agricultural and rural research in the Mallee region in the context of multiple changes. The research focuses on gender relations; that is, relationships between women and men and the positions they occupy, the opportunities they have, and the social equity matters that are embedded and embodied in the industry restructuring process.

The tradition of feminist research has resisted the powerful implications of a positivist-inspired research trajectory that emphasises research findings without attention to the role of the researcher and their beliefs in the research questions pursued and the production of knowledge. Feminist epistemology theorists have debated the necessity of distinguishing between theory and methodology and argued for research revisions that consider the politics of representation and the politics of research practice as well as research as process (Sprague & Kobryniewicz 2004). This has also involved substantial critique of the subject-object relationship as traditionally expressed in theory, and promoted reflexive research practices. Feminist epistemological concerns promote ethical research practices that are empowering for women and important for transformative social action that improves the position of women in society

which also involves increasing opportunities for women. Researcher reflexivity in the action of research is as much a theoretical matter as a methodological priority. Thus this research is explicitly concerned with exploring social justice matters and issues in developing the scope of research and the exploratory nature of the inquiry into gender relations composing, challenging, affirming and therefore changing industry social experiences.

Further, my theoretical emphasis is on the plurality of social experiences and is a commitment to working with diverse people, with a categorical focus on gender and gender equality issues in exploring gender relations. There is a commitment to connect different experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring in a move to highlight an objection to injustices and challenges operating within industry discourses that will not admit nor confront the outcomes for social relationships and families managing and reworking industry change. This critical reflexivity and political intent is not intended to separate the 'researcher' from those with whom they have been fortunate to work. In the research process political intent can shift – indeed has shifted – in response to the research work, and this informs the research findings.

This chapter explores the importance of researching 'gender' and how gender relations are important in understanding the changes and adaptations taking place in conjunction with industry restructuring. This PhD research prioritises a focus on gender relations in order to improve understanding of, and to challenge, inequitable industry embodiment. Industry is a powerful networking of subjectivities and discourses lived and imagined at any given time.

### **Feminist standpoint theory and situated knowledge**

In considering feminist epistemology and the influence of feminist theory in assisting the scope of this PhD research and strategies to support analysis, it is useful to consider two major feminist epistemological streams of thought: feminist standpoint theory and situated knowledge.

Harding describes epistemology as "a theory of knowledge" (Harding quoted in Hesse-Biber (2004)). There is a historical context to standpoint theory which is a feminist epistemological tradition that has grown since the 1970s: indeed, as Harding describes it is pertinent to now acknowledge that there is a plurality of standpoint *theories* (Harding 2004a) working to assist the theoretical and methodological complexities of articulating and researching women's

experiences. Harding (2004a, p. 12), in an edited text that revises feminist standpoint theory, ends her introductory essay by asking the question 'How should one think about the role of experience in the production of knowledge?' Feminist standpoint theory was influenced by Marxism and stimulated research examining women's experiences with the political intent to promote a marginalised group's consciousness. Women are themselves a source of a unique knowledge that is in turn the very knowing critical to lead to social transformation and challenge the dominant group (Harding 2004a, 2004b; Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser 2004).

Thus standpoint theory insists women and those who are marginalised can influence research agendas (research '*for*' those people who are marginalised) and critically, knowledge production is acknowledged as socially and historically situated. This standpoint of the marginalised knower is empowered as a major contributor to the production of feminist knowledge, and this political context and act (research as political process) redefines the production of knowledge where a renewed 'strong objectivity' admits and works with *new social possibilities* established by those 'starting points of thought' grounded in 'the experience and lives of marginalized peoples' (Harding 2004b).

Similar to Harding, Haraway (1988) interrogates the scientific tradition in knowledge production and argues how objectivity is a knowledge-making tradition or 'vision' that denies the 'violence' of the politics of how knowledge is established and framed. This is also known as the 'God trick' – meaning the research view re-presented omits the story or mapping of the researcher's power and the power of research. Haraway's (1988, p. 581) assertion that 'Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*' offers an alternative feminist practice to challenge the biased and masculinist political act of representing knowledge as out-of-view to the reader or subject as object. On this latter point Haraway continues a feminist theoretical trajectory demanding the exposure of the power and gender relations built into scientific research practices where binary oppositions are serving a type of knowledge-making whereby the 'knower' is nowhere to be found in final research results that compose knowledge. This is a critical feminist insight in discussing useful theoretical approaches to political options available to researchers and the relationships formed during the research process – issues Smith (2004) and Oakley (1981/1988) have also discussed especially with reference to sociology and how the notion of objectivity effectively splits the knower and known (Smith 2004).

Haraway goes on to caution against developing other / othering theoretical binaries in the scramble for alternative theoretical positionings that support admitting to the politics of location in research and gender politics. As Haraway (1988, p. 585) writes, re-visioning involves a research 'practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction'. This is about the importance of the right to critique as much as about ensuring one binary doesn't get replaced with another that again causes social exclusion. Haraway (2004, p. 234) in turn goes on to question a focus on the politics of representation and reflexivity to offer the notion of 'Diffraction, the production of difference patterns' to assist critiquing gender relations. Location is not so much a categorical focus on gender and class and race and ethnicity – and the researcher's political position in knowledge production – but rather, as Haraway (2004, p. 235) explains, a critical consideration of 'specific, located practices, some of which are global in their location.' Haraway also argues the need to understand gender as relational.

This discussion of feminist standpoint theory and situated knowledge introduces the reader to some key issues that will be discussed throughout this chapter: first, that the theoretical matter of researching lived experience needs to include a consideration of the how the subject is theorised *in relationship to* the political intent at work in the research process and in analysis of the relationship between the individual and social structures. Researching 'lived experience' is not an ontological given in this critical-constructivist theoretical paradigm. Articulating social 'experiences' needs theorising as well as representing 'gender' and undertaking a 'gender analysis'. Weaving together theoretical influences in this chapter I hope to intersect useful strategies that contribute to a political representation of discourses of industry restructuring and a context of change that re(works) gender orders and gendered subjectivities. After all it is my hope – and this is where I draw on feminist standpoint theory and situated knowledge – that gender relations are open to change and made possible by building on research that is able to articulate a feminist politics of lived experience.

### **Intersectionality and the category of gender**

Feminist theory is overwhelmingly concerned with understanding women's position in society and creating opportunities for women. This involves much theoretical attention to 'gender' and gender relations as issues to focus research and analysis in order to engender social change and

promote equality for women, and positive social relationships for women and men and between women and men. As mentioned in the introduction, feminism is diverse – there are feminisms – and so consequently there is a plethora of feminist theories informing social research. I now consider the specific issue of research focussed on ‘gender’ as a priority category. This categorical focus is expressed in femininities and masculinities, as well as gender relations which are priority social issues informing the scope of research inquiring into the gendered social experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring in the context of change.

A singular focus of feminist research on ‘gender’ has been substantially critiqued over the years by feminist theorists including within feminist standpoint theories. I now review this debate with a particular focus on the theoretical concept of intersectionality to guide feminist research.

Intersectionality as a feminist epistemological and political strategy also informing methodology (Phoenix & Pattynama 2006) developed in response to feminist critiques of research focused on the categories of ‘gender’ and ‘women’, and the politics of excluding the complex and dynamic lived experiences, inequalities and priorities of many women (Bryant & Pini 2011; Ludvig 2006; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006). Feminist theorising of intersectionality continues long-held epistemological concerns of interrogating the politics of research practice and rejecting homogenising theoretical traditions that may be harmful to the research relationship, essentialise ‘subjects’ and distort representations of lived experience and social structures.

I recognise that in this research the focus on gender relations is aligned with a strategic use of categories – in this case a priority focus on gender – for political purposes (McCall 2005). Yet while many authors assert that intersectionality is a critical feminist methodological issue it remains inseparable from epistemological concerns. Further, it is also an ontological consideration: the subject is stable and remains available to be known through a research process grounded in categorical tensions even if categories may be deconstructed or challenged. I argue the emphasis on intersectionality as a methodological matter is a response to the challenge of transitioning theory into practice. While I agree it is a critical feminist research task to commit to providing insights into the everyday complexities of numerous social categories and categorical associations, I argue there is still much value in prioritising a

research focus on gender if indeed that research priority – and category – is substantiated by other aspects of the research process i.e. findings, and does not exclude attending to working with the priorities women and men we work with express. I am concerned intersectionality problematises the ‘category’ to support analysis rather than drawing attention to the politics of representation (Lather 1993) and what follows a researcher’s responsibilities to those they work with given the conversations that ensue.

Intersectionality builds on situated knowledge and other feminist epistemological resources. Yet I am hesitant about a focus on the politics of the categories of choice rather than on the politics of research revealed as process, including *the use* of categories in the research process and the *representation* of concluding thoughts. On this latter point Ludvig (2006) offers important insights: Ludvig (2006, p. 246) poses that a difficulty for applied intersectionality is that ‘the list of differences is endless or even seemingly indefinite. It is impossible to take into account *all* the differences that are significant at any given moment.’ Ludvig also argues the need to consider which differences are recognised. I argue this point returns intersectionality to a feminist epistemological check on not only the ‘how’ of research but the ‘why’ (Hesse-Biber, Leavy & Yaiser 2004) and the need for researcher reflexivity.

Bryant and Pini (2011) in a recent publication, *Gender and Rurality*, connect the notions of rurality and intersectionality to argue how gender can work as a paramount consideration in research also attending to the multiple categories of Indigeneity, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability and ageing at work in rural contexts. The authors are keen to emphasise the workings of ‘compounding categories’ (Bryant & Pini 2011, p. 11) and that the challenge is to develop intersectionality as a methodological approach. The authors achieve this through their careful mapping of their research processes and thus demonstrate that a consideration of rurality and gender involves embracing diversity to assist a revision of rural femininities and masculinities and the rural gender order.

In their Conclusion Bryant and Pini emphasise how, in order to understand rural subjectivities and optimise the research process whereby matters of social inclusion and exclusion are (re)worked in a shifting rural context, both the theory of intersectionality and research practice is assisted by considering embodiment, emotions and place. Indeed, Bryant and Pini describe a diversity of social experiences and locations, and embodied subjectivities, including the

researcher's, in rural contexts. The authors incorporate reflexivity into their research practice and, in their chapters considering the workings of gender and Indigeneity or gender and disability, for example, they reveal how intersectionality assists their rural research by intimately connecting their research practice with the people they work with, the conversations that flow in this time, space, and the politics of Bryant and Pini's location as authors-rural researchers.

I find Bryant and Pini's discussion of intersectionality useful as researchers need a starting point even if it immediately is challenged, and a focus on compounding categories in conjunction with working with embodied subjectivities is a theoretical guide assisting the researchers to explain the political intent inherent in their rural research. The focus of research and discussion is also able to explore opportunities as well as constraints for rural women and men. I will now argue that this discussion of intersectionality, and thus this research, is assisted by theorising gender, gender relations and embodied subjectivity.

### **Critical reflexivity, representation and validity**

In this analysis of gender relations and embodied subjectivity as the lived experience of industry restructuring, the main research question priority focus on 'gender' assumes industry restructuring involves understanding multiple discourses. This discursive context is a site of diverse lived experiences and relationships – for women and men – where 'industry' dominant trajectories are challenged, endorsed, resisted, adapted and confused. There is no singular industry social experience to report back here. I prioritise a focus on gender to the extent that I have framed a research project to pursue gendered perspectives in working with women and men either currently farming or who have left farming. Given this feminist intent I explore diverse subjectivities and disclose 'the self-reflexive business of making the feminist perspective *visible*' (Baxter 2003, p. 12) in this critique of industry.

As many feminist researchers point out, locating 'gender' as a priority issue in conversation can be elusive or not even an expressed priority by those we work with (Baxter 2003; Ludvig 2006). One critical issue to consider in this thesis is this very matter of prioritising a research focus on gender and gender relations in the social experiences of industry restructuring. It is almost as though the 'why gender matters' question needs consideration: industry statistics may in part

argue the case for a focus on gender relations and thus gender difference is important in researching and understanding restructuring. Yet this deflection to problematising the representation of gender differences is indeed at the heart of an important matter: gender differences do matter and are embodied in powerful discourses at work in complex industry changes interacting with social relationships.

This research seeks out women's and men's perspectives to explore gendered experiences of industry restructuring. I am both working gender differences to establish diverse social experiences and understand the complex power dynamics at work in industry, and challenging those very gendered social experiences imbued in the discourse of restructuring. This non-acceptance of gender relations is so intimately connected with gender as social norm (male, female, man, woman), in turn working the dominant discourse of a restructuring trajectory where I find myself asking: 'What does restructuring demand of women and men?' This line of thinking does perhaps imply industry subsumes women and men yet with industry as a discourse the complexities of social experiences are permitted space to be named. This is a direct challenge to gender social norms imbued in industry practice that preclude social alternatives and equal opportunities for women and men. The varied social impacts of restructuring can continue to be revealed in the hope of driving some challenge to and change in the dominance of industry discursive practices.

Working *within* discourse, across a region and with diverse women and men I have and continue to be profoundly affected by conversations that disclose the experiences and gendered perspectives of restructuring. This feminist political-theoretical stance on framing research that aims to challenge the farming / exit farming binary and work with women and men to explore gendered perspectives as well as pursue a feminist intent to include working with men in the research process – these matters led to interview work that repositions my writing and hence research intent i.e. the 'why' as a continuous engagement with interview work. So here 'in theory' is an inability to again isolate epistemology and methodology as there is a method to writing and using theory with feminist intent that is dynamic. The effect of research in combination with being affected by research process work in tandem in decisions to isolate representations of the work undertaken with participants.

Critical reflexivity is a work in progress if we are to work towards revealing-reflecting strategies employed in the research process for political purposes. It is only when I was undertaking interviews that I was able to reflect on the injustices and social tensions in current food production practices, in a different way to how I felt prior to undertaking the interviews. This returns me to the important considerations Bryant and Pini (2011) make about including emotions in the representation of our research work. And perhaps I am attracted to the work of Bryant and Pini as they work in rural places and are working to avoid the researcher-researched power dynamic including acknowledging the importance of a researcher's personal geography in combination with the gendered politics of rural places.

The reflection that takes place in 'the action' of research (Daley 2010) as well as critical reflexivity has long been upheld as essential in ethical feminist social research. Making meaning becomes a political engagement at every step along the way. From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, attempts to fix meaning are not as important as emphasising how in valid and ethical research the researcher should be able to represent their intent and politics as well as experience.

Lather (1993) queries the 'problem' of validity to argue this focus on validity as an ongoing problem is potentially side-stepping the politics of both undertaking and representing research. Lather (1993, p. 685) asks: 'What is my goal as a researcher: empathy? emancipation? advocacy? learning from / working with / standing with? What is the romance of the desire for research as political intervention?' This quote by Lather helps return this discussion to how, through research, we gain insights into our values and politics and knowledge-making happens along the way. We respond to what we learn and our politics can be reshaped in response to what we find out. This is valid research. Put simply I am arguing that critical reflexivity and the politics of representation go together and thus theory assist being within, researching within, discursive rural sites interacting with gender differences and gender relations.

Researchers are also part of communities and it is an ethical requirement of research that the research process must be respectful of the people we work with. Feminist theorists have emphasised that it is important to value differences between women as well as between those of the researcher and those they have worked with. Lather (2007) writes about the need for a 'less comfortable social science' but I think it is also important that as a researcher I am

comfortable with the work I produce even if this means revealing what I am not comfortable with. Lather (2007) makes a similar point to Haraway's expose of the God trick: Lather writes a feminist critique of post-positivist methodology where 'getting lost' is a useful methodological praxis in the philosophical tradition of deconstruction and indeed Lather does a good job of avoiding fixing meaning with her 'deconstructive moves'. I am naming, representing, working with categories *in analysis* and prepared to undo some of that knowing but I am holding onto taking responsibility for representing lived experiences and my interpretation of what I have learnt along the way.

After all this writing about gender and gender relations, it is now timely to further articulate and discuss 'gender' and 'gender relations' prior to a consideration of the theoretical notion of 'embodied subjectivity' and 'discourse'. These key theoretical positions critically inform analysis and interpretation processes in this PhD.

## ***Gender, gender relations, subjectivity***

### **Theorising gender and gender relations**

Theorising 'gender' is a political undertaking committed to an inquiry into relations between women and men. It is to critique the social order, the power dynamics at work in that order, and normative discourses that result in the unequal positioning of women and men, and the subsequent opportunities available on the basis of gendered subjectivity. Theorising 'gender' is both an action by the researcher involved in critiquing lived experience and fundamentally related to a consideration of gender relations and gender difference. Thus the emphasis here is that gender is an embodied experience of social difference that is intimately relational.

As Haraway (2004, p. 228) argues:

Gender is always a relationship, not a preformed category of beings or a possession that one can have. Gender does not pertain more to women than to men. Gender is the relation between variously constituted categories of men and women (and variously arrayed tropes), differentiated by nation, generation, class, lineage, color and much else.

Gender is a category saturated in social engagement at a time, in a place and in an economy supported by a raft of interactions and institutions. There are occasions when the power dynamics involved in the business of being gendered are challenged and contrasted by the representation of social alternatives that may relocate social norms and desire a disruption to

the gender and 'sex category'<sup>2</sup> binary. Haraway makes the point that gender as a category supporting analysis is a working one, and is *open to critique* which is a challenge to the category and the social experiences that explicate the rural gender order. 'Gender-in-the-making' (Haraway 2004, p. 229) is fluid. Gender is made, remade, and has a historical context (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; West & Zimmerman 1987). In this *activity* there is scope to revise what is possible amongst the politics of hegemonic discourses where we self-reflect and evaluate our thoughts on our lived experiences as expressed through language. So gender cannot be isolated to experience-as-category as it is a negotiated subjective experience in that its dynamic ever-presence in theory is expressed as a social relationship and normative social order.

Similar to Haraway I find the work of Connell (2009) useful as Connell further articulates gender to include an analysis of gender, social inequalities on the basis of gender, and the international dimensions to the (re)establishment of multiple gender orders interacting with hegemonic gender relations (see also Connell 2005). Connell (2009, p. 5) explains how male / female gender difference 'is a *becoming*, a condition actively under construction'. Gender identity is established as 'natural' through dynamic social processes including social structures and institutions where men are privileged by gender differences notwithstanding differences exist between men and men (and, women and women) that include experiencing social inequalities. Connell (2009, p. 6) theorises gender by making the point that social structures are interacting with women and men's ability to 'construct *themselves* as masculine or feminine'. 'Gender' is premised on gender differences between women and men and substantiated by a normative body-biology framework that splits sex and gender identity. What Connell does is locate the *politics* of gender identity and emphasise the *effects* of gender differences as fundamentally political in the social experience of power through relationships: Connell refers to this as the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 2009, p. 142) that overwhelmingly benefits men 'as a group'.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have also theorised the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. In an article that provides a literature review mapping the development of the concept and revising the concept, the authors articulate a theoretical trajectory whereby a hegemonic

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<sup>2</sup> West and Zimmerman (1987) make an important distinction between sex, sex category and gender to emphasise the 'doing' of gender relies on the two sex categories to ensure gender and evolving power differentials are 'accountable' in social interactions and institutions.

system 'logic' can be expressed through violence but also 'through culture, institutions, and persuasion' (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832)<sup>3</sup>. The authors emphasise that notwithstanding differences between men and the coexistence of – and hierarchy between – masculinities (plural) the concept of hegemonic masculinity remains useful in providing insight into men's relations with women and problematising gender relations in order to reconfigure gender relations and promote social equity. The authors emphasise the hierarchical relationships implicit in 'a pattern of hegemony' (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 846). They note that in exploring changing gender relationships there are also geographies and places transacting gender relations that map how, in understanding gender as 'relational' local, regional and global dimensions to gender relations are linked in defining 'gender politics'. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 849) write:

Global institutions pressure regional and local gender orders; while regional gender orders provide cultural materials adopted or reworked in global arenas and provide models of masculinity that may be important in local gender dynamics.

In addition to this, Connell's theorising of gender (2009; 2005) is useful for extending gender analysis to provide insight into the social tensions at work in the interplay of gender differences, gender relations and 'global' social orders.

Connell's (2005) emphasis on splitting gender differences and gender relations is to return a theoretical and empirical focus to the role and responsibilities of men in working towards gender equality. This point has also influenced the decision that in undertaking a gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region, the PhD methods include working with women and men. This reflects a commitment to the importance of discourse-dialogue that includes exploring both Mallee rural masculinities and femininities as an expression of gender relations indicative of the social tensions concurrently embodied with the (negotiated) demands of gendered policy and global social ordering.

In this theoretical discussion of gender differences and the politics of gender difference I now want to attend further to this theoretical notion of the subject and embodied subjectivity. The theoretical concept of embodied subjectivity, in combination with Foucault's theorising of

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<sup>3</sup> The theoretical notion of hegemonic masculinity resonates to an extent with Bourdieu's notion of 'masculine domination' in that Bourdieu (2001) emphasises the 'symbolic violence' promoting the masculine dominated social order.

discourse and power (and thus knowledge production as well as the representation of knowledge), is also useful to assist the theoretical framework used in this thesis for the purposes of analysis of dynamic gender relations and the diverse social experiences of industry restructuring.

Connell describes how gender is socially structured and gendered bodies are both socially constructed and have agency. Connell (2009, p. 68) writes how:

Gender is a specific form of social embodiment. Gender relations form a particular social structure, refer to particular features of bodies, and gender practices form a circuit between them.

Gender is dynamic as social embodiment has variations across time and locations: social transformations are thus possible.

A theoretical position regarding the gendered subjectivity is assisted by the concept of embodied subjectivity (rather than social embodiment, for example) and is a preferred theoretical strategy in this critique of gender differences and gender relations for explaining the interplay of subjectivity and powerful discourses. Connell raises the important issue of the interplay of individual, local, regional and global social structures. This interplay has political ramifications for gender relations, and promoting gender equality in relationships. However, in this PhD research it is also useful to explore gender equality in (agricultural restructuring) discourses and not assume social structures are outside dynamic individuals representing masculinities and femininities in turn indicative of global 'top-down' social and economic structures. Rather, the notions of embodied subjectivities and gender analysis within industry discourse particularly assist analysis of the gendered perspectives of industry social experiences given the methodology used in this PhD.

### **The subject and subjectivity**

Notions of gender as a priority category informing research and analysis, and gender relations, emphasises that the social experience of gender is always a matter of social relations interacting with the foundational theory of the subject and subjectivity. This post-Enlightenment theoretical space remains engaged with the unified and rational 'I' expressed by the 'individual' who is invaluable in the production of knowledge and is able to reveal knowing through describing experience (Mansfield 2000).

The all-knowing subject as individual has now been extensively deconstructed and critiqued in the hope of challenging normative social frameworks supporting inequities. From a Foucauldian perspective, the problem with the 'subject' is that it locates meaning production in the individual and yet the 'individual' validates powerful 'truths' and in turn this subject ideal effaces the multiple technologies at work constituting powerful discourses interacting with subjectivity (Foucault 1997).

While Foucault's focus is on analysis of the subject and is achieved through his method of an 'archaeology of knowledge' (Foucault 1997, p. 178) where he attends to the history of the subject, subjectivity is also considered a theoretical tool where contradictions and complexities in understanding oneself and relationships with others are expressed in language and conceptually subjectivity becomes re-valued as a site of transformation, potential and social renewal. The 'I' is refashioned in subjectivity in a critique of dominant social norms to offer a theoretical framework for learning what is not known and what does not yet exist but is possible. This theoretical trajectory challenging the (overwhelmingly male) subject is invaluable for feminist theorising of social experience as it offers leverage for undertaking critique attending to dominant social norms and social experiences within discourses – the emphasis for investigating power is not isolated to the individual or subject per se but rather, social relations and social structures are interconnected discursive sites indicative of contemporary social justice issues (and thus assist exploring the issue of agricultural restructuring). Foucault (1997, p. 179) writes:

... this theoretical analysis would have a political dimension. By this phrase 'political dimension' I mean an analysis that relates to what we are willing to accept in our world, to accept, to refuse, and to change, both in ourselves and in our circumstances. In sum, it is a question of searching for another kind of critical philosophy. Not a critical philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the object, but a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, of transforming ourselves.

Moreover, binary oppositions including the male / female opposition are critiqued to express a political discontent with current opportunities for power, resources and social participation. Butler (1990) challenges the sex / gender distinction with its dependence on the foundational subject to critique both the foundational subject and feminist epistemology focus on sex and gender identities. Butler displaces the binary in as much as she argues 'sex' is categorically

constituted as a social construction and dynamic as directed by the gender binary working in language.

Binary oppositions nested in Cartesian thought and an evolving foundational subject are open to critique with intent to problematise gender relations, notwithstanding research remains focussed on the priority category of gender along with attention to exploring how both 'gender' and 'gender relations' are directing / connecting the individuals we work with, and the social structures in place including industry social structures. Social structures exist in multiple locations and build upon discursive trajectories configuring across time and in places, informing this notion of 'lived experience'.

Tracking the development of the subject and understanding the philosophical underpinnings of how the subject is able to be contradictory, conflicting, dynamic – and there is the possibility of the unconscious<sup>4</sup> – potentially implies a not knowing or incomplete knowing that challenges empirically-based feminist social research. Yet a careful distinction between the demand for valid research that accepts situated knowledge and actively supporting working with social differences in an effort to embrace a continuum of social experience – together this assists a qualitative critical-constructivist mapping of lived experience supported by a feminist research framework. There are discursive layers being explored in this exploration of theoretical arguments: I am working within the discourses of agricultural industry, feminist social research and post-structuralist theory.

Weedon (1987, p. 32) describes feminist post-structuralist theory: 'For feminist poststructuralism, it is language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitutes us as conscious thinking subjects and enables us to give meaning to the world and to act to transform it.' Language is an anchor point for the expression of individual understanding and being-in-the-world and the representation as well as expression of social structures. Yet the notion of discourse extends language to text and image, for example (see Fairclough 1995; Weedon 1987). Language is gesture, utterance, embodiment and what is not said. I argue that gender relations imbued with power dynamics are expressed through language concomitantly a discursive siting of subjective location of meaning and understanding.

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<sup>4</sup> See Weedon (1987), Mansfield (2000), McLaren (2002).

Feminist post-structuralist theory has deconstructed both the subject as object of male interests as well as 'experience' as indicative of a singular 'truth' (Weedon 1987). Weedon (1987, p. 34) writes that:

... feminist theory suggests that experience has no essential meaning. It may be given meaning through a range of discursive systems of meaning, which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality, which in turn serve conflicting interests.

As Butler (1990) argues, the subject needs to be critiqued for its legacy of not only stabilising the category of women, and gender performance, but also positioning women as Other.

However, in terms of theorising lived experience, representation is not automatically to be equated with fixing the subject. After all, theory is a strategy to assist interpretation and analysis in the production of knowledge as well as the representation of knowledge.

I am strategically using this notion of 'lived experience' – also social experience – where language and spoken word express discursive positions of managing agricultural (and rural) restructuring and there are associations in the expression of experience that accept contradictions, temporal expression and the subjectivity of researcher interpretation, for example. The subjective learning in the feminist social research process is concurrent with the rigor inherent in respecting diverse relationships, individual interpretations of social experience and the gender politics of restructuring. Consequently, this feminist theorising of subjectivity is working the relationship with the 'subject' for the purposes of inquiring into power expressed in gender relations and what may be possible.

Being responsive to the gender politics of agricultural and rural restructuring involves attention to the diversity of social experience where social experience is embodied subjectivity. The notion of 'embodied subjectivity' as defined by McLaren (2002) draws on the influences of Foucault's notion of power / knowledge – for Foucault the two cannot be separated – and discourse in assisting a feminist theorising of gender and gender relations.

### ***Foucault, discourse and power / knowledge***

Foucault's work attends to the workings of power. Foucault describes power as enacted through discourses that are multiple and shifting, micro as well as macro, located in state structures and others that support governance. Power is 'always already there'. Importantly

Foucault identifies a 'social body' (Foucault 1980a) drawing attention to the individual who is subject to powerful interests and actions. Yet power is not simply subjugation or repression, received by the subject for the individual to then reconfigure in powerful interests. Power relations fundamentally exist with resistance and there are multiple forms of relations e.g. kinship, sexuality – such 'interconnections' create a fluid social body whereby power is challenged and transformed (Foucault 1980b). Further, as power is 'always already there' and given this ever-presence, it is not possible to be (nor work) 'outside' power (Foucault 1980b). Following the work of Foucault, the researcher must also practice reflexivity and understand where they are located in powerful relations (Foucault 1980c).<sup>5</sup>

Foucault argues that theorising power and power relations is also about theorising the subject. Considering the historical development of the subject, Foucault (1983, p. 211) argues 'in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these binaries.' Resistances – and this feminist social inquiry is an overt resistance to an industry trajectory – problematise social norms. Here Foucault (1983, p. 212) is again useful for providing a critical insight into how to inquire into power relations (and thus gender relations) when he writes how the activity of challenging social norms 'are a refusal of these abstractions, of economic and state violence which ignore who we are individually, and also a refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition which determines who one is.' Power operates through techniques that 'make individuals subjects'. Yet power is not mono-directional and 'above' individuals nor society. For example, the splitting of industry experience as to stay or leave farming, or to get big or get out, is illustrative of a logic of winners and losers both subsumed and challenged in the continuum of diverse social experiences. It is also gendered.

For Foucault power together with knowledge is both constituted and experienced within discourse. In the History of Sexuality Volume 1 Foucault (1990) clearly defines discourse and it is this text I will rely on here to describe Foucault's concept of discourse. Importantly, Foucault develops theory by researching past constructions of bodily experiences and the representation of social norms expressed through bodily experience interacting with but not

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<sup>5</sup> See also The History of Sexuality Volume 1 where Foucault (1990, p. 93) defines power: 'Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.'

limited by – technologies of power. In this text Foucault is examining the discursive construction of 'sex' and 'sexuality'. With reference to the past Foucault (1990, p. 27) is able to strategically locate a dominant and domineering 'truth' about sex that is dynamic and informs contemporary discourses about sex and sexuality where the language and conversation used to discuss these issues is intimately depending on silences informing the discourse trajectory: 'There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.' Clearly, for Foucault (1990, p. 18) there is a 'politics of language and speech' in his analysis of the relationship between power and sex.

The rise of multiple discourses such as medical and scientific discourses informed regulatory techniques regarding both sex and the body. Foucault (1990, p. 100) demonstrates how power and knowledge together inform discourse which in turn is a shifting manifestation of numerous 'discursive elements' that can dominate at different times with various intents. Further, Foucault (1990, p. 101) argues discourse is therefore 'both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.' 'Truth' is made problematic through the theoretical tool of 'discourse' which in turn is a strategy to identify relations of power that constitute the subject including opportunities for challenging a discourse.

For the purposes of undertaking a gender analysis of gender relations as women and men manage agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region in a context of multiple changes, Foucault's notions of power / knowledge and discourse assist challenging an idea of economic conditions as directive of social conditions to the extent that the 'economy' is all-powerful and cannot be challenged or social relations can be reconfigured. The interconnected nature of gender relations and economic conditions are supported by Foucault's notion of discourse as discourse assists with understanding how experience is temporal, transformative and active. Further, power is a corporeal experience and while technologies of power that work to regulate the normative subjects that constantly shift, subjects are potentially empowered in the discursive space of managing social changes as well as managing the potential detrimental social impacts of industry restructuring.

What Foucault is articulating with this notion of discourse and power / knowledge is that as technologies of power work to establish dominant social norms they are temporal and open to

change. I am in agreement with McLaren that Foucault's critique of subjectivity – remembering that for Foucault a consideration of power relations is a critique of subjectivity and the subject as unproblematic or unified – assists feminists striving for 'a politics of diversity and inclusion' (2002, p. 2).<sup>6</sup> I will further elaborate on the potential for feminist research, knowledge production and representation to use Foucault's key concepts and consider the notion of embodied subjectivity.

### ***Embodied subjectivity***

In his work Foucault locates the body and corporeal experience as integral to subjectivity. Drawing on Foucault's theoretical engagement with subjectivity, McLaren (2002, p. 15) argues that Foucault's work is a resource for feminism as his emphasis on practices that include the body-power-knowledge interplay in the individual expression of discourse acknowledge how 'as embodied selves we are situated in the world in relation to a variety of social practices that shape not only our understandings of our bodies, but the materiality of our bodies.' This notion of embodied subjectivity assists feminist social research to critique gender relations by including reference to being embodied and therefore the individual is capable of instigating social change *in* those relations and through practices.

Embodied subjectivity assists theorising 'a conception of the subject that can account for both the processes of normalization and for resistance to norms' (McLaren 2002, pp. 53–54). This is a feminist theoretical shift useful for this research where I have worked with women and men. The notion of embodied subjectivity is also contributing to a feminist theoretical trajectory demanding processes that support promoting equal gender relations, and challenging social norms that categorically purport fixed gendered subjectivities.

McLaren (2002, p. 61) explains how 'Foucault refuses the subject as the condition for the possibility of experience, claiming instead that it is the experience that results in a subject of subjects.' Embodied subjectivity offers a different placing of 'experience' in that along with historicity, time, place, the contradictions and complexities in the articulation and potential for

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<sup>6</sup> See McLaren Chapter 1 for her discussion of feminist critique of Foucault and that his notion of subjectivity does not address resistance.

experience there is also the bodily experience of gender relations. Dominant discourses can be and are challenged. Social norms are categorical in support of fixed identities but they are also open to reconfiguration. This returns me to West and Zimmerman's (1987) emphasis on 'doing' gender. Doing gender emphasises the activity of gender and power dynamics through practices. Embodied subjectivity explicates that social norms – in this case an agricultural restructuring trajectory – are not given or entirely stable. The gendered social experiences and gender relations implied in agricultural restructuring discourses are discourses open to being challenged and indeed, are challenged.

There is a tension in working the male / female gender binary and assuming gender differences as lived experience in the research process. Working with and working against gender difference is an intentional strategy to explore social experiences and diversity in discourse in an effort to engage future scenarios that shift the intersection of the individual and structure to revise possibilities in embodied social practice.

## ***Conclusion***

In this research both the theoretical and methodological frameworks used support a gendered analysis of the research process in investigating the dynamic gender relations in agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region. As I outline in this chapter, this PhD is informed by feminist post-structuralist theory and Foucault's theorising of power through the key concept of discourse. Further, I draw on McLaren's feminist interpretation of Foucault's work to argue for the usefulness of understanding embodied subjectivity in undertaking research that has a priority focus on gender relations. This PhD applies a research praxis that is critically reflective (Fook 1999), engaging with the matter of validity as intrinsic to representation of knowledge and knowledge production processes. Thus rural social research and research findings are situated knowledge and immersed in multiple discourses (Haraway 1988). Following this theory chapter I now turn to discuss the research findings in the next four chapters.

## **Chapter 6: Gendered agricultural production and restructuring in the Mallee region: new exclusions in and out of family farming**

### ***Introduction***

In this chapter I draw upon data to demonstrate how agricultural production and restructuring is a gendered rural space and lived experience. Rurality, gender relations, rural-based femininities and masculinities all locate the agricultural industry, describe how women and men are managing restructuring, and exemplify the power dynamics at work in livelihood changes. Interviews articulate social experiences and gender relations as women and men manage changes in food production and agricultural industry structural changes. Interviews identify who is farming and who is not farming as well as at times complicating strict definitions of whether someone is farming or has left farming.<sup>1</sup>

There are two parts to this chapter. ‘Part 1: A gendered industry and rural social context’ describes gender relations in farming, food production and restructuring in the Mallee region. Findings describe farm entry, women and men’s perspectives on farming, rural and family life, on-farm roles and responsibilities, farm business and social structures. Interview-based narratives assist an understanding of who is farming or not, and these narratives offer both descriptions and critique of agricultural restructuring.

In ‘Part 2: Restructuring trade and gender relations in the local-global agricultural industry interface’ I discuss the significance of how changing terms of trade impact on social relationships. In this section I consider decision-making with respect to on-farm restructuring

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes used in the findings chapters are simply identified as either from an interviewee who is ‘farming’ or who has ‘left farming’. As explained in the details of the findings and data analysis, interviewees’ situations are diverse and an important finding is the complexity of defining who is and is not farming. For example, a woman who is involved in undertaking selected tasks to support a family farm may not actually live on a farm. In this example the interviewee is identified as ‘farming’. For the purposes of representing the quotes selected from interviews, I have simply chosen to demarcate if that participant is ‘farming’ or ‘left farming’.

and leaving farming, and argue how changing terms of trade and markets embody gender-based inequities, and women as well as men are excluded from agriculture in new ways.

## ***Part 1: A gendered industry and rural social context***

### **Farm entry**

All participants were asked how they got 'into' farming. This interview opening strategy was developed after conducting four initial interviews with two couples. These interviews revealed that the two women I interviewed entered farming through marriage, and the two male partners entered farming via taking over a family farm. While perhaps a discussion of 'farm entry' initially seems at odds with a research focus on the experiences of restructuring and leaving farming, I became interested in asking about people's experiences of farm entry to assist the flow of interview conversation, and it became clear family farm entry remains highly gendered as reported in the literature review. Discussions of farm entry are relevant to understanding reasons for leaving farming, and how women and men understand their positions on the farm, and relationship to the farm business, as well as managing change and industry restructuring including consideration of leaving farming.

The majority of women I interviewed were involved in farming, or had been, via marriage – whether they were living on or off the farm. One woman purchased a farm in association with her husband. Another woman worked on her family of origin farm. This is in contrast to their male partners who had overwhelmingly taken over a family farm through patrilineal inheritance and succession practices. For example, female interviewees described:

Oh well I married a farmer! [03, female, farming]

I married into farming. [07, female, left farming]

I grew up in farming, so I was very familiar with it, yes. And then I married into it, so just continued on, yes. [27, female, left farming]

Farm entry is described as patrilineal and male-female relationships support the farm family tradition whereby males and sons inherit the farm and property. Participants indicate the complexities in how patrilineal inheritance and succession currently works as well as highlight some broad trends in farm land tenure: family farming land transfer remains patrilineal and

requires men to negotiate intra-family relationships including with other men i.e. fathers, brothers and uncles.

One male interviewee described working on the family farm and anticipated the opportunity to formally take over the family farm in the future. Another male interviewee was from a farming family but described purchasing a separate farm in the Mallee region. Apart from these two interviewees, all other male interviewees described their entry to farming as a continuation of a family farm they grew up on, and many describe this broadly as a negotiated purchase from the previous generation. For example, one male interviewee describes his entry to farming and farm ownership:

... scrimped and saved for an awful lot of years while [my wife] worked fulltime until we managed to feel we had enough stake in it to stay there ... [04, male, farming]

While I did not set out to ask specifically about inheritance and succession practices, many interviewees raised these issues during interview conversations, highlighting the importance of these matters. Participants revealed a number of issues in relationships between men and women, as well as between women and between men that impact on masculinities and femininities and gender relations in farming, and are pertinent to understanding experiences of restructuring.

Several male interviewees describe taking over the family farm:

So I guess as a son you watch your father on the farm like, and just progressed into that I guess. [08, male, left farming]

Dad had a property ..... I used to work on the block of course, at a young age, and I thought, "No, I'm not going to transfer away, I would rather go on the block, on the land, and Dad said, "Well just hang around," so we sort of did part time work on the land ..... and that's how I sort of got into it. Just followed through the generations which we are the last ones I'd say (laughs). Yeah. [09, male, left farming]

I got into farming because we're fourth generation farmers here in the Mallee. So yeah, had a farm to come back to, I suppose. So it was a case of go away, did a bit of schooling, worked away from the area, and then when the time was right, came home [12, male, farming]

I was born into a farming family. [28, male, left farming]

One male interviewee also described how his entry to farming was influenced by his position in the family: 'it wasn't easy for me to go back home because I already had a brother on the farm'. Yet overwhelmingly men described a socialisation process influenced by intra-family relationships that supported the opportunity to take over the family farm. I interviewed a female farmer who described how her family supported her entry into farming and acknowledged 'Oh it's very unusual, very unusual. But Dad is very supportive.' I then asked this interviewee, for women, 'How to actually get entry? How to get land?'

I guess it's just so hard to get into if you're not born into a farm but it's massive capital outlay, so unless you've gone and done something else first. Yeah. So I guess I'm lucky in that regard. I had the opportunity to. I know there'd be girls out there that would like to do something like I but not born on a farm. [20, female, farming]

Thus the opportunity to farm in the Mallee region is guided by local gender orders where interviewees describe how overwhelmingly men and (some) sons are encouraged to farm and continue the family farm tradition. The extract from the above interview also highlights the role and power men have in supporting opportunities for women to enter family farming as well as the important issue of access to capital and land.

During one interview with a female interviewee who describes current succession plans and arrangements for patrilineal inheritance and succession, I queried the practice being described:

Josephine:

Did your daughter ever, was she interested in farming or...

Interviewee:

Yes, but my husband, I guess, never encouraged it. I didn't encourage it either. There's always a dilemma when girls are involved in farms, whether they should share in the entity of the farm ... Don't know. [19, female, farming]

Further, at another stage in the interview this participant offers reflections in age and generational differences between women and recognises the difficulties in farming given the legacy of how women have been positioned in farming:

Like a lot of farmers have sent their daughters away for education reasons and not many of them have returned. Not many of them have considered coming back, and I think it might be something to do with the derogatory term of farmer's wife because if they were encouraged to come back as a farming partner, and they were treated as a farming partner rather than a wife, there would be girls, like myself, who were born and raised on farms who might see some value in that, but I don't think any woman these days wants to just clean houses and cook cakes, and water the garden. A lot of

women – and I’m not discounting that role – a lot of women do that well, but they top it up with volunteering and they make a life, and being a good mother and fulfilling all those roles is important, but the younger generation just seem to have interests in travelling overseas, and they have other priorities, so that if they did marry a farmer and come back, and even be a farming partner, they’re still going to want enough money to do those quality of life activities **that us older women probably denied ourselves because we were more focused on the business side of the farm**. At times I wonder why I made the decisions that I’ve made, but our farm is still here because of the decisions that have been made so it can’t be that bad. [19, female, farming; emphasis added]

Further, during another interview with a male interviewee I also queried whether he would support succession for his daughter:

Yeah, absolutely. It probably shouldn’t but it gets a little tricky I reckon. ... Like gender, it shouldn’t be discriminatory but it’s always going to be. Use my daughter as an instance, if she were to come home on the farm and we’ve got our farm here and then she gets married or falls in love, or however it goes, to someone with a farm somewhere else, then where does she go? Like who gives up their farm basically, or a business, the same sort of thing. [14, male, farming]

The interviews are saturated with references to patrilineal inheritance and succession practices that support opportunities for men in farming. Expressions of birth-rights and a patriarchal tradition focussed on family-based land ownership are common throughout the interviews. As I progressed in conducting interviews this ‘saturation’ in interviews of descriptions of a local Mallee gender order supporting patrilineal family farm inheritance and succession, posed challenges to the interview context. As a feminist researcher I had the opportunity to query and challenge practices described that I interpreted as largely beneficial to men, and divested women of equal opportunity to participate in family farm ownership and agricultural production. At times I felt subsumed by ‘the farm’ and male-dominated priorities – including in discussions with a number of male and female interviewees.

In discussing views on leaving farming, one male interviewee describes:

... what makes it harder in one sense is that we haven’t got any sons to take over the farm but in another way it also makes it easier I suppose because there is a time when you can basically say, “Well that’s it, I’ll go now.” [25, male, farming]

The assumption is that family farm succession is an opportunity for sons. This is also an example of an occasion when I did not query this gender order and practice directly with the participant. This quote illustrates the relationship between gendered farm entry practices and the flow-on effects with respect to decision-making regarding not only on-farm restructuring but also processes informing how and when people decide to leave farming.

In response to my question regarding his changing livelihood strategies, another male interviewee reflected upon farming and inheritance both with respect to his experiences in relationship to his father and future plans for the family farm:

Josephine:

So tell me about your changes in your work?

Interviewee:

Yeah I suppose that was a little bit to do with ah, you know ah – what would you call it – succession plans. Like none of the older farmers wanted to give the younger farmers an opportunity, due to a number of things, because a lot of them had been burnt because of failed marriages etc., where the son comes home and gets married and the new daughter-in-law takes off with a million dollars and the farm, it sends the farm broke and that's still happening now so there's a huge worry about that. The parents, like my parents, after spending their whole lifetime reducing the debt and owning the land, I'm the same now, do I want to pass the farm over to my sons when their partners might do the same thing? So there's some issues there, some big issues in farm succession. A lot of people have trusts and you know there's pre-nuptial agreements and all types of things but that's an issue. [22, male, farming]

This concern that women entering farming via marriage may threaten the family farm patrilineal tradition is also raised and critiqued in another interview with a female participant:

Interviewee:

I do know friends whose the uncles and fathers go, "The girls names go on nothing, not piece of paper, no," and I just think that gets a bit hard doesn't it, if something happens to one of those younger men and they've got children and things, and I don't think women come in to relationships thinking, "Yeah, I'll be with this fellow for a while and then I'll divorce him and take him for half the farm," but I think some men do look at women-

Josephine:

They worry about that?

Interviewee:

Yeah, sometimes, but the thing is, in any other occupation, if what you build up over a marriage is considered not just the man's, is it? If you're in any other occupation, if you're husband's a builder, he doesn't build up a business and say, "This is just my business. What I make off the business is just mine," so you consider it as a family is what you're sort of doing. [11, female, farming]

One male interviewee again emphasises the importance of succession issues in farming families, as well as his particular experience:

Look I think there's a feeling of hopelessness in a lot of farming families. They won't admit it but I just think there's a lack of direction and a feeling of hopelessness. Not in all families, but I'm saying you know that's seventy per cent, because a lot of farms are in family trusts and like none of them will ever talk honestly about it, but you know lack of direction, lack of vision, you know lack of goals, or the parents' goals don't align with the children's goals, things like that. **But it's a taboo subject. My father and myself never spoke about it, never.** I had no idea what I owned, what I was going to own ... But there's a lot of people – not everyone – but there's a lot in the same boat and it's a taboo subject ... [22, male, farming; emphasis added]

In this quote the participant critiques the 'taboo subject' of succession and goes on to recommend that it is a key issue that needs to be addressed in family farming in the Mallee. This discussion highlights how while farming continues to be patrilineal in terms of land transfer and succession in the family farm business, there are a number of intra-family relationships being negotiated in farm families, and relationships between men are integral to understanding family farming, rural masculinities and gender orders.

Moreover, these relationships between men and generations, as with female-male relationships, impact on managing change, agricultural restructuring and decisions regarding leaving farming. Women are frequently excluded from entering farming through family farming practices that deny women access to land and farm ownership through inheritance and succession practices. Given what is occurring it is important for social analysis of agricultural restructuring to understand the social exclusions occurring *within* farming, and the impact of these experiences not only for on-farm restructuring but also for understanding restructuring in terms of 'structural change' and leaving farming. As the above quotes also demonstrate, women are critical for the continuation of family farming, for supporting male succession and are also viewed as potentially a threat to the continuation of a family farm.

One female interviewee describes how she understands her relationship to the family farm where her husband commutes to work, and also makes a connection between her experience and the nature of her mother-in-law's relationship to the family farm:

... as I said like, it's not my family farm to inherit ...

it was the same with Tom's mother. It wasn't her family farm to inherit when it was much smaller but because she lived with her husband and that's what they both worked towards for her lifetime, well it is her farm. Do you know what I mean? [11, female, farming]

Following my questioning, male interviewees discussed their thoughts regarding the future of their farm and their involvement in farming. For example,

... it [the farm] can stay in the family but it may be leased out or share-farmed or some other arrangement because I don't think any of my boys are coming back. So. Well, not unfortunately, I told them to go and have a look around and come back if they would like because that's what I regretted not doing. [22, male, farming]

In this conversation while again the future of the farm is considered with reference to the possibility of patrilineal inheritance, the male interviewee also reflects on how he entered farming, and connects this reflection to a perspective on the future of the family farm that includes consideration of family-based obligations. The same participant also notes the temporal nature of our discussions and his perspective on his current involvement in the family farm:

When I actually sit down and reflect on it talking to you now, I'm thinking, "Shit, you know, the future doesn't look all that bright, does it?" Really, I mean, I see how hard my father worked and I'm thinking, you know that's sort of the – not the guilty, but that's – you feel obligated to keep the farm going I suppose because all my brothers and sisters are still alive and their children and they would be very, very disappointed if the farm went out of the [family] name. I think they would be, anyway. So I suppose I feel a little bit obligated and I know Dad told me he wished it to remain in the family name. So I'll probably put it in some sort of trust and people can lease it and the money will go to the kids and the grandkids, I suppose. That's thought and talk, I mean, I'm talking about it. I haven't come to any decisions yet. So for the time being, while I'm fit enough I'll just keep doing what I'm doing. [22, male, farming]

Male participants describe diverse reflections on the opportunity to farm and support the family farm. Some men describe not being pressured to inherit the farm, while others describe

growing up and being directed towards taking over the family farm. There are also variations in the timing regarding when men 'enter' family farming, and as mentioned, how succession is negotiated. One male interviewee describes both his earlier caution in succeeding in the family farm as well as what he values with the opportunity to do so:

... so up until I was 16 I really wasn't planning on coming home on the farm, partly because I guess financial is a fair part of it – our farm's never been comfortable financially. ... I guess with a family farm, the other thing about it is a – can't think of the word – it's like a sense of belonging, or it's sentimental or whatever it is. It's not like a job where you can just say, "Dad was a mechanic so I'll be a mechanic" and then you think, no, bummer that, I don't want to be a mechanic, I want to be something else, but it doesn't actually matter because unless it's a family business and all that sort of thing, it might be different, but that's what this is, the farm, there's history here and all that sort of thing, so that tugs you home a bit, I think. [14, male, farming]

Patrilineal inheritance may be a social norm but it is also a diverse practice. Understanding farm entry social norms also assists understanding decisions made regarding family farming restructuring both on-farm, and people's considerations of leaving farming as well as practices and processes that inform finally leaving farming. It is my suggestion that the interviews reveal a gender differential in entering farming and there are important links with this practice and dynamic gender relations, how women and men are positioned within farming and the opportunities, and withdrawing from farming.

### **"...the farm comes first"**

The rural-based agricultural industry is gendered and the gender social order is embodied and critically revised. To continue to describe restructuring and the gendered industry context it is useful to now consider discussions with participants regarding their roles, responsibilities and livelihood adaptations. Here I consider discussions with those women either farming or connected to and supporting a family farm, and in making this distinction I recognise from my research that new trends have emerged in how women relate to the farm.

The expression 'the farm comes first' is one that a number of female participants used to describe their work and place on the farm and / or in relation to their male partner's work and the family farm given that some female interviewees and households do not live or no longer

live on the farm. For example, one participant describes how she manages her own business in relation to her husband's farm work:

The farm comes first so pretty much, if he's got to be at the farm and I've got to be at the [business], he gets to go to the farm

The same interviewee also reflects:

I don't like the fact that the farm comes first when I pay as much bills as Tony does, so that annoys me.

So I just have to make everything work around the farm because the bigger picture is that he'll take over it and that will be our life and yeah. [16, female, farming]

This participant also raises the issue of insufficient childcare available in the town in which she lives. Further, as she talked about other challenges in carrying out her work she recognises her outsider status:

... moving here initially was hard, like coming here was really hard because if you're not from here it's hard to fit in. It's sort of, I guess, clicky, in [a] way, and also I've shot myself in the foot because I work as well ... [16, female, farming]

These quotes indicate the tensions at work in gender relations regarding whose work is prioritised, and how livelihoods are negotiated, as well as difficulties in this participant's social life given her work commitments and outsider status.

In other interviews women described working on the farm *to support* the farm, and some women identify that their work is integral to the running of the farm. One female participant reflects on her married life and involvement in farming, and her changing position on the farm as well as farm work given she and her husband had left living on the farm to support succession:

I've certainly cut back on my involvement and mostly, a lot of [it] is because I'm not on the farm ...

And later,

Josephine:

So do you still work in the farm?

Interviewee:

Well no I don't do much physically but, oh except when they're busy like we're starting cropping now so yep I'll be a pilot vehicle shifting things if they need to move to move

the tractor or whatever around 'cause the land that we farm it's not all ours, we lease country too and it's spread all around the place ... [03, female, farming]

This is a contrast to what this interviewee's husband describes:

At this stage of our lives or my life I suppose you're talking to me, I'm still, I still consider myself to be fully involved in the farm ... [04, male, farming]

Further, this male interviewee describes his renewed involvement and interest in farming given succession plans:

... my son and I – I should say like we have agreed or fallen into a plan which is about farming in as futuristic way as we possibly can, we've taken on all of the challenges in terms of the technology ...

and

So, it's good, it's exciting, I'm really enjoying it and I've always been enthusiastic about farming and I'm more so now because I'm doing it at the cutting edge. [04, male, farming]

This comparative representation of perspectives on involvement in farming given succession occurring highlights the gendered nature of involvement in farming as well as how age and life stage impact on restructuring decisions and the experience of leaving farming. In this example the female interviewee describes a withdrawal from farming prior to her husband.

Another female interviewee describes the extent of her involvement in running the farm and how it has changed given her age and caring responsibilities:

I've always felt totally involved. But, I guess when you've got kids, my priority was always the kids whereas Phil's priority would have always been the farm. My priority was always the kids, and if there was actually an occasion that came up, when the kids needed me rather than the farm, the kids got me, so my priority was always the kids ...

Further, this interviewee describes how her priority is her children even as her age and responsibilities change:

So, I guess my priorities now, if the kids needed me, I would go, there would be no hesitation. I just hope and pray they don't need me in the busy season, but that would be still my priority, even though they're adults, if they needed us for a reason. [06, female, farming]

Another female interviewee describes her involvement in farm work.

... it's been basically a one-man operation, Patrick and me just together and that was a cost-saving thing too, that I could do the tractor-driving. [24, female, farming]

In our conversation this interviewee also discusses her reduced involvement in aspects of farm work as she gets older, as well as her preparedness to leave farming prior to her husband:

But once I leave, I think I'd feel quite happy because sometimes I just feel totally exhausted and can't cope and think, "I can't cope anymore" but yeah, you rally again, I suppose. [24, female, farming]

In the following discussion another female interviewee describes her extensive work on the farm, hopes for making a livelihood change, and desire to support patrilineal succession:

Josephine:

What attracts you to the idea of relocating to a regional centre?

Interviewee:

Oh probably because I'm getting older and I'm thinking of what I'm going to do if I retire, and I don't like the idea of retiring. I would always like to be doing something but considering I've studied, it would be nice to earn some income with those qualifications rather than being a volunteer for the rest of my life. There's a lot of effort in upgrading your skills and qualifications, and maintaining them, and I think that it would give me perhaps, a little more quality of life living in a regional town, and it's appealing that I don't have to do as much driving, and there [are] a few more social activities that could interest me and probably more people with similar interests. So ... for those reasons, so but then for other reasons of keeping the farm strong and passing on my business knowledge to my son – that's important too – so until he and his partner learn the bookkeeping, I'm virtually in that position of having to stay put or work part time in a regional centre, and be back and forth. Not sure at this moment. [19, female, farming]

In this example, gender relations and women's position in farming is also influenced by work opportunities locally available, expectations within families including those for women in supporting restructuring and succession (specifically, a daughter-in-law), as well as challenges due to managing the impacts of the recent drought. Reflecting on the array of roles she has in running the farm, this interviewee also describes:

So ... that's what holds me back from relocating to a regional centre is that my role's become vital because the men are too busy doing it. I'm the coordinator and the communicator, negotiator. ... I hadn't really thought about the range of roles [laughs]

that have developed. I probably need my daughter-in-law to learn, if she's interested, but my son is learning that too. I'm delegating to them at times and saying, "Look, I haven't got time to contact whoever. Can you give them a ring?" so that they develop that confidence and skill. [19, female, farming]

As interviewees identify, age and life stage matters in roles and responsibilities on the farm and in supporting farming. A clear pattern emerged that women involved in farming often described their responsibility for bookkeeping, and younger female interviewees also describe their expectation that they need to learn this responsibility at a future stage. One female interviewee who no longer lives on the family farm while her husband now commutes to the farm described:

But basically it's really his farm and I'm the bookkeeper. [21, female, farming]

In another interview with a female interviewee living on the farm who describes at length her roles and responsibilities regarding raising children, I ask about her involvement in the farm:

Josephine:

I wondered would you like to get more involved?

Interviewee:

Not really. To be honest, between me and you, no ... but I am because I know I have to be, because [my mother-in-law] can't do it all: it's a big job, it's a huge task, because it's millions of dollars and you've constantly got invoices going out and bills coming in, and the organisation of it all is nuts. But yes, I will take over the books at some stage ... [13, female, farming]

Thus how women and men are on the farm and involved in farming is dynamic and change is influenced by succession and life stage. Intra-family relationships matter including those between women. The same participant cited above also discusses intra-family dynamics in terms of generational change and succession on the farm:

You're trying to take more of a role in the farm so the generation before you can retire and enjoy some of their time. It's just a balancing role: it can be very difficult and stressful, because being a daughter-in-law, you don't want to overstep your boundaries with your parents-in-law, but you've still got to support your husband too. It's just the way it goes [laughs]. [13, female, farming]

Another participant describes how she and her husband live off the farm and her husband travels daily to the farm. We discuss her professional background, current work and care arrangements, and I ask about her satisfaction with her work and family life:

Josephine:

So are you happy with your current paid work out of the home, that workload, the occasional [profession name] or is there something you would like to be doing more?

In response this interviewee describes her casual work outside the home, and how this supports the family and her husband's farm work:

I still feel like there's, with the kids I still feel like it's still a bit chaotic and so I feel like what I've got on my plate at the moment is enough for me, so the beauty of – and I'm quite happy to just do the occasional days 'cause and I mean some people don't like that so much, just being told what to do and when to do it but I'm quite happy to do that and then leave at the end of the day and not have any of the extra things that I need to sort of worry about. Plus, Tom really, he has busy times and slower times but he's not a husband that's at home five-thirty every day, here for tea time and reading of the books and settling kids down. Quite often he's not here until after all of that's happened so, and during say cropping, Tom wouldn't be here for me to rely on so I don't want to put the kids under too much pressure because I'm racing out the door to work as well. I just think Tom's place – I think that's when things come unstuck sometimes, when you try and overload everything too much and Tom, what he does is already fairly full on, and as I said, he does the physical side of the farming plus the administration side of it as well, and so I don't want to sort of tip the boat by taking on too much as well [11, female, farming]

This interviewee also discusses the separation of family life and her husband's farm work and the *value* of her roles and responsibilities:

... and I suppose it's the old, "It's ours," although I'm not the person who physically works for that money, **we both sort of earn it because we're both are doing roles for the family**. If that makes sense ...

... so I look at it like that, that is his occupation and I'm happy. I want to feel like I'm considered like our family's considered a part of things, it's not just him, but again, I don't consider myself to be an equal partner in the running of ... and the structuring and the working of the business, but yeah, I don't see that as my role, so I suppose at the moment our roles are back to the traditional sort of – I'm doing more of the home sort of thing, but, as I said, that's what I'm happy [doing] ... [11, female, farming; emphasis added]

Further, this interviewee reflects on her lack of involvement with the farm:

I suppose as a woman I don't feel that undermines me, that I don't get my back up and think, "I should know more about everything that's going on," I don't know if that comes down to my self-worth. I think, well, whatever I'm doing at the moment is important. I don't need to be involved in everything Tom does to make me feel important. I've done my own thing, I've got my own qualifications, I've been to other places, do you know what I mean? So I'm not looking for some sort of purpose for me. [11, female, farming]

I interpret the above discussion as a critique of 'the farm comes first': this interviewee describes how for her the family is her priority. In her circumstances the farm is physically separate from the home and she clearly identifies her livelihood interests and care responsibilities as separate to the farm in working towards supporting her family and her husband's family farm business. The farm comes first in that her work and care responsibilities are organised to support her husband and his work and yet 'the farm' supports a collaborative work and livelihood arrangement where for this interviewee, her priorities are supported.

Another participant describes her involvement in supporting farm succession and in the discussion shares a caution she offered to her son and daughter-in-law:

... when our son decided he would like to come home and it was still you know that was when ... the drought was going and, and I mean we were, we were delighted that they wanted to come back but I did say to both [my son and daughter-in-law] a number of times "you know it's great but if it gets too hard just go, don't feel obliged to stay, you know, don't think that you have to stay"

Josephine:

Because of the sense of inheritance or-

Interviewee:

Yes. And yeah, so hopefully they took that on board. Actually when they got together [my daughter-in-law] said "how do you manage on the farm?" and I said "oh well, you have good years and bad years" and um she said "what happens when you have a bad year?" and I said "oh you just pull your belt in a bit" and a few years ago she said to me "I think I've pulled the belt in as far as it can go" [laughter]! But anyway. [03, female, farming]

During one interview the participant both challenges the dominance of the farm and male priorities, and expresses her concern for her husband's workload, and the difficulties in managing many challenges in farming:

I think we [women] take a back, back seat role in priorities. I know with myself and my friends we feel it comes with the husband's priority is the farm, and **then because of the stress of the farm**, it's a sports day, Saturday football, and then luckily on Sunday we may get to see him for a couple of hours, and then he may work half a day. So you're really battling to have a whole family unit a lot of the time, because the farm and the amount of work, and the pressures on the farm, considering the droughts we've had, the prices, everything else, they have to work hard to provide for us ... so the women really do a lot of the time, get a rough end of the stick, because we don't get that chance to, oh well some play sport but we don't get a huge lot of opportunity to have family time, and then just chill time. You just don't have enough hours in the day. [13, female, farming; emphasis added]

In this section I have selected extracts from interviews with women involved in farming and in supporting family farming. Discussions include references to intra-family relationships and dynamics, social expectations, and roles and responsibilities that emphasise the gendered social experiences for women given agricultural restructuring. Rural restructuring intersects with industry restructuring and there are intersecting challenges which I interpret as both on-farm and not-on-the-farm in understanding gender relations in family farming. 'Industry' is clearly located as a gendered social experience.

### **Men reflecting on family and farming life**

As previously discussed, this research into gender relations in industry and rural restructuring is an opportunity to work with women *and* men to assist understanding of how gender relations are renegotiated as women and men involved in family farming manage an array of changes and challenges. In this section I consider insights into restructuring issues including livelihood changes, roles and responsibilities, as discussed by male participants currently farming.

I asked male participants about the relationship between the farm business and the organisation of family life. For example:

Josephine:

Is that a tricky balance managing the farm and home?

Interviewee:

Yeah it is. I struggle with it a lot. Like tonight, Kate asks me for a hand sometimes and I know I need to give her a hand and just in my head is going on hundred jobs that I think I should be doing that should be more important and that's where, probably what I was talking about a bit before, making decisions based only on business or only on emotion or whatever, I guess. Business is not always the be all and end all. You have to do what's going to be good for the family in the long-term as well as the short-term, and it is something I have trouble with. [14, male, farming]

It is significant that a distinction is made between 'business' and 'emotion' in managing farming and family life as this participant describes tensions he experiences. It is also pertinent to reflect that in my question I have presented a distinction between 'the farm' and 'home' which is an acknowledgement of local interpretations of gendered spaces and structures, as well as both an attempt to co-locate the two spheres through the interview process and overtly (re)position farming business as lived experience.

Similar to female participants, many male interviewees describe the substantial workloads involved in farming. For example:

Josephine:

So tell me how your wife supports you.

Interviewee:

Obviously with taking care of children and those sort of things, which then I don't have to do it, so it enables me, especially when we're harvesting and cropping. Like I might not get home until well after midnight and then gone by six, so you just don't see them, so she's obviously flat out organising kids ... [12, male, farming]

Another male interviewee similarly describes:

... it is probably hard because during cropping time and harvest I'll only be home for four hours and so the kids are in bed and asleep and I get home and have a sleep and then go back to work before they're even out of bed, so they sort of miss you a fair bit. ...[kids interrupt] So, yeah, you've just got to work around and sometimes I can come in at lunch time and pick one of the kids up and take them back out to the farm to help Sally out. [15, male, farming]

Discussions with male interviewees indicate the significance of life stage in understanding decision-making practices, roles and responsibilities.

Restructuring includes managing the social impacts of drought and terms of trade issues. For example, one male participant describes a strategy to manage changing farming practices and multiple challenges in agricultural restructuring that assist the family to retain land ownership, by leasing the farm and undertaking commodity production under contract for a company:

... for every acre, and then every time we start a key, like machinery and doing work, we're getting paid from then, so that when we decided to go down that line it was because grain prices were four hundred dollars, and then they were a hundred and fifty dollars, and fertilizer went from four hundred dollars to twelve hundred dollars: input costs just tripled, and they were saying, "Oh yeah grain price has hit 400." So it was all relevant, but then they, "They're going to be around for three or four years," and then the next year they were back down under 200 so, but inputs stayed up. So, we just thought it was a five year deal, get rid of some of the uncertainty and the high risk for five years, and see what's going to happen, and that was, we had already been in eight years of drought, so that was the other thing ... so this gave us five years of security, and plus I was having a young family so it sort of guaranteed that we could pay ourselves a wage and have money coming in. [12, male, farming]

It was my initial post-interview reflection that during the above interview as a researcher I struggled with how to assist establishing conversation that led to discussion regarding the social and gender relations at work in family farming. This reflection occurred during and after a number of interviews with male interviewees. Yet upon rereading the interview as a whole, I recognise that this interviewee cited above was indeed making clear connections with reference to life stage i.e. raising a young family, by referring to restructuring practices with respect to farm business structure matters, terms of trade issues particularly commodity price insecurity, and managing drought conditions.

The same participant, who is contract farming, describes the complex interplay of changes to farming, restructuring, managing climatic variations and health issues:

Josephine:

So what are your expectations for the future?

Interviewee:

Ah, I think, yeah, well the way we're doing, I hope that they want a renewal or someone does and we can keep going down this line because it's very low risk, and less stress on both family, and yourselves, health wise. It would be a different story if the seasons turn around and we get back into a wet cycle for ten years then it's a lot easier obviously because you know you're going to grow a crop but coming out of

twelve years of not knowing – every year you went and sowed it and sowing it on marginal moisture, and looking up and hoping, there’s a lot of blokes that got very despondent. [12, male, farming]

I discussed with all participants currently farming how family life and the ‘work’ of farming are interconnected, and further, the interplay of farming family life with restructuring and managing changes in farming. Discussions offer gendered perspectives on priorities regarding restructuring issues, and thus define the gendered and social experience of family farming given multiple agricultural and food production restructuring challenges in the Mallee region.

### **Farm business structure, decision-making and income distribution priorities**

Decision-making practices were discussed with participants. In interviews with women and men currently farming these discussions also highlighted issues pertaining to farm business structure and income distribution priorities. The discussions with women and men farming reveal that often there is a difference between inclusion in a formal farm business structure and decision-making practices.

One interviewee describes how she has advocated to be included in major farm decisions:

It’s the four of us, [my mother-in-law] and [my father-in-law], myself and Alex. I was getting a bit nervous because of the drought, we were more financially beholden to the bank and I was thinking, “Well, if my name’s going on this with everyone else’s, I want to know what you’re spending it on.” Not so much I want a say, and I want to say no or yes or anything like that, but if we go down, I’m in the shit too sort of thing, so I want to be included in the conversations. I don’t want to be treated just like a kitchen hand ... [13, female, farming]

The same interviewee also describes the daily practice of involvement in making decisions:

Alex and [my father-in-law] bounce off each other enough without adding in more people to the discussion. They’ve been doing it for years, they’re the experts. We leave it up to them. I’m sure I could *have* my say but it wouldn’t gain me anything and it would be a pointless exercise. That’s alright. So I do the house he does the farm, if you want the simple version. [13, female, farming]

Another female interviewee describes:

... basically my link to the farm is through Tom mainly ... I don't have – my role, I suppose predominantly at the moment is with children and yeah so I'm probably involved in a few decisions that affect you know, directly affect me, but basically yeah that's Tom's main occupation and his main area. [11, female, farming]

Another female interviewee describes how her work supports the continuation of the family farm, as well as contemplates alternative off-farm options for herself, family farm expansion and the necessary 'business strategy' involved:

... we've farmed up to 10,000 acres. So it's happening, but it means that we go without a lot of things like holidays and renovating houses, and personal sort of things I guess, because the focus is on the land and the machinery, *and* having a city-born daughter-in-law, I think she's coped very well, considering. It's a lot for her to learn, and to understand why we do things the way we do them. It would be very tempting to look at the income and say, "Well, that could be budgeted differently," or "That could be framed differently. That money could be used for different things," and yes it could, but then if you did that, you may not be farming, you may not be able to achieve your goals. So, it's all around priorities and goals, and understanding that probably eighty per cent of what you earn goes back into the farm, and there's no other way around farming than to accept that that's what farming is all about. You try to earn enough for a reasonable lifestyle and a few other things, but the primary goal is keeping your farm strong, keeping it a healthy farm, a productive farm, and so yeah, there's a lot, a lot of business strategy. [19, female, farming]

This quote highlights the interdependence in the roles of women between generations in supporting patrilineal succession plans, as well as the interplay of farm expansion necessary to support succession and terms of trade – all factors contribute to the rationale for understanding income distribution.

These factors discussed – farm business structure and restructuring opportunities and pressures – highlight the diverse and gendered perspectives of how participants critique and challenge the dominance of 'the farm'. This includes other conversations where there are references to inadequate income:

I can see how the farm works but I don't think it should work like that. I think it should be like any other job where you do get paid what hours you work and you do get paid holidays whereas he's like, "You don't understand." I said, "I do understand. I just don't like it." [16, female, farming]

Another female interviewee also raises the issue of her frustration with farm income and identifies how this is linked to the impacts of the drought:

Yes, the droughts some days, and I think we were in our ninth year and I said to my husband, “Are we ever, ever going to be able to do anything to be able to not stress about paying for something? Are we ever going to be able to give ourselves a pay rise?” Because obviously we take a wage from the farm, Alex’s parents and we do, and you take as small amount as possible, so it all goes back into the farm. I said to my husband, “You know what I would love to do? I would love to be able to draw a wage that we can comfortably live on, so we’ve got money, like savings” [13 female, farming]

In an example of gendered perspectives, frustration with income inadequacies was also raised by the same participant’s husband in a separate interview, in response to my question regarding the impact of the drought:

Josephine:

How did it [drought] impact on the household because I’m interested also in that relationship between the farm business and the household?

Interviewee:

Yeah, it’s pretty stressful. Every year we feel we just keep saying, “We’ve got to tighten the belt a little bit more,” so whilst we haven’t had a failure, we haven’t made very much money either, and we had other things going on which probably added to that, as in we were expanding the farm and that sort of thing, which meant everyone was busier so more time away and also more money was going into that, and [my wife] I know, feels like she’s not getting a return from her service or however you want to say it, but yeah, she keeps saying she’s been here for some years and still waiting for the mythical good year, and well, yeah, I guess drought has been a lot of it, but even when we’ve had a reasonable return it’s all been pumped straight back in and just trying to catch up sort of thing. [14, male, farming]

Further, one female interviewee identifies the ‘emotion’ in farming and how this affects the ‘business’ of farming:

I’d like to make it more of a business and not an emotional thing too, the farm. Like it is dirt, treat it as a business. [13, female, farming]

In this example separate interviews with members of a couple reveal both share frustrations regarding farm income. While some female participants are more supportive of on-farm income-distribution patterns that strengthen and support the expansion and continuation of the family farm, others who support family farming also critique the lack of farm income. Cumulatively, findings note the concerns women and men have in farm restructuring decisions and managing changes in terms of trade such as uncertain commodity prices, need to acquire more land, escalating input costs, for example, in combination with managing drought conditions.

### **The masculinisation of agriculture in the Mallee region**

Interviews reveal that not only does agriculture persist as a male-dominated industry; there is evidence that agriculture is becoming more masculine:

Josephine:

So how do you see the changing roles in farming for women and men?

Interviewee:

Nearly all the women around here work. So they work off-farm ... I can't think of one wife who doesn't work but there probably is. So and that keeps the women sane because they're not putting up with the constant you know farming stresses plus it's financially beneficial obviously. So that's a total change. My mother, she was a worker. Like she did everything, sheep, everything. So she was actually like having another full-time man around but the young women of today, that's not going to happen. ... Every day they're not going to do it. They want their life too.

Josephine:

So does that mean there are less women farming?

Interviewee:

**There's no women farming.** They've all got their own careers and jobs. You know [pause] I'm just going around the district. I can't think of one woman who doesn't work. So yeah, **the woman on the farm used to be as I said another worker but that's finished.**

Josephine:

And then for men, does that mean more work on the farm?

Interviewee:

Well it means more isolation and we can't get farm workers.

[22, male, farming; emphasis added]

To provide some background, the previous extract is from an interview with a male dryland farmer who commutes from a town to the farm. For many years he and his family lived on the family farm and then they relocated to a town. His wife describes how now her involvement with the farm is primarily doing 'the books' but she does not spend time on the farm. This is another example of where a wife has 'left' farming prior to her husband. Yet the impacts of agricultural restructuring are clearly gendered and as the male interviewee quoted above identifies, with changes to farming there is 'more isolation' for men.

I also worked with women who described wanting to leave farming prior to their husbands, and leaving in one interview was described as complicated by supporting patrilineal succession. I also interviewed women who were not interested in farming and / or being on the farm.

In some interviews women's perspectives challenge a farm-focus as they challenge the dominance of 'the farm' by not wanting to be involved or no longer wishing to be involved in farming. Yet in contrast to some of the existing knowledge base that describes the women in agriculture movement, for example, what I found is that agriculture is still described as still a stronghold of patrilineal land tenure practice and is male-dominated and perhaps increasingly becoming so given restructuring and changes in commodity production and terms of trade. Given that I mostly worked with those involved in, or who had left dryland farming, I accept that this conclusion may be specific to certain commodities and more research is required to undertake further investigation of this relationship.

## **Conclusion to Part 1**

From interviews the interplay of multiple restructuring issues come to the fore – drought, attachment to the family farm and land, changing terms of trade and the impacts of sustaining the on-farm conditions that support family farming. These issues intersect with social structures supporting patrilineal family farm inheritance and succession as well as gender-based attachments to land and place. These factors in combination are expressed through the gendered perspectives participants provide, and represent gender relations.

## ***Part 2: Restructuring trade and gender relations in the local-global agricultural industry interface***

### **Relating to markets**

Through interviews I became aware of the social significance of changing commodity market conditions. Many participants describe changes in how they sell their commodities in terms of the location and the sale negotiation process. Participants describe the challenges of managing commodity sale price uncertainty, long-term downward trends in commodity prices, and several interviewees describe the stress in negotiating commodity sales. For some participants, the stress is also cited as contributing to the decision to leave farming (see Chapter 7).

There have been substantial changes in how people relate not only to 'the market' but to other aspects of our food systems and recent changed business structures redirect social relationships. This point highlights the complexities in rural-based social research attempts to isolate *the social impacts of* restructuring to the detriment of omitting how agricultural restructuring is to consider food production and social interactions across a food system. Relating to changing market conditions impacts on decision-making and understandings of agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region. Global industry social conditions may also be resisted and adapted in the social space of agricultural restructuring. Further, a key component to describing and explaining agricultural restructuring is the social significance of relating to markets and social issues may be specific to commodity production.

One male interviewee describes an aspect of his interaction with the commodity sale process:

Josephine:

Where do your commodities go?

Interviewee:

Oh, we just deliver into the local system and they go down to Melbourne, and either go on the ship, or depending on the grade and the quality, that's what it all comes down to.

Josephine:

So you're exporting most?

Interviewee:

This year we wouldn't have been – it wouldn't have gone because the quality was down, and so it all depends on the quality and what grade you've got where it ends up ... [12, male, farming]

A female interviewee describes her concerns with the increases in company investment in farming and the flow-on effects with respect to new challenges for family farmers:

They [investors] come in with, and let's just pick a number out of the sky, a million dollars of investor's money and they can just go, bang, that farm's paid for, and then they can have enough in their kitty to have new everything, so they don't have a repair and maintenance bill as high as a local farmer, they don't have interest payments on land, so the economics of it all is quite different, and so if they become willing to just accept grain prices as they are, they don't have the overheads, so therefore they can accept grain at a different price to us. Obviously they want the best price for their shareholders, but it concerns me that farmers, who are farming privately need the grain prices to be as high as they can get them and whereas investors might be able to survive on lower prices, and whether that has any concerns for the future I don't know. It depends on world markets. [19, female, farming]

My interpretation of these discussions is that it is more useful to consider the activity and the embodiment of trading and globalising agricultural restructuring conditions. Therefore, the 'local' and 'global' are connected gendered lived experiences that confront simple top-down – or perhaps that is static – notions of 'the economy' and 'industry' as well as 'trade'.

### **Social terms of trading**

If responses to industry restructuring are diverse, and social diversity is permitted in understanding / investigating the rurality of industry restructuring, then I need to acknowledge both the limits of my findings as well as advocate for the social significance of leading research into understanding what *is* 'restructuring' and what *can be* 'restructuring'.

In researching gender relations, researcher theoretical priorities work with the responses to questions answered and interviewee priorities, and the latter in turn may challenge and critique researcher frameworks. Moreover, the interview itself involves gender relations. Gender relations in the 'local' and 'global' nexus of agricultural industry restructuring is expressed in diverse ways. I argue here that within an embodied restructuring is an inherently

gendered dimension that expresses itself through discussions of the social experiences supporting many aspects to 'trade'.

As discussed in the literature review, a key feature of agricultural industry restructuring in Australia has been guided by the notion that farmers need to 'get big or get out'. The matter of land – of access to land, the means by which people can acquire more land, of caring for land, of history, sentiment, place and 'connection' to land associated with family farming as noted in the previous section – is a matter frequently referred to by participants.

One female interviewee identifies the high cost of land and debt issues as a barrier to her (and others) leaving farming:

The only way at the moment that young farmers can buy land is for their parents to support them, parents to back them so that makes it hard if you're wanting to retire in ten years' time, and you're tied up with helping your son buy land. [19, female, farming]

However, the 'reason' for leaving or remaining farming is not necessarily singular and the same participant describes the detrimental impacts of the drought notwithstanding the ability to expand farm size during this period and thus support male succession, as well as her relationship with her daughter-in-law that is potentially a social structure that may support leaving farming:

... at the moment I think I'm just stuck here [laughs], but things will change. It's dependent a lot on how much my daughter in law is willing to sort of contribute to the farm, it depends. At the moment we're just at a standstill until she sorts out whether she wants to. [19, female, farming]

Women are certainly involved in farming and are expected to be involved or at least supportive of the family farm. There are women who are no longer involved in farming, or reducing their on-farm involvement as discussed in Part 1. The patriarchal and patrilineal aspect to family farming may also be supported by women, and is a social dynamic negotiating changing terms of trade.

## **Conclusion to Part 2**

In this second Part to this chapter I draw attention to analysis of interviews that emphasise how women and men involved in family farming are negotiating changing terms of trade and, in particular, markets. There are social and gender equity issues at work in the interplay of complex issues informing decisions to farm or not. While throughout this chapter – and this section – I have overwhelmingly drawn on interview material taken from interviews with women and men who are farming, the social significance of changing terms of trade and relationships to markets is a theme that continues to be of importance in subsequent findings chapters. Market conditions, and relating to markets, also inform decisions to leave farming as well as decisions to continue farming. Further, as outlined in Chapter 8, there are also significant wellbeing issues implicit in understanding the social impacts of relating to markets.

### ***Conclusion***

Drawing upon the interview material, I propose that a gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee reveals that restructuring involves multiple farm ‘exits’ occurring at the same time. There is a gendered social experience of leaving farming as well as a masculinisation of agriculture occurring that not only further demarcates gendered roles and responsibilities on-farm but involves gender-based inequities in who is withdrawing from being involved in the agricultural industry and farming.

In the literature review I drew upon resources that define neoliberalism and globalisation as social, cultural, political and economic processes. This chapter also conveys how participants describe the social conditions of managing changes in family farming that can be analysed as a gendered embodied experience of agricultural restructuring. ‘Industry’ and ‘restructuring’ and even ‘terms of trade’ as defined in interviews reveal the interface between ‘local’ and ‘global’ in that both social experience and a globalised industry intersects and adapts through dynamic local social norms. Participants describe and critique the experience of restructuring and articulate social pressures and priorities in managing multiple changes in food production, for those women and men who continue to farm and as the next chapter will argue, also for those who make the decision to leave farming.



## Chapter 7 Leaving farming in the Mallee region: gendered perspectives

### *Introduction*

This chapter addresses diverse experiences of leaving farming. The chapter examines the interview data from those who have left farming and their reasons for doing so. Livelihood changes and decision-making practices are complex and gendered. There is no 'one' reason for leaving farming: findings demonstrate there are a range of reasons for leaving, which are multifaceted.

At this early stage in the Introduction to the chapter I wish to take the more unusual step of including data that has influenced the analysis of the experiences of leaving farming. Towards the end of an interview with a male participant who left dryland farming, I asked this question:

Josephine:

Is there anything else, when you were thinking about coming here today, that you had on your mind that you wanted to share, or anything that has come up that you would like to talk more about?

Interviewee:

I just wanted to share the process and I wanted to include all the personal journey of it as well rather than just talking about the machinations of it, and the timelines and the processes, and I hope that helps as well because, especially when I was depressed, I just didn't know how I was going to move through it but also there was life after it as well, so I'm here to set an example that there is life after depression, and yes, at times I really didn't know what was on the other side of it, so whether it was a new identity or just whether I was going to be able to function properly again, and yeah, I really felt that had to be part of the story as well. It was part of what got me here. [17, male, left farming]

I interpret the above quote as significant both in terms of the health and wellbeing, and identity issues described by the interviewee's consideration of leaving farming. Further, it is significant for conveying the relationship between gathering data and thus methods, and the opportunity for reviewing how findings are represented to the reader. As this interviewee points out, 'the process' of leaving farming is what is important.

In this chapter Part 1 describes the reasons for leaving farming and Part 2 explores the experiences of leaving farming. Exiting farming is thus explained as a process, and while findings articulate interview conversation at a point in time, leaving farming is also expressed, at times, as ongoing and / or part of a continuum of experiences. This distinction is offered to establish multiple ways to represent findings that are responsive to women and men managing complex changes in agriculture and family farming.

### ***Part 1: Reasons for leaving farming***

Interviewees typically offer several reasons for leaving farming. Further, what I outline here is by no means an exhaustive list of reasons for leaving. Rather, I describe the most cited and significant reasons for leaving, and associated livelihood changes, as well as decision-making issues and practices.

#### **Descriptions of who is leaving farming**

Initial interviews with key informants, and throughout many interviews – with those both farming and those who have left farming – interviewees provide their own analysis about those who are leaving farming. For example:

But at the moment most of the farms that have been sold are by older people rather than people early age or younger selling up and moving out. [key informant 01]

See the other thing going on too is leasing, a lot of people perhaps who want to break from farming or they don't want to sell their farm, they lease it out to someone else. [01, male, left farming]

Descriptions people offered overwhelmingly support the proposition that in the Mallee region people are leaving due to age, retirement, health issues and the farm being sold – typically to neighbours – or as proposed above, the land may be leased and continue to be farmed. Further, people I interviewed describe the Mallee region as still dominated by families farming, although several interviewees describe alternative farm structures emerging including areas of land being farmed by corporations.

As I recruited using snowball sampling, I asked people farming if they knew anybody who had left farming who may be interested in being interviewed. In response people would again

describe people mostly leaving due to retirement, and that retirement may occur in conjunction with other reasons e.g. health issues. Interviewees also asked me who did I want to interview, and I purposively asked about the possibility of interviewing people who decided to leave due to financial difficulties, drought and farm viability issues. This provided invaluable information about reasons why people are leaving and who is leaving, but also about relationships between those farming and those who leave farming.

Some interviewees noted other reasons why people leave farming including not having a family member wishing to take over the farm, and 'financial reasons':

Josephine:

You know, when I started my PhD and I started reading about agriculture and restructuring and family farming, I kept reading about the phrase, "get big or get out". So I just wondered, well, how do you get bigger, and who gets out?

Interviewee:

Yeah, well that's a good point. Some people, well everyone's different: some people had to get out like due to financial reasons. Other people have got no kids, and just woke up and said, "Well, I'm 55 and I've still got my health, and sitting on say \$2 million worth of assets and land, none of my kids are coming home, well I'm going." So up and just go, and buy a house with no mortgage in a bigger regional area, and then start travelling, and doing whatever they want to do. [12, male, farming]

My question to this interviewee does offer the potential to discuss the relationship between his strategy to increase his farm size and how he relates to those who leave which in turn enables an opportunity to continue to farm. However, as I progressed with the research it became clear to me that discussion of this relationship is not easy and I relied on a descriptive phrase to introduce the subject in the interview in a 'safe' manner. The response remains a broad description and my interpretation is that what is not spoken about is just as important as what is – in this case a withdrawal from discussing social relationships in managing access to and acquisition of additional farm land.

### **Debt pressures**

A key reason offered for leaving farming is avoiding and reducing debt. A number of interviewees discussed the stress created by the pressure to expand the size of the land farmed

and purchase more land as well as to acquire new technology, machinery, and financially manage increasing input expenses and thus reduced profit. Women and men who had made the decision to leave farming discuss the issue of managing increasing debt and discuss exit strategies to reduce debt.

One female interviewee describes:

So we couldn't get hold of ground was another reason, plus there was only Richard and I, so just the two of us trying to run it yeah, just getting really stressful. I found Richard was just getting very, it was all a bit demoralising sort of for him, he just found it all a bit too hard, I think, it just wasn't as easy. Loved it, absolutely loved it, we both did, but [it] had just come to a stage when we needed to update the header, we needed to update the truck and all of that was going to cost thousands of dollars. You've got to decide if you want to go into debt. [07, female, left farming]

Further, this interviewee explains how the decision to leave included considering the consequences for (male) succession:

... we know a lot of friends there are never going to get out of debt, they're going to be in it and they're passing it on to the next generation now, which we decided that we didn't want to do that. We sort of had a discussion with [our son] ... whether he sort of wanted to, and he didn't really know [07, female, left farming]

Thus the decision to leave farming is also informed by a refusal to accept the stress experienced in managing farm restructuring and this interviewee also identifies particular difficulties for her husband, difficulties gaining additional land to farm, as well as breaking from an industry succession practice that is potentially unsustainable due to debt. Indeed this interviewee goes on to emphasise how providing new opportunities for her children was critical to the decision to leave farming:

... a lot to do with, for the kids, what was going to be good for the kids as well. So that's more or less what made us realise was just the economics of the whole thing, it's just absolutely ridiculous what, the costs that go into it then what you get out. It's a fantastic lifestyle, absolutely fantastic lifestyle, but yeah a lot of stress goes with it. [07, female, left farming]

Elsewhere a male interviewee describes how:

It was sort of because the bank, well they would have foreclosed, and just to circumvent that they want you to make the decision, so yeah, so for me to do that, as

much as the history and that was there ... yeah, just to clear the debt and just to free yourself up, yeah, not to be tied and locked in so much. [26, male, left farming]

Thus 'history' is named as it is significant, as well as financial pressures, and as other interviewee's describe, the historical connection to the family farm and land is extremely important and is a consideration in the decision to leave farming.

### **Changing farming practices and terms of trade**

People describe several – often intertwined – reasons for leaving farming. Men and women who have left farming discuss debt issues as well as the impacts of changing farming practices and reduced terms of trade. Terms of trade includes discussion of escalating input costs, inadequate commodity sale prices, changes in how commodities are managed and sold, and relationships with markets.

With one couple<sup>1</sup> both include the challenges of changing farming practices as a reason for deciding to leave farming:

It just became really hard, well Richard describes it. When I was sort of first there, you more or less just got your grain off, sowed your crop, got your grain off, took it to the silo, got paid. Now, it's got to the stage where you've got to be watching your prices all the time. It's more or less get the crop off as quick as you can because the prices can fluctuate two or three times a day like you can miss out on hundreds and hundreds of dollars, or thousands of dollars, in a day, just because the prices are up and down. Just the cost of farming.[07, female, left farming]

... just I guess prices and the input prices versus your income. So it was probably frustrating in a way that we were probably a block or two short on our land really all the time, just didn't have quite enough land, but I could have changed I guess – machinery was getting old and we didn't know which way to go there, whether to change into the real modern way of farming, direct drilling, instead of the old fallow type farming that I was into [08, male, left farming]

One couple who were leaving irrigation farming describe a number of reasons for leaving including changes to the terms of trade and changes to water allocations and pricing costs.

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<sup>1</sup> With all couples I interviewed the wife and husband separately.

They also emphasise the impacts of the recent drought, and describe the importance of age and life stage considerations.

... but they've [wineries] made a lot of people suffer now, pricing and everything like that, and yeah, you've got no recall or anything. You've just got to take what they give you and that's it, so that's another reason why, that's it, no more grapes. That's the way it goes. I hope, like as [my wife] said, and other people say, "Our fathers and grandfathers they saw the situations." **The drought part is one story but then the winery part's the other one**, where they virtually said to growers, "Put wine grapes, put wine grapes in," and then people went in in a big way ... [09, male, left farming; emphasis added]

So I think that's what brought things to a head, too, was that we weren't making anything out of it ... there was no security of where we're going to get rid of the fruit ... I think when it stopped being financially viable, when our overdraft kept building up was when we thought, "This is crazy," so that was probably the catalyst for stopping. [10, female, left farming]

When we had contracts earlier on when we were doing this with the grapes, we would have a two or three year contract, then we would have a one year contract, but at least that one year, you knew you were putting your work in but at the end you were going to get such and such a price for your grapes, but when they abolished that, you work all the year for them to ring up and go, "Yeah, no look, maybe we'll give to. No yeah, we will take 50 tonne, but we'll give you \$250 a tonne for it," you know, just crazy. So, I think that uncertainty was one of the really big issues, and just being manipulated by people rather than having any control. [10, female, left farming]

Both interviewees specifically emphasise the impacts of changes to commodity sale processes including the loss of sale contract security, commodity prices, as well as changes in their *relationship* to a market – in this instance, wineries.

One female interviewee also describes difficulties she and her husband experienced in gaining additional land in order to expand their farm size to assist them to continue farming:

... and we needed more ground, we only had 3000 acres. You probably need nearly double that, and we tried to buy neighbour's farms when they had moved and that, but you find a lot of big farmers coming now and just buy the lot, and they're cropping like you know 10 and 20,000 acres at a time. [07, female, left farming]

There are differences in terms of trade and farm restructuring issues that interviewees who have left farming discuss as reasons informing their decision-making. There are differences based on farm-type and commodities produced. Notwithstanding such differences the impacts

of commodity prices, terms of commodity sales and farming costs in restructuring, and input costs are discussed as important issues.

## **Drought**

Reasons for leaving farming involve responses to changing farming practices and conditions (e.g. water security as mentioned by those who have left irrigation farming), changing terms of trade and the impacts of drought conditions. Thus reasons for leaving tend to be multiple and complex, and often during interview conversations interviewees are working through reasons and the priority issues informing their decision-making.

One male interviewee who left dryland farming also describes multiple restructuring pressures. Discussing the decision to leave farming I specifically ask about the impact of the drought:

Josephine:

And was that compounded by the drought?

Interviewee:

The drought didn't help, no. It was, even though I was still getting a crop out of the drought, it was just the input costs that I was carrying from the changes that I made. I also made some management decisions with basis contracts. I hedged two or three years ahead because of where the prices were, they went [makes sound 'poof'] through the roof, and course that cost me.

Josephine:

So you were locked in to a price?

Interviewee:

Yeah, I took the basis contract, and when we bought them back instead of being in the money we were out of the money by thousands and thousands of dollars. Like I was a hundred and fifty odd grand out of the money and that compounded with a lean year, your borrowing costs and taking on more debt, yeah, it just all compounded, and then also expanding the business as well, taking on more land. **So it was all a combination.** [26, male, left farming; emphasis added]

It is significant that this interviewee emphasises a number of issues that in *combination*, as he describes, created pressures resulting in the decision to leave farming. While I asked about the significance of drought, input costs, sale contract conditions, debt, farm expansion as well as reduced commodity output due to the drought are all described as contributing to the decision-making.

Another male interviewee describes how drought influenced his decision to leave farming:

The seasons are very unpredictable and you would have a reasonably good year, an average year, and then the next year you would have a dry year and you would go backwards and you were losing money, so you would have to wait for the next year to then get back to even, to then, and it just seemed that it was quite a few dry years there. There was a couple of droughts, and yeah, I really really felt this was not going to work for the long term because you have to because, probably in the long term, you have to look at it in a ten year period rather than just an annual type of event, so the decision was sort of made there on the way, to exit farming, to leave farming, and to move on to a different career. [17, male, left farming]

Further, another female interviewee describes how 'a few bad years' contributed to the decision to leave and retire from farming:

And also they'd been a few bad years and we were having a better year so we got out before it got any worse. [02, female, left farming]

This conversation also indicates what circumstances may assist leaving farming, e.g. favourable climate conditions.

### **Age and life stage**

Interviewees identify their age and life stage as influencing their decision to leave farming. This includes discussion of retirement plans, succession planning, caring responsibilities and other significant relationships.

One female interviewee describes opportunities for her children as an important consideration for her, in the decision to leave farming:

So, yeah, I would say we probably did it more for the kids than for us, in a long way. Yeah. We did it for us but probably more for them in the long run I would say.

[07, female, left farming]

Another male interviewee notes age as a factor and a prior plan regarding when to leave farming, and raises drought and water security / pricing issues as well as the matter of no children to take over the farm:

... so yeah, gradually withdrawing, yes, yep – which we had already planned for, you know, the last seven or eight years I suppose, when the drought started and then the water situation, pricing of water going up and yeah, lack of water, used the water very

sparingly and managed to produce the last few crops up until – what was it – 2010 was the last crop that we took off last year. We always said, “By the time we’re in our late 50s we want to get out of the place.” No kids to take over, they’ve all done their jobs, gone to uni and that sort of stuff, which we, yeah, didn’t beg them to stay on the land, we knew we would be the last ones and they were all prepared to go away anyway, so yeah that’s where we are. [09, male, left farming]

Additionally this interviewee specifically emphasises:

... and the age thing because we thought, “No, we’ve had enough.”

Further,

... and then the main thing is that you’ve got no one else to take over the land, no kids. [09, male, left farming]

The above interviewee’s wife also reflects that it would be more difficult to leave and make decisions if the children had been at home:

Josephine:

So how did you manage when there wasn’t the income coming in?

Interviewee:

Because I was working full time then and luckily, because all this happened as our children were off our hands, and that’s the one thing that I thank God for every day, is that this situation didn’t happen fifteen years earlier, because I don’t know what we would have done, but because all of our children were off our hands, they had all gone through Uni, so financially independent ... [10, female, left farming]

Here this participant describes how her off-farm work supported the continuation of the farm for a period of time. Matters of age and life stage are critically important in decision-making regarding leaving farming and this includes the timing of when people decide to leave farming, and how they leave farming. Yet these matters continue to be intertwined with many other reasons for leaving farming which in turn impact on how significant age and life stage become in the decision to leave farming.

## **Conclusion to Part 1**

In Part 1 I have outlined the key reasons for leaving farming described by interviewees. There are often multiple and intersecting reasons. There are other reasons for leaving that were described in interviews that I have not concentrated on in this section, for example the reason

of individual health issues, relationship stress and succession are all described in interviews as influencing decisions. Stress and wellbeing are discussed in Part 2. Stress is a pervasive issue raised in many interviews and is a significant issue described by people leaving farming as well as those who are farming. I turn now to the experience of leaving farming.

## ***Part 2: Experiences of leaving farming***

While this second part includes further exploration of reasons for leaving farming, the focus here is on representing the experience of leaving as described and explored in interviews. This section is guided by lived experience as expressed through gendered perspectives. In this section feelings and emotions in and around leaving farming are explored, and convey how decisions are made and when, and by whom. The outcomes of leaving farming emphasise the continuous aspects to leaving farming. In this section I portray livelihood and identity issues raised in interviews, challenges in managing rural social change including discussions of relationships between those farming and those who have left. I also include a discussion of supports that interviewees identify that assisted them in leaving farming, and suggestions interviewees have made.

### **Leaving farming: “there’s a lot more emotion attached to it than you actually think”**

One female interviewee describes the emotion in leaving farming:

We had really good family support so that helped, but he [husband] found it really tough when we moved, like we thought we were ready but he still wasn't. We had only been here, and he might tell you himself, but we had only been here two weeks and he had a breakdown. But just all of a sudden it must have hit him, and he was very upset and thought he had done the wrong thing by all of us and wondered what had he done sort of thing, and it's probably taken him a good twelve months to settle in. He's really settled now good, still misses it but he wouldn't go back. Well he won't even go back and look there now, so but yeah, big, big decision, and as I said it's more – I don't know what you put Jo – there's a lot more emotion attached to it than you actually think. You think you're right to go but once you drive out that gate it's sort of, you're fairly emotional ...The kids were all more or less sort of brought up there, but as I said, **it was definitely harder for Richard because that's all he's known his whole life.** [07, female, left farming; emphasis added]

This conversation details many significant issues: the emotion in leaving farming, the difference the female interviewee identifies between herself and her husband, and family support. Not

only is leaving described as emotional, but this interviewee's discussion has a particular focus on her husband's wellbeing and his experience of leaving. The same interviewee also identifies that for her husband:

Very, very emotional for him, very emotional because he felt a lot of guilt because it's a family farm [I 07 female, left farming]

Thus this interviewee also recognises the significance of her husband's connection to the family farm and this indicates the social significance that leaving farming involves leaving a farm and a place i.e. the family farm, and this social connection involves important relationships to that place and environment as well as intergenerational history and responsibility.

This latter point is emphasised by the interviewee's husband:

Josephine:

And so what was it like? Can you share that experience?

Interviewee:

Of leaving the land?

Josephine:

Yeah.

Interviewee:

Well, I thought I was pretty right at the start but it sort of got to me about two weeks before we left the farm I think, it sort of, "Ooh," you know. You always thought oh yeah "It's all fine," until you sign the dotted line you know, yeah, and then it sort of hits you a bit. The worst thing I found was leaving was like losing your identity. I sort of felt like a nobody, you're a farmer, you're a shearer. I topped the lamb market lots of times in [Mallee town name] and I shored for thirty years around the district as a shearer as well as a farmer, and yeah it didn't hit until we moved that, "Geez, I'm a nobody. I'm in my fifties, and geez." Just losing your identity of who you were and what you're about basically. You get asked once we came here and socialised and, "What do you do?" and it was hard to say, "Nothing at the moment but I'm an ex-farmer," you know whereas when you're a farmer it was just so great, everywhere you socialised, whether it be field days or sheep sales, pubs, that's what you were, so that was a hard part. I guess that's probably about the hardest part I could think of, yeah. [08, male, left farming]

This interviewee asks me did I want him to talk about the experience of 'leaving the land'.

While I usually asked interviewees to talk about the experience of leaving farming, the question that this interviewee asks, asserts the importance of the link between leaving farming and

leaving the land. As the subsequent conversation articulates, leaving farming has involved loss of identity, livelihood, status and relationships including an embodied relationship to the land.

A contrasting feature of the interview with the female partner is her focus on the experience of leaving farming for her husband. In response to this priority, at one point in the interview I ask:

Josephine:

And you talked about Richard settling. How have you settled since you've left the farm?

Interviewee:

Yeah, I'm fine, I love it [laughs]. I love it. It's a lot more easy for me. I think I'm running around just as much as I was [07, female, left farming]

While this interviewee at this point identifies how leaving farming has been easier for her in comparison to her husband's experience, elsewhere during the interview she describes many challenges including the emotional turmoil of leaving, the planning around how and when to leave farming including managing the sale of the farm, the physical relocation of the family and organising housing, for example. Yet I include this conversation here as this gender-based differential will again be referred to throughout Part 2.

### **Livelihood and identity changes/ challenges**

Several interviewees who have left farming describe how they continue to develop their livelihood options. Thus leaving farming is a 'process' and livelihood outcomes are described as still emerging for some interviewees. As a male participant cited above describes, regarding the 'hardest part' to leaving, there are a number of ways that the experience of leaving farming can be analysed. These include the loss of livelihood as well as challenges and opportunities. There are also notable differences in the content and emphasis of discussions with women and men regarding their experiences.

Another male interviewee also raises the important matter of managing changing livelihood *and* 'identity' in leaving farming:

What do you do? And I used to be a farmer, so I was a farmer, I wasn't myself and then a farmer, so I changed my identity and I was quite prepared for that before leaving farming but it's a real change within your own identity or consciousness, yeah, you used to be 'you were a farmer', you were this, you just weren't yourself. So that's been one of the biggest changes as well. [17, male, left farming]

The same interviewee describes the challenge of managing leaving the sociocultural context of family farming that supported his previous livelihood identity:

... a lot of my work ethic was passed down from my father and was also passed down from his parents and yeah, just by being in that environment you're given a work ethic and I guess a set of rules around work or around, and everything came first, the farm came first so everything else came second, so it was quite an interesting, emotional tug of war to lift that because I was sort of in that pressure cooker all the time. I had grown up though that, that culture. [17, male, left farming]

Thus to leave farming involves a critique of 'the farm came first' – a hegemonic masculine livelihood-farmer local culture. This interviewee also offers a further description of how intertwined his livelihood identity was with his spatial location and intergenerational relationships:

You've probably identified that it's a real psychology, it's a culture, I guess not individual but it's a very insular culture where you've got that generational tie as well as the geographical tie and all the emotions around that as well. I know people experience those in other ways in the community but I found that a real process to work through if I was to leave farming, leave your identity. [17, male, left farming]

Many interviewees indeed describe the process of leaving farming as difficult, and together interviewees describe diverse reasons for the pressures and stimulus that prompt the decision-making process, as well as the details of actually managing the logistics of leaving. What is also being described is very much a masculine farming sociocultural context that supports not just livelihood capability but also male identity. In turn the strength of this spatial and family-based farming and agricultural industry identity is described as a huge challenge to men who leave farming.

I asked interviewees about the outcomes of leaving farming including livelihood outcomes. However it became apparent that this 'outcome' focus was not always relevant or appropriate. Male interviewees who had left farming often noted that they were still formulating their ideas regarding future work opportunities. For example:

That's in the back of my mind again, whether I should go and do a few courses and things now and prepare myself for something but I'm still not sure where I want to head, what direction. I guess I've had my career, farming and shearing and done

exceptionally well out of it, so I guess to move on to something now, I'm not sure what direction to go in. I don't know. [08, male, left farming]

This interviewee also describes some of the difficulties he has experienced with relocating and looking for work since leaving farming:

Yeah, well I guess being my own boss for that many years I've always been my own boss when I had my shearing run and farming since I took over the family farm. So yeah, that was a hard part of working for someone when you're in your fifties getting told what to do, I guess and that was the hard thing working out. Early days it was pretty tough because I never had a resume or anything, never had to have one because being my own boss, and going around and handing that into some local employment agencies was – and not hearing [08, male, left farming]

Another male interviewee also discusses how he is still working out what to do next:

... we've been really nutting it out and, "What are we going to do next?" and whether it's part time work for each of us or how we're going to juggle the parenting ... and we're still formulating that. [17, male, left farming]

Both reference the issues of age and life stage. Further, the latter notes how his livelihood strategy involves discussion with his wife.

Another male interviewee describes how he remains interested in farming and reflects on managing change:

To be honest probably the best decision I've ever made. Yeah, as much as I love farming, my passion is still agriculture, as much as I see other industries like the mining industry and different things, yeah I still have a – well I don't know like it's sort of a bit of unfinished business, but in saying that, I'm not looking to go blindly into it like I did previously. I've sort of got a bit more of an open mind that if things don't work out well then you can make a change, you don't have to be tied into things, you can change and move, and yeah, just go with what's there instead of reacting to everything you can sort of, "Ok. Well that hasn't worked," and you can make a conscious decision to just make a move to a different point or to go down another path. [26, male, left farming]

In comparing the responses of couples who have left farming it is notable that there are significant gender-based differences relating to livelihood options when leaving farming. For example, one female interviewee describes gaining work that assisted her family's relocation:

Well, when we first moved I had work to go straight to, so I came here and I had a week, I think, and then started work straight away, and that allowed Richard time until he found something. [07, female, left farming]

Elsewhere this interviewee identifies that it was easier for her to leave farming than her husband partly due to her husband's ties to the family farm. The interviewee also describes as significant her experiences in other locations as assisting her decision-making and experience of leaving farming. After describing the decision to leave as 'pretty stressful' the interviewee goes on to further describe:

One day yeah, it's all good, and the next day you think, "Oh my God, are we doing the right thing?" but when it came to the crunch, yeah, it was definitely the right move to make for us anyway, but yeah a very emotional decision to sort of relinquish something like that, and Richard's known nothing else, that's all he's ever done is farming ... whereas I've sort of been out a bit I suppose, so as much as it was pretty emotional for me too I've lived in a town and I've sort of moved around. [07, female, left farming]

Another female interviewee who overtly did not identify as a 'farmer's wife' as she did not live on the farm, similarly describes how her diverse work experiences assist her to make change and support what is clearly described as her husband's decision to leave farming:

I've done lots of different kinds of things and James has mainly done farming. He's had another business as well but I think it might be harder to conceive of something new, entirely new if you haven't had a wide range of experiences in that. [18, female, left farming]

Further, one female retired farmer explains how it was easier for her to leave farming and retire than her husband:

... but it wasn't so difficult for me because I'd already been doing things in town, anyway, in various community groups so it just mixed in to whatever I was doing basically, but probably it would have been more difficult for Tim because it was his life and his career, but I was more or less like the second party. [02, female, left farming]

In leaving farming men can suffer a loss of livelihood and a loss of identity. Several women identify that it is easier for them to leave farming, notwithstanding that they identify numerous challenges. Women also identify their different experience is informed by a gender-based

differential with respect to their attachment to the family farm, and this informs different livelihood trajectories including future opportunities.

### **Reflections on family, work and life**

Some men resist and critique the gender order in farming. This is evident in the reflections men make on family, work and life. Significantly, a number of male interviewees make mention of relationship, family and lifestyle pressures both in and out of farming.

For example, one interviewee reflects how:

... at the end of the day from what I've learnt over the years is that family is everything and everything else comes second, so where I've been putting everything else first and that second or third or fourth ... [26, male, left farming]

Another interviewee also reflects:

I realised that I had an unbalanced life in respect to the farm, the work was everything and then your family and your balance came afterwards ... [17, male, left farming]

And, elsewhere:

I've had my career, and I think [my wife] [is] probably in agreeance, I'm all for the kids now and trying to set them up really, as long as we've got a little bit left to live on, and we'll scale down, we bought this place because of the kids, bigger and everything, and so basically I just want to see the kids go forward and get careers and watch them grow, I guess [laughs], that's my ambition I suppose, looking forward is to properly set them up, yeah. [08, male, left farming]

Further, one interviewee identifies family and relationship stress is an issue in farming:

... and it's very demanding on the family unit, and especially for someone who is from outside, that environment, that culture, it's something that's a bit foreign I think. [17, male, left farming]

Thus a number of men discuss 'family' as important in discussions of what has evolved from leaving farming. Some critique the notion that the farm comes first and this challenges any notion that leaving farming is simply a livelihood-based decision.

### **The decision to leave farming**

Some people describe making decisions in association with their partners or spouses, others describe a more individual approach to the decision to leave and interviewees had various relationship statuses. There is also discussion of who takes on what role in leaving farming, as well as the influence of broader family and rural community relationships.

One female interviewee, who was not involved in living or working on the farm as her husband commuted to the farm, described the extent of her involvement in the decision to leave farming:

Josephine:

And so with your partner's decision to leave farming, how did the decision making process work?

Interviewee:

Between us?

Josephine:

Yes.

Interviewee:

I guess I felt really that I wanted to leave it to James as much as possible because I felt it really was part of the core of who he is, and I felt if I pressured him or made him feel like there was pressure coming from me to leave, I just thought that's not going to be good down the track. I didn't want him to get down the track and think that he was sorry that he left and that he might harm our relationship and might resent me for it or whatever. I really wanted him to be sure that that was the right choice for him, so I tried to be as neutral as I could about it when we talked about it, but the feeling I had was that he'd actually probably made the decision long ago ... [18, female, left farming]

The same interviewee also describes how her husband's decision to leave farming led to decision-making regarding options of lifestyle and where to live:

... it meant that we could think about some other possibilities for how we might live, and also I guess where we might live too. Once you're obviously a farmer, your whole

life is rooted to a spot whereas lots of other lifestyles and ways of making a living don't have that same rootedness in an actual place, so it sort of freed up a whole lot of possibilities once that decision was made. [18, female, left farming]

Her husband discusses his decision to leave farming in response to my question regarding how he felt about leaving farming:

How do I feel about it? It's been a life changing process and in a positive way, I guess we embraced it that way, but it wasn't easy, it was a very, very hard decision to make and it probably took me four or five years to make it, and even though the decision was made it was such a difficult emotional process to go through. I was a third generation farmer. We were never actively encouraged to be a farmer or had any sort of family pressure. It was more, if you wanted to make that in life, "You're quite welcome," and we're all given lots of experiences in our life to see alternatives but yeah, it was very hard to make that decision. Once it was quite crystal clear it was really quite an easy process – believe it or not – it was easier than I thought it was going to be, but I think we created a good structure and support system around ourselves in that process and as I mentioned our family was a part of a whole team and we were able to go through the process with a support system, and that was, gee, I wouldn't say it was the hardest decision of my life, but it was pretty well up there. [17, male, left farming]

This conversation cited describes the length of time it took to decide to leave, the importance of family support that assisted him to leave farming, as well as the difficulty of what is described as an incredibly emotional decision to leave farming. And similarly to his wife, he describes the opportunity of relocation:

... we exited farming, we were geographically free, we weren't actually tied to a place which I had been ... for almost 40 years, and so it was quite a fresh feeling that we could now relocate, or how do we want to create our life? [17, male, left farming]

Again, this reiterates the point that the decision to leave farming involves imagining new geographies, places and community, as well as lifestyle and livelihood matters.

### **Relationships between those farming and those who have left**

To consider the experiences of leaving farming is also to consider rural community social change. This is expressed by interviewees in discussions of relationships between those farming and those who have left.

I specifically asked one female interviewee who has moved out of farming about changes in her 'sense of community':

Josephine:

Tell me more about your sense of community, having moved and...

Interviewee:

[sighs] That's the part that's really sad with people who you thought were friends ... We haven't got a lot of contact with anybody since we moved, which Richard found really, really hard. It's more or less like they've nearly wiped you. [07, female, left farming]

Further into the discussion this interviewee also emphasises the significance of these relationship changes and loss of relationships in leaving farming by nominating it as an issue for me to research:

... so it would be interesting when you do your studies to find out has anybody else experienced that. I would be very interested to hear that but that's what we found. [07, female, left farming]

People leaving farming describe changes in social relationships, and some discuss difficulties and tensions in relationships for different reasons.

The same interviewee also describes a local 'protocol' she and her husband observed in leaving farming and selling their farm:

... we did the right thing, we went around to all the neighbours, which is that's sort of a bit of protocol, whatever and offer the blocks to your neighbours, that's the *done* thing, that's a non-negotiable thing, you offer the neighbours the ground first. It's sort of a bit of a code of ethics sort of thing. [07, female, left farming]

This point further emphasises that there are social norms in leaving farming with respect to the leaving process and relating to neighbours specifically on the matter of access to farm land.

One male interviewee reflects on the changes he has observed in the community he left:

... it's really quite an interesting feeling returning back, say to [Mallee town name], over the last three years since I left, and for the first 12 months I would get quite emotional everytime I went back, and then after getting over that emotion I could appreciate the decline in the social [pause] social support but also the social networks within the Mallee, and it's been a very slow decline but consistently, a consistent migration of people out of the Mallee. [17, male, left farming]

The same interviewee discusses his relationships since he has left farming:

I still keep in contact and I still have, still want to be part of the support system because it's not easy for a lot of my friends, a lot of my peers, because they're going through lots of change still as well, a lot of pressures. It was funny, when we had the clearing sale, which was a bit of a full stop for me, we were having afterwards a few beers and a barbeque and in the end one good friend said, "All my friends are leaving," you know, very emotional, very upset, "All my friends are leaving," and it's true, they've got this happening where community is changing and I said, "I really admire you guys because you are still doing what I can't, or won't, I'm not prepared to do and I've made that decision and I can't continue it, and I really admire what you guys are doing," and that's about where it was. [17, male, left farming]

There are difficulties for both those leaving and those remaining farming: people leaving farming results in out-migration and substantial rural community change that can be challenging both for those who leave and those who remain. Thus this relationship between the two – those farming and those leaving – is important as this interviewee has identified.

A female interviewee, who has retired from farming and remained living in the same community where she and her husband farmed, broadly describes the demographic changes to the community as well as the impacts on her of people leaving farming and migrating:

Like this generation has gone – in the good old days, they would have retired into [Mallee town name] and kept their links with their farms, but there's been such a change in the family farms – they've got bigger and bigger, so there's less people farming, so nobody does that anymore and they've all gone to be with their families. So that's left very, very few people behind, of our age group anyway. [27 female, left farming]

She also describes at length her current dilemma regarding having retired and leased the farm, and is now considering leaving the farming-based rural community where she has continued to reside:

Josephine:

And you'll stay living in the town?

...

Interviewee:

Well this is the question. It's becoming a question a little bit now. For me it is – I don't think my husband will think it's such a big question because as far as he's concerned he's going to stay here forever, but I'm beginning to feel that, with the decline of the town, perhaps we should move on, because there's so few people left of our age that there isn't much social interaction for us. So I'm beginning to feel that perhaps it's time to make a decision to move off, but it will be a different idea to get him to agree to that too. But I can see that it's not – there's so few of us, and what do we do? It's all

very fine to be comfortable here and be still seeing what's happening on the farm, etcetera, etcetera, but at the end of the day, if there's very few people left, what's best for us? I am concerned about it, and yeah, some of our children are too, but I will have to convince my husband of that [laughs] yeah, I am certainly beginning to feel perhaps there is more. Because there was a vibrant community once but there isn't anymore, so after all it's our life, you know, where do we go from here? [27, female, left farming]

On the one hand she has left farming and yet not left the same farming community. What she describes indicates the social significance of managing rural social change including for retirees, and she clearly nominates a difference in managing change compared to her husband, and expresses her preferred strategy in managing and coping with the impacts of 'rural decline' and community-based social change. This gendered perspective illustrates that there are many dimensions to understanding relationships between those farming and those who have left and this includes issues associated with where people relocate to when they leave farming as well as life stage.

### **Wellbeing matters: 'the stress factor was too great'**

Health and wellbeing issues are frequently discussed as contributing to the decision to leave farming.

One male interviewee describes experiencing depression. Elsewhere another male interviewee describes getting depressed prior to leaving farming. Many more interviewees describe the stress in farming and in leaving farming. Moreover, one male interviewee describes experiencing reduced stress since leaving farming:

You would start a new season a new cycle and I would have a very sleepless night or sleepless time where this pressure would build and I would actually be thinking of, what if's. What if it's a drought? What if it's, you know and all these scenarios would go through my head and once I finished, exited farming this stress was gone, this pressure was gone and that was the biggest change that I really have felt. I didn't know it was there so on a different level it was always a slow burn and a pressure, and yeah, it was really surprising. [17, male, left farming]

The issue of stress and the extent to which it is intertwined with other aspects of restructuring is perhaps succinctly described by a retired male interviewee who discusses his experience of leaving farming, which involved a succession plan:

Well it was succession planning ... so it was part of the succession planning that he [son] was going to take over the farm fully, but the droughts made it unviable for him to. It seems like you have to increase the size of your farm all the time to be viable, and if you don't increase it your viability goes so you're only jumping down in one spot, farming but you're not having a lifestyle. So what I was going to say that sets up if you're buying land all the time not only do you have to make a profit but you've also got to pay off your new purchases, so that changes the lifestyle, not the viability but the cash flow and everything. So if there's not enough cash flow to meet all your commitments well it's very stressful, and [my son] opted out because, and I agree with him because **the stress factor was too great**. It's just the evolution of farming. [28, male, left farming; emphasis added]

Wellbeing and health issues are very significant, and in the next chapter, Chapter 8, I will further consider this important issue for both people farming and people who have left farming.

### **Supports that assist leaving farming**

There are a number of supports that interviewees describe as assisting the experience of leaving farming. Some interviewees describe the benefits of being able to clear farm debt which includes the opportunity to sell farm property and thus have available purchasers:

... there were people wanting to buy our properties which was excellent. [09 male, left farming]

Further, a strategy to reduce debt is described as influencing the plan and timing of how this male interviewee left farming:

And the process it took – we made the decision and consequently we had a dry year. If we had exited we would have exited in quite a bit of debt, so it was a two year process before we actually got out from making the decision of getting out, so it was frustrating but we got the timing correct, in the end, so we were able to get out and we were able to clear all our debts and move on in the positive rather than the negative. [17, male, left farming]

A number of interviewees described a planning and withdrawal process. One interviewee also describes how a 'gradual' withdrawal from farming assisted her to cope:

I think because it was gradual we were able to cope when we stopped and there weren't any regrets. [10, female, left farming]

One male interviewee describes the value of family-based supports that assisted his experience of leaving farming:

... and the really positive out of this experience was that we also found as a family unit, and we worked through how do we execute this? The decision was made but how do we execute it? The hardest part was making the decision and it was very crystal clear, it wasn't a, "Maybe," or a, "I don't know," it was really quite clear path and a clear decision ... so that even the family as a whole, my siblings and everyone were quite enrolled in the whole process and supportive, where I know at other times it can be quite an emotional unsettling time and not quite as conducive or working as a team, and we really did, yeah, I it was really quite positive. [17 male, left farming]

I also asked this interviewee what he identifies that would assist others, given his experience:

Josephine:

So thinking about what helped you, I mean, what would you specifically focus, if you think someone was going to read my work one day, it's going to share information about the experience of leaving farming and the social impacts. What are the key things that you kind of, identify that would assist people from your insights?

Interviewee:

Yeah, it's a very individual process, I understand that, and it really depends on the individuals, I guess the way they work through problems. I was able to work through it by creating a team around myself, and a support team that could participate, support and also help me execute it instead of doing it individually. [17, male, left farming]

He also identifies:

There's a lot of resources and a lot of information and also support out in the community slash services if, I guess, being willing to access them and take the first step. [17, male, left farming]

Another female interviewee identifies many issues in leaving including the timing of when and how to leave, as well as in her experience the importance of sorting out where to live, as well as consideration of the impacts on children and supporting them:

I didn't want to go through that building a house and the gardens, and I thought it would be easier for us if we just moved and everything was just ready to go. I just thought it was easier for everybody, kid wise, we're just set. They can come in and they can set up their rooms, everything's just right to go [07, female, left farming]

People-focussed supports as well as strategies that support the logistics of leaving farming which may include selling the farm and relocation (but not always), were identified by a number of interviewees.

## **Conclusion to Part 2**

In Part 2 findings demonstrate the diverse experiences of leaving farming that embody masculinities and femininities. Gendered and rural identities may be challenged and critiqued in the experience of leaving farming. Age and life stage is an important consideration in the decision to leave farming. Decision-making and leaving farming involves many stages and processes.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter emphasises the processes in leaving farming. Leaving farming is a gendered experience which is dynamic. In this chapter I have represented my findings to isolate a number of reasons for leaving farming and then proceeded to describe many significant aspects to the experiences of leaving farming that interviewees discuss. Interviewees describe a plethora of wellbeing issues as well as difficulties managing drought conditions, changing terms of trade and nominate other aspects of restructuring that combine – as described by several interviewees – to inform the decision to leave farming.

Leaving farming offers significant challenges for rural-based agricultural male identity. However, I argue that both male identity and male power is potentially challenged through the experience of leaving farming given the masculinist context to both farming and agricultural restructuring arrangements currently occurring. Further, the social sustainability of family farming and indeed, agricultural production and current terms of trade, is problematised by interviewee narratives.

## **Chapter 8 Coping and wellbeing in family farming and agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter further explores how wellbeing is a significant issue in the process of agricultural restructuring and leaving farming. The discussion explores coping issues as people manage changes in farming and social changes in farming-based rural communities in the Mallee region. The findings both describe and critique agricultural restructuring and rural social change, the social impacts and wellbeing issues. Further, many participants in this research concurrently advocate for and value family farming, and food production. This theme includes significant perspectives on social alternatives in imagining the future for social relationships and communities, terms of trade and for farming practices.

### ***Coping with changes in farming and rural community social life***

There are significant changes occurring in family farming social structures and practices, as well as in Mallee towns, demographics and rural community life. Participants frequently discuss adapting to changes in rural-based farming lifestyles and this includes discussion of coping and stress related issues. In this section I explore the issues women and men raise regarding coping with rural restructuring and agricultural restructuring.

There have been historical trends that explain the social change that has occurred:

... but that's been the decline over a thirty year period and it's been consistent and it will keep on moving in that direction, and so the community's changed over that period of time and also yeah, that's where I've seen the change, the decline in the community, from being a stable, not even robust but just stable to being quite under a lot of pressure from the change, socially and there's a lot of pressure ... [17, male, left farming]

I love [Mallee town name] and grew up here and I've got strong ties but you know what we had going for us twenty-five years ago disappeared completely nearly and it won't be coming back. [22, male, farming]

'Decline' is expressed as rural community decline including broad regional descriptions and those pertaining to a smaller 'district' locality or a specific town. Participants also describe the experience in terms of the personal impacts including future scenarios:

There's only you can say four or five young farmers in the district that's all, and they're trying to survive, they haven't got time to – they try and help the community but they can't hold it up, there's not enough of them. So there are going to be changes. So I find that very, very very depressing. [27, female, left farming]

Further, there are gender-based differentials in the impacts, as articulated in analysis of interviews with couples. One retired female interviewee, who remains living in the town where her family farmed, describes it this way:

... and it's this business of the farms having to get bigger to survive and there's less people, you know, with the big equipment, machinery, they can cover such bigger areas without much help, without the labour, and that's what's happened – the population's just decreased tremendously and then this generation doesn't stay here any longer, they go, and it's something – it's not going to reverse, it's just a fact of life, **and I suppose it's how we cope with it, and there are times that I would like to just go.** [I 27, female, left farming; emphasis added]

This perspective is a contrast to her husband who describes his experience of rural and agriculture change:

Josephine:

And how are you feeling about that? You described that, it's 'adjustment' I think was the word you used.

Interviewee:

It doesn't affect me for some reason, I don't know why it doesn't affect me, because I think I can look at the overall picture and the reason why, rather than it will happen to everywhere, it's all over Australia really when you get out in the country. [28 male, left farming]

Undertaking gender analysis of both interviews offers the opportunity to compare perspectives on managing agricultural and rural restructuring, and reveals that there are diverse responses. Articulating the experience of leaving farming is multi-faceted and a layered experience in as much as leaving farming does not always include leaving a rural community. Age-based and gender differentials are identified by interviewees in responding to, and coping with, significant rural community social change as a key component to agricultural restructuring.

Changes in local demographics in the farming community, and expectations regarding the future are further described:

No young ones are coming home, as [with] my sons. I can think of families around who have all got sons and none of them are home on the farm so the elderly blokes – I'm in my fifties – some are around 60, no sons home to help, so they either lease it out or sell it, which means diminishing numbers. [22, male, farming]

A female retiree extensively describes the decline she experiences:

Just the decline is very, very distressing, and I get exhausted for the people who are trying to hold it together because they go through all this trauma which I hear about a lot, but at the end of the day, it's going to happen anyway, so do we let it go? At what stage – I said that before – at what stage do you consider yourself as opposed to the community? Which you can't change. No, you can't. It's happening. It's happening. [27, female, left farming]

In the above quote substantial rural community change is also identified as a source of 'trauma' for others as well the personal experience of decline and managing the tension of community-based responsibilities.

The impact of the expense of acquiring farming land is also considered:

... the threat is as soon as another farm comes up for sale, there's not new people coming into the district because the farms are getting so expensive that no one new coming in can actually afford to buy a farm. [24, female, farming]

That out-migration and demographic change is articulated as a 'threat' reiterates the social significance of descriptions of rural *and* agricultural restructuring as stressful and challenging.

Interviewees also describe the changes in where people live, and the increase in living off-farm and commuting to the farm:

... one reason why I shifted to a rural city was I was still able to run the farm mechanically and physically from that distance because it's so mechanical now and that's been the shift in the communities in the farming scales, like every farm's been getting bigger, and I can picture, there's all these old farm houses that were within probably a few kilometres from [Mallee town name] and they were all families and they're all gone now. It's all changed from this real little insular unit to these larger farms and more acres and that's what's been happening continuously and it will keep on continuing with, I guess, the shift in machinery from way back when it was all done manually. So communities are sustainable but they've been in a different form to what they are now and what they were. [17, male, left farming]

Then probably the last five years probably another five families have left, six families have left and started commuting but that's only happened recently. [21, female, farming]

There are a range of views regarding the increasing isolation in farming, the masculinisation in agriculture and the increasing social isolation in rural community life. A male interviewee, who left farming ownership some time ago and remains living in the Mallee region and working in farming, simply describes how:

It's lonely, it's terrible [23, male, left farming]

Further, another female interviewee describes how after many years she no longer lives on the family farm while her husband now commutes there to continue farming. She offers this perspective on rural and farming community change:

Yes, I don't see farming as being a great thriving community anyway. I just see it as being a very lonely life for the women who do go there and for the children. [21, female, farming]

Further, the same interviewee describes the pressures of agricultural restructuring including the impacts of demographic change:

I think that's why it was ridiculous. Pour all that money into the ground and moving it, sure you have good times but there's a lot of hard work and you've got a lot of expenses in chemical and machinery and there's a lot of pressure. If you let it get to you, you could easily have a nervous breakdown but it's very hard. That's where it's probably harder and harder because there's not so many people there for one to bounce off each other and have a bit of a talk. [21, female, farming]

One female interviewee identifies differences between her own and her husband's experience in managing the social impacts of restructuring:

That's something that we've lost generally, we've lost a lot of neighbours, so but in particular for my husband, it doesn't worry me so much because I'm out in the community so much, but if he's home there's not the same number of neighbours that you might run into up the road, or you might have a conversation with down the paddock, or you know, that's had a significant impact on his life. [19, female, farming]

Agricultural and rural restructuring is fundamentally intertwined and often a stressful experience. The social impacts include social isolation as agricultural production in the Mallee (specifically dryland farming) is becoming more masculine.

Restructuring processes may be distressing but not all research participants articulate a discourse of decline. Two male participants use the word 'evolution' to describe farming and rural community change. Further, one female interviewee asserts:

I certainly don't feel like [Mallee town name]'s a dying community, it's not.

[11, female, farming]

This indicates the diversity of experience within the Mallee. There is the development of key towns within the region as smaller towns have reduced in size or disappeared altogether.

Another participant currently farming, challenges the popular representation of the farmer as ageing:

I just don't think that that statistic takes into account the ages of the people that are making the decisions on the property, it only takes into account the ages of the people that own the property. Which is sad really. I could be wrong but that's what I think is occurring because there would be ten or a dozen farms in this immediate area that are real go-ahead, they're big properties, big enterprises, they're really going ahead and every single one of them has one or two young people involved. And you know, it just really annoys me that we can't recognise that that's what's occurring. [04, male, farming]

This quote is a reminder about the limits to this research in that a focus on gendered experiences of both farming and leaving farming to assist answering the main research question includes acknowledging that interviews also reveal what research questions have not been asked – in this instance the question arises, what are the gendered experiences of women and men who enter farming?

Despite acknowledging different perspectives, these findings reveal how there are key coping and wellbeing issues in agricultural and rural restructuring. This aspect of rural community change is intersecting with agricultural industry change which is a social space whereby family farming remains patrilineal, and is increasingly becoming more masculinised. The social impacts of demographic change are informed by the relationships imbued in the gender orders at both the 'local' level of family farming and 'global' industry practices. Demographic change and rural

out-migration, for example, cannot be discussed separately from the multiple pressures to leave farming, as well as the pressures experienced in farming, and the interconnected nature of the gendered experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring.

### ***Is farming sustainable?***

As the previous chapters have identified, those participants who are currently farming and those who have left farming frequently describe farming as stressful. This point does not preclude participant self-advocacy for the value of their livelihoods, farming and food production. This section further considers the significance of how farming is described as having become increasingly challenging. Moreover, the matter of the sustainability of farming is framed as problematic, including with respect to the research methods used.

One female participant describes her observations regarding issues for women involved in farming:

A lot of women in this area do suffer depression because they can't find a way to balance, and they worry about their husbands and their husband's health, and the stress of the farm on the husbands [13, female, farming]

She also goes on to discuss the role of men supporting each other, and women in supporting men, in response to the suicide of a community member:

And so the communication levels really opened, and people knew that they had to speak, they had to tell people their fears and that, and get it off their chest, because we didn't want to lose someone because no one was ballsy enough to speak about it and support one another. So the men were amazing. They really did support each other, and I think more amazingly, the women at home were there propping up the men. [13, female, farming]

This quote indicates both the stress involved in farming for men, as well as social expectations regarding the role of women in coping with farming-related stresses.

A number of participants currently farming identify that in recent years farming has become more difficult. For example:

Josephine:

So how's, are there any other significant changes you've experienced in farming?

Interviewee:

Yeah. One thing that [my wife] says a bit, and I don't disagree with her, I agree with her a lot, and I probably always used to tell her that farming, the lifestyle's great. You can work whatever days you want and have a day off here and there and that sort of thing, and she always tells me that I don't have those days off that I should and I probably agree, and probably expansion and that type of thing is the reason and it feels like we used to when I was a child growing up, we used to have time. I guess we had livestock was probably one main difference and one of the most enjoyable things that I had as a kid was chasing sheep down a road, just run along behind them and that type of thing and that's one thing we don't have. So that has changed a lot, we're farming a lot more area and we've done that expansion, as I said before, in times when it's difficult, so probably it's been harder [14, male, farming]

Another participant notes:

Well I guess I'm not that keen to get bigger. Well, look, it's different now. Probably for two years, no longer than that. There used to be a quiet time in farming and now there's not. For probably a long time we've been, [we] have been slogging our guts out trying to run these farms and grow a crop and try and make some money and it's been really, really hard and for that reason I haven't been interested in expanding. I just can't work any more hours and I can't be any more tired [20, female, farming]

The plethora of references to the difficulties, workloads and stresses in farming that inform decision-making, roles and responsibilities indicate the importance of understanding the social sustainability of farming. The data supports the thesis that the intersection of gender equality and social equity issues in farming includes consideration of wellbeing matters. Consequently there is the need to further understand the opportunities for improving the social sustainability of food production.

During a preliminary interview this question was posed:

Josephine:

So what helps make agriculture sustainable?

Interviewee:

Interesting question. I don't think we doubt for one moment that it is sustainable so it is not something I would ever think about in terms of what makes it ... [04, male, farming]

Further:

... so, what sustains agriculture to me is we just see it that we produce food and we don't have [pause] we like producing food, we see it as our industry and what we all try and do is [sighs] we try and do it in a way which allows us to be economically viable

but I think there is always an underlying thought in peoples' mind that we are producing food and we want to do it as clean and green and as well as we can. It's really important to us. That's why we do it. Otherwise the reality is we can go and work on a mine ten days on and five days off and make a lot more money in our pockets that we are doing here.

Josephine:

So there is that pride in producing food-

Interviewee:

Absolutely. Mmm, yeah, very very much so. And well not only in producing food but I see that or I think that we sustain rural Australia. We run businesses out here – producing food happens to be the business but we sustain rural Australia because without agriculture it wouldn't be here, there wouldn't be no industry, no need for it. [04, male, farming]

In the above example, the 'sustainability' of agriculture is not as problematic as the researcher's perspective that informed the very question asked at this early stage of the research. The participant clearly defines aspects of sustainable agriculture and advocates for the place of this work, farming and food production in a national context, and in support of 'rural Australia'. This discussion of sustainability issues in farming and agricultural restructuring both highlight what people value – and there are often gender-based differentials identified across interviews – as well as critique.

One interviewee describes a number of social issues in farming that are a source of stress including the issue of (male) succession:

Farmers abuse their health something shocking. No one wants to talk about the succession plans or if there is any. [22, male, farming]

Here, I interpret that succession practices are indeed being identified as a health issue.

Moreover, during this interview the interviewee makes it very clear the importance of this issue:

Josephine:

So given what you describe about farming and issues, what are your ideas about what would assist farming?

Interviewee:

What will assist farming big time is you've got to open up this – it's not a problem, but I reckon it's a problem in seventy percent, some sort of open honest communication

regards succession. That's a huge problem. Like you might come home on the farm and work for thirty years and own nothing and there's a lot of people around like that. So that would be a huge plus. [22, male, farming]

This interviewee also nominates a number of issues of importance in farming that are typically not discussed within communities and suggested they will not be discussed with myself as a researcher:

Interviewee:

So there's a lot of issues out there. But you probably won't hear – you'll only hear the gloss stuff because no one – because on one you know, because I'm one of them they're more likely to talk to me. Don't take that the wrong way but -

Josephine:

Yeah, sure.

Interviewee:

But I think you'll find that there's a lot of stuff just glossed over. But there's been a few suicides lately. Yeah look I don't think things are travelling very well, so I don't. And you know stress increase and alcohol, perhaps drugs, domestic violence, all that stuff but it's a taboo subject, no one touches it. Like the farms are now a multi-million dollar businesses and things like contracting grain, I could have sold my grain for three hundred and twenty seven dollars a tonne, which I did on the small portion and now it's a hundred and fifty. So I'm kicking myself. Why didn't I sell more of it? [22, male, farming]

This conversation is as a challenge to researcher 'knowing'. This interviewee is nominating that there will be limits to the knowledge gained due to local social norms regarding what is permissible to discuss, specifically with a researcher-outsider. Moreover, in identifying what is 'taboo' this interviewee identifies significant social and health issues including domestic violence in farming, as well as the stress of current terms of trade which include income stress and the impacts of changing commodity prices. This latter point is again reiterated when the interviewee also describes stress in relationships:

There's a lot of stress between, in marriages too because finance for instance. My wife would fall into that category. She'd come from a fairly quite conservative working class and then to have these sort of figures, like lose two hundred thousand in one year, couldn't handle it. She acclimatised to it. [22, male, farming]

Participants nominate a range of health and wellbeing issues that problematise the social sustainability of farming in the Mallee region. Stress in farming is a key issue, as well as uncertainty regarding the future and terms of trade, notwithstanding that some participants advocate for the value of farming in this region.

### ***Changing relationships to land and the family farm***

As discussed in previous findings chapters, the matter of land ownership and access to land is integral to agricultural restructuring – both in terms of supporting farm expansion, frequently described as necessary to manage changing terms of trade, and also with respect to supporting (in the majority) patrilineal inheritance and succession that remains a family farming practice. In this section I further consider how a number of interviewees discuss changing relationships to land and the family farm. Integral to the data is gender-based differentials in land and farm ownership, as well as gendered perspectives on how agricultural restructuring impacts on the changing nature of relating to land.

Women and men describe a socially significant relationship to the land, and as described in the previous chapter (Chapter 7) it can be incredibly difficult for people – particularly men – to leave *the land* in the experience of leaving farming. That finding prompted me to further consider the social significance of relating to the land as an embodied and gendered experience. Participants also describe significant wellbeing and care issues as integral to their connections to the land and the place of the family farm.

First, the opportunity to work with a number of couples has demonstrated that there are gender-based differentials in attachment to the family farm and land farmed. This analysis includes differences identified in on-farm roles and responsibilities and decision-making practices in managing restructuring pressures whether remaining farming or leaving farming. One couple, in separate interviews, describe different relationships to the family farm:

I guess my attachment isn't quite as close as my husband's 'cause it's his family property ... [03, female, farming]

I just think that it's the land on the one hand but it's our farm on the other, you know, it's our heritage, **it's my country**. [laughs] And that means a huge amount and yeah, we look after it because it is, so ... [04, male, farming; emphasis added]

There is a gender differential identified in relating to the farm that pertains to property ownership and legacy expressed as 'heritage' by the husband in this example. Further, the husband identifies his responsibility to 'look after' his 'country'.

Responsibility for the land and caring for the land is also described elsewhere by two female participants:

I just want to get across that this is where we live and we love it and we're continually trying to make it better. I talk about being here and my kids being here so I want it left in pristine condition. [20, female, farming]

I guess I love the land. I'm interested in how we look after that soil so that we can continue farming, if we don't look after it we can't continue farming, so there's a lot to the whole process of farming. [19, female, farming]

A number of interviewees also express their concern about restructuring and specifically, the corporatisation of farming and how this possibly displaces the value in family farming for people to care for the land and have a relationship of attachment to the land:

I would like to think family farms will continue, and some will. I would like to think we would go back to valuing families running farms. The more corporations get in on it, it makes it very hard for families to compete so it becomes an economical battle for people to actually have that connection again to the land. [06, female, farming]

As discussed in Chapter 7, leaving farming involves a process of disconnection from the land and family farm. In some interviews this is described as an extremely difficult and stressful experience. An inability to acquire additional farm land is cited in some interviews as a reason for leaving farming, as well as the financial stress of debt required to enable further land acquisition and farm expansion to manage declining terms of trade. There is the additional social pressure on people to sever attachment to the land and reconfigure the emotions of care and attachment to land / for land in contemporary restructuring processes at work.

Gender-based differentials in attachment to land and place in farming are occurring, which affect coping with the social conditions of restructuring which may also include advocating for caring for 'country'. Those participants that speak of connections to and relationships with land, emphasise the social significance of how embodied relationships to land involve responsibilities that clearly inform decision-making for women and men in managing

agricultural and rural restructuring. There is the stress of restructuring pressures to disengage connection to land itself and yet, as many participants describe, connections to land are extremely important and highly valued in family farming.

### ***Objections to chemical use***

An objection to chemical use is a minor theme that emerged out of interview analysis, and is included here due to its social significance and the gendered perspectives that were revealed. Data was re-examined for references to chemical use – a revision promoted after analysis of an interview with an organic male farmer who offered a vignette that supported his view that women in particular object to the increased chemical use in farming, and that consequently chemical use contributes to the social exclusion of women in farming.

Vignette from an interview with an organic male farmer:

This is basically this little story that came from one of my near neighbours not so long ago. I say this on the back of what I'd said earlier about the fact that Susan and I have been fairly much involved together on the farm, pretty much all our married lives. This guy said to me, and he'd probably be, I don't know how old he'd be – probably 35, 40, something like that – and he's got a young family and he's heavily into no-till farming and he said to me that he's thinking of changing things. He wasn't sure yet how he was going to do it. He wanted to change because he said, "My family can't be involved." He said, "I'm just out on the tractor all the time. I don't see my family." And he said, "They can't be involved with what I'm doing. My wife wants to be a part of it. She's concerned that she's not part of the farm now and she just can't be a part of it."

And he said, "I'd like the children to be out there with me, but they can't be." I thought to myself – I didn't say a lot – I was just listening and taking it in – and I thought to myself later, "I guess that is and it's got to only be because of the chemical story," because you see, of course you wouldn't submit your children to the risk of chemicals, or your wife, if at all possible and so that's why they can't be a part of it and I thought, "That's really sad." He was saying to me, "I've got to change, something has got to change. I can't keep doing it like this." I thought, "Wow, that's just incredible. I wonder how he's going to change it." And then once again it came back to me that I'm so relieved that we went down the path we did. [25, male, farming]

In this vignette the interviewee offers a story of a how a conversation with a neighbour describes the neighbour's social isolation and desire to include his wife and family in the activity of farming. He then offers his analysis of how his contrasting experience of organic farming has supported the long-term involvement of his wife in farming and that it is chemical

use that is excluding his neighbour's wife and family from being involved in farming. Here is an analysis of gender relations in agricultural restructuring that is a critique of the gender impacts of chemical use in dryland farming: chemical use is identified as excluding women in farming.

Through snowball sampling I interviewed four organic farmers. This adds an additional opportunity for comparative analysis of interviews with respect to understanding how gender relations are renegotiated in the Mallee as women and men manage agricultural and rural restructuring.

Following analysis of this interview and vignette, I returned to all the interview data and using NVivo I searched for references to chemical use. Other references include:

Tom does a lot of the spraying as well, and so clearly like you don't really want them [children] out there when he's dealing with chemical and he's in and out of a machine that's spraying chemical everywhere and that. [11, female, farming]

I've had enough chemicals, I just want to get away from it for now, and plus, it's a very demanding job and it's crazy hours. [26, male, left farming]

The farming, the thing I dislike about it, but it's just the way it is, the more chemical use that they use these days it's – and also that they have to contract grain in. [21 female, farming]

Spraying is often described as a job in farming and a number of male interviewees describe how they have done off-farm spraying at times to earn additional income.

I argue the vignette offered by the organic farmer raises a very important consideration about whether indeed women are not participating in farming activity, or withdrawing from farming, due to concerns regarding the impacts of chemical use including health concerns. Thus chemical use can be analysed as contributing to the further masculinisation of agriculture notwithstanding that some men also object to chemical use.

In conclusion, I wish to end discussion of this 'minor' albeit significant theme by again drawing on a quote from the same participant whose vignette is cited above:

The other really, really interesting thing to me is that I've spoken to – over a number of years, I suppose, I've spoken to a number of the wives around the district and not trying to influence them in any way but they've come out and said very clearly and this was one wife's words, pretty much exactly, she said, "If I was running the farm we wouldn't be using chemicals." [25, male, farming]

Indeed, if women were provided with the opportunity to run the farm what would be the experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring including farming techniques? Further, what are the opportunities women are seeking to further support their inclusion in agricultural production? Thus this theme 'objections to chemical use' in response to the PhD research question(s), in turn lead to new research questions: the hypothetical scenario of women running the farm indicates the gender order at work in family farming in the Mallee region.

### ***(Re)valuing family farming and food production***

Health and wellbeing are significant issues in the experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region. These experiences are gendered, and are exemplified through undertaking a gender analysis of interview data that includes drawing on individual gendered perspectives as well as multiple contrasting perspectives. Concurrently many interviewees advocate for rural social life and the continuation of both family farming and food production in the Mallee region and in Australia. I now draw on the exploratory nature of the interview process to consider suggestions for change that people identify – this includes how people imagine the future and the values they describe. Building on interviewee critique of restructuring, which at times includes the need for change in support of *a more* sustainable agriculture, I now consider those discourses promoting change in agricultural production.

Notwithstanding the plethora of stresses and concerns interviewees raised during interviews, interviewees also describe valuing farming. One participant expresses their overt advocacy intent as a reason for their participation:

I'm just thinking about whether or not the [sighs] your findings could be valuable for promotion of agriculture or promotion of yeah, rural Australia, rural Victoria.

[04, male, farming]

During this interview the interviewee does not discuss stress, nor wellbeing issues, which was a contrast to the interview with his wife. I interpret this as indicating the relationship between my research design, questions and assumptions are working in association with interviewee intentions.

Further, the same interviewee strongly advocates for the value of family farming:

The family business farm, because it's no longer just a family farm it's a business enterprise but it's done on a family basis rather than a corporate basis. There are plenty of examples where there are farms now that are going semi-corporate. They're working quite well but the connection is lost, if that makes sense. The family farm still has an absolute connection between the land and what we produce and where it goes. Once you take on any form of the corporate world then then it's purely and simply a commodity which is traded most often in some way or another electronically so there is always almost no contact with even the people you are doing business with let alone the end user of your product. And whereas the family farm still has that.

...

And so I think the greatest thing about the family farm business is still that connection between the handful of wheat that you plant in the ground and the end result or where that ends up. [04, male, farming]

Here is a critique of changes to farm business structure, and in advocating for the value of the family farm this participant nominates the importance of retaining a connection between people, food production, land and commodity markets. He also self-reflects that he has a particular interest in how commodities he produces are used. What I find significant here is not just the advocacy for the value of family farming but the advocacy for a type of farm business structure that *supports relationships between people involved in various aspects of a food system*. In previous chapters I have identified the social distress people experience in changing relationships to markets. The value being described in the above quote, is in production that supports relationships between people and between people and the land.

However, given the gender-based social inequities in who gets access and ownership to land, if (again) connection to land is identified as a significant value that supports production and relationships to other aspects of the food system, these gender-based inequities in relating to land need to be challenged and supported to adapt in the interests of promoting gender equality in family farming.

Participants also identify the need and potential for change:

... I just know there's a better way, a better and more healthy way of producing food than the way we are today, locked into ...

Unhealthy the way it is now, it's mentally, mentally, financially and physically – just all three factors. It's crazy. I don't verbalise myself how I feel to people because they think you're a raving lunatic, but I, but to like minded people it's – I don't say they

think you're a raving lunatic, I think there's an under – what would you say, an unspoken word within farmers, they know they can't keep going on the way they're going because it's just not sustainable. They know that there's a different way and I think quietly they're just going about looking for those alternatives, but to actually come out and verbalise it, it's a very in the world that we have here today in the chemical driven, fertiliser driven world, it's very difficult to come out and say that because it goes against the grain of what we've traditionally known. [26, male, left farming]

A substantial critique of current farming practices and farming is offered as 'not sustainable' on many levels. Again, chemical use is critiqued. Further, this notion of silences is discussed, that local hegemonic discourses are operating which are limiting farming adapting to a more sustainable practice. The same interviewee also specifically mentions the issue of stress in farming:

I just think if you want to be in it, I just think it's a good positive business to be in but you don't have to take on the stresses that some, that supposedly come with it. Like there is alternatives. Like you don't have to get locked into that real heavy input, push push push situation, there is other ways of doing it. [26, male, left farming]

This potential for change is identified by a male interviewee who has left farming and remains interested in agriculture and food production. He is suggesting that change is needed and it is possible to achieve. Change is required in farming practices but also in support of a socially sustainable alternative that will address personal wellbeing.

Below is an extract from an interview with a female participant where I was comfortable with asking an overt question about the meaning of sustainability, and I include the text of the question I asked as I identify the complexities in discussing matters of sustainability in agriculture and social alternatives:

Josephine:

I wondered what does sustainability mean to you?

Interviewee:

Probably a few things. The obvious thing is sustaining you so you can live and you have enough income to live to the standard to which you would like, or need, it's different to like actually, *need*. Sustaining the land so that it can keep producing or be improved, in actual fact, but that's sustaining the land. Sustaining yourself mentally and physically so that you can keep going. So all those things are actually very important in sustainable agriculture, you've got to be able to do all of them, it's not just one, it's all of them. [06, female, farming]

This extract is similar to that of the male interviewee cited previously in that livelihood and wellbeing in agriculture are named as involving financial, mental and physical sustainability – and this interviewee, cited above, again names the importance of ‘sustaining the land’ as other interviewees identify.

In this section I have drawn upon data that demonstrates how people advocate for the value of agriculture and specifically family farming. Interviewees hold incredible knowledge of food production and the changes that constitute restructuring processes that are ongoing. Their knowledge of managing change includes detailed experiences of many wellbeing issues and as well, many interviewees offer a critique of restructuring and ideas on values that need to be incorporated into agriculture as it continues to be restructured.

## ***Conclusion***

Many interviewees describe both unsustainable and sustainable aspects to managing the impacts of agricultural restructuring. In this chapter I have further considered the health and wellbeing issues that are raised by participants, as significant issues in agricultural restructuring.

The social pressures of changing terms of trade – markets, commodity prices, inputs, equipment, debt and land access constraints – which can be also described as neoliberal economics involving global commodity exchange, is a structural adjustment process with many geo-localities supporting gender relations that continue to be patrilineal and patriarchal. In this research I frame gender relations as a key issue for supporting social sustainability in agriculture and supporting equitable gender relations. The question is how is this to be supported in family farming? I argue that efforts to (re)value family farming – and interviewees clearly identify they value farming – must address the wellbeing issues in production and terms of trade including the need to promote gender equality in family farming.



## **Chapter 9 A gender analysis of intersecting challenges to agricultural production in the Mallee: restructuring and the context of climate change**

### ***Introduction***

In this chapter I argue that multiple challenges in farming and agricultural restructuring now include managing the impacts of climate change. This chapter addresses answering the aspect of the main PhD Research Question that seeks to understand how gender relations are renegotiated as people manage agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future predictions. Gender relations and livelihoods, and decision-making practices in managing current intersecting challenges to agricultural restructuring, respond to and embody the impacts of drought, climate change and managing the uncertainty of climate variability.

Findings exemplify the context of climate change and participants' experiences of managing climatic variations. 'Climate change' is recognised as experience, local knowledge, and discourse, and this includes its temporal positioning in the interview process where 'climate change' is frequently critiqued and the social significance of 'climate change' is thus negotiated.

### ***Talk 'climate variability' not 'climate change': Agricultural restructuring in the Mallee and the local context to climate change***

As described in the Literature Review Chapters 2 and 3, the Mallee is a region predicted to become drier due to climate change. When I commenced my PhD research the region was experiencing drought which ended as I commenced fieldwork in 2011. The 'Millennium Drought', as it has become known, ended with substantial rainfall and in some areas in the Mallee and in the irrigated horticultural areas (known as Sunraysia) there was extreme rainfall that resulted in flooding and loss or downgrade of crops.

Interviews include discussions of climate change and managing climate changes and thus climatic variability. As argued in previous findings chapters, the impacts of drought inform gendered experiences of restructuring. I now consider gendered perspectives on intersecting

challenges to farming and agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region, and the priorities nominated in managing change and uncertainty in the context of restructuring and climate change.

I adopted a researcher-position that anthropogenic climate change is occurring and this informed the scope of research to consider its social and gendered significance in agricultural and rural restructuring. The literature-based research also revised how the impacts of climate change, and experiences of climate change, are researched.<sup>1</sup> This includes the need for researcher sensitivity to the political, local, rural, socio-economic and industry contexts to how climate change is researched and discussed. I now discuss the relationship between the gendered impacts of climate change in the Mallee and the very issue of talking about climate change in the interview-based work undertaken.

... a lot of farmers don't like to talk about climate change. They will talk about climate variability but they – a lot of them – won't talk about climate change [Key informant 01]

The above quote details a key informant's perspective on the challenges involved in discussing climate change with farmers.

I included talking about climate change in interviews, but not all. Interviews were undertaken over several months that included a period of time when the Australian Government debated and introduced legislation to support a Carbon Tax / Emissions Trading Scheme to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate change. On several occasions this political discourse entered interview conversation either at the instigation of the participant or in response to my questioning regarding what interviewees thought about climate change. While I prepared initial questions to support semi-structured interviews that included asking participants for their perspectives on climate change to prompt discussion of their experiences and future expectations, it quickly became apparent that it was not always useful to directly

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<sup>1</sup> For another example, in an article by Shervel and Askey (2012, p. 349) the authors describe how 'The interviews deliberately avoided the scientific and political debates surrounding human-induced climate change, although these issues sometimes arose in discussions. As both case studies are located in conservative rural regions, there remains considerable scepticism about anthropocentric climate change'.

ask and prompt discussion about climate change. The reason for this is due to differences between researcher and participant priorities and standpoints regarding climate change.

In the previous quote farmers as a group are homogenised as I was seeking clarification on many matters from key informants, to inform and guide future interviews. Yet as a researcher I also had the opportunity to highlight climate change as an issue integral to agricultural restructuring in the Mallee for the purposes of exploring the gendered social impacts. There were diverse ways I introduced the prompt for discussing climate change, during those interviews where I did proceed to initiate discussion. For example, I did this on a number of occasions when climate change was referenced and I took the opportunity to continue dialogue on the subject. There are also occasions when I introduced a prompt to discuss the experience of climate change and it was rejected or 'climate change' was substantially critiqued by interviewees. Moreover, as previously stated during some interviews, I did not consider it appropriate to initiate a prompt to discuss climate change.

Thus *talking about* climate change and the experiences and impacts, is an opportunity within the 'context' of climate change. Participants discuss experiences and impacts of the drought and to use the phrase from the previous quote, 'climate variability'. Participants draw on local and historical knowledge of the climate and weather in discussing their experiences of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region, livelihood changes, decision-making and managing change and uncertainties. Thus the 'context' of climate change and indeed, uncertainty and future scenarios, is defined and re-defined in multiple locations including within an interview.

In further discussion with the key informant previously quoted, I asked 'so is it easier to talk about sustainability rather than climate change?' and this is the response:

Yep. It certainly is. I think part of the thing is that the term climate change has lots of negative connotations with it, you know people, although the climate change predictions are hotter and drier in this part of the world, two degrees, a lot of people also say what's two degrees? What's that, you know? But they don't actually realise that is a big change you know gum trees in this area will die out with a two degree difference. So yeah I think that's one of the reasons people don't like talking about climate change but if its 'sustainability' that's the buzz word at the moment, that's a word a lot of people will relate to, but as I said depending who you're talking to, if you

talk about – talk to farmers about weather patterns – I think it’s about the language Jo.  
[Key informant 01]

Local discourses inform perspectives on climate change and interpretations – and critique – the discourse of climate change as ‘other’. Further, as other data and discourses concur, climate change is often located in the future and elsewhere. Climate change as a discourse intersects with the embodied experiences of climatic variations, for example drought and rain, that are clearly identified as challenging livelihoods as well as at times impacting on wellbeing and coping for participants and their communities. I interpret that the limits to conversation about climate change with participants is defined on an interview-by-interview basis.

The explanatory statement included the brief information that I had identified the Mallee region as one that was predicted to get drier. Thus in contrast to research that intentionally avoids discussion of climate change, I pursued the opportunity for this research to explore gendered perspectives on agricultural restructuring and the context of climate change. I acknowledge that researcher intent was at times challenged by participants notwithstanding detailed experiences of managing climatic variations, livelihood changes and challenges, and other components of agricultural restructuring including declining terms of trade.

### ***The social and health impacts of climate change and drought in the Mallee region***

I think, in the last ten years with the drought and different conditions that we’ve had, we’ve probably lost another five neighbours who’ve decided, “This is all too hard,” or for whatever reason, “We’re ready to retire anyway,” and so they’ve sold up and moved away. [19, female, farming]

Drought and ‘different conditions’ have contributed to the decision to leave farming. As this participant proposes, these factors can impact on decision-making along with other variables, for example, approaching retirement.

This participant discusses her perspectives on climate change, her experiences of managing drought conditions, and recent as well as current challenges in climate variations impacting on her experience of farming:

So we had a wet harvest 2009, a wet harvest 2010, we better not have a wet harvest [in] 2011 because **it really does put too much strain on everyone's health**, and we're as organised as we can be, everything's been serviced, we've got an extra truck this year, we've got extra men that are going to come in and help, we've got a contractor as a backup, so all you can do is put everything in place and then hope for the best. There's still very much a family argument over this not being part of climate change, that this actually has been seen before in the Mallee, it's well recorded, well recorded. [19, female, farming; emphasis added]

This theme that this participant describes, that there is a health aspect to managing climate variations – in this case unseasonal rain patterns for dryland farming that have impacted on harvesting – is reiterated towards the end of the interview:

Josephine:

The only other thing really on my list of questions, is for you to share with me a bit about how you've managed the changes in the climate? Not just the recent drought, then there's been lots of rain as well?

Interviewee:

Well it's been exhausting, yeah, nothing short of frustrating and exhausting. Last harvest was the hardest harvest that we've ever known because of the rain coming during harvest, and -

Josephine:

So it was almost a year ago?

Interviewee:

Yeah, almost a year ago, and everyone in the family was absolutely exhausted by the time harvest finished, and there was downgrading of our grain, which was disheartening, and now they're forecasting that maybe this harvest could become wet as well, which makes it really, really difficult to, from a physical, mental and emotional sense, to get through because it's just vital, we're reliant on this annual income, the major income for the year, so it does put a lot of pressure on everyone. We've had one good thing, one thing really positive about the Mallee is that even in drought we will still grow something, and all through the drought we have always grown something and had some sort of income. [19, female, farming]

The impacts of managing climate changes, including drought and unseasonal rainfall, are described by several interviews – both those farming and those who have left farming. As mentioned in the second finding chapter (Chapter 7), drought is cited as one of the several reasons informing the decision to leave farming and it is described as a component of an array of determinants that informed the decision to leave farming. One participant who left irrigation

farming describes the impact of the drought including water shortages and the high cost of water:

... like if we have cycles of especially the droughts, where that was another big thing for us with the water, when we were working the block, that insecurity of water and the madness of paying, gosh, what did it get up to, 7, 800 dollars a megalitre for temporary water just to get people through with the fresh fruit and things like that, **the anxiety that that all caused**, like if that climate change does build and continue like that, I don't know how anyone can plan for the future because how much is the water going to cost? Is it going to cost full allocation and that? Or are we going to get thirty per cent allocation and have to buy in the rest at a ridiculous price? And the people that spent megadollars on chemicals to get through the rainy season we've just had, only to be told by the winery, "We consider you've got three per cent mould, we're not taking your fruit." The trimming and the picking with the fresh fruit to try and get decent fruit to pack. [10, female, left farming; emphasis added]

Importantly this theme of the coping, wellbeing and health is referenced by participants who are or have been involved in both dryland and irrigation farming, as well as a number of key informants. Several participants describe the mental challenges of their recent experiences of drought and then the ending of drought followed by high rainfall:

... those who have now harvested have to go out and spray because the direct drilling – this new – it's not new but the direct drilling, and so they go out and spray and it's too wet for them to spray in a lot of cases as well and they are getting machinery bogged, and that poses, that's challenging mentally as well as physically you know the physical side of farming has been really difficult because of the weather but mentally it does affect the farmer, the families, and the community to an extent because there's just nothing they can do about it and those farmers who have been flooded or who were severely impacted by drought have you know I believe have had [pause] yeah, **they were learning to cope with drought and then having flood come along – it's just, yeah, it's been very challenging for them mentally.** [Key Informant 01; emphasis added]

In another interview with a key informant I asked:

Josephine:

So what are the challenges that people are experiencing in managing agricultural and rural change that you have insights into?

Key informant:

Sustainability would be the main, survival at this point in time.

Josephine:

Ok.

Key informant:

Because of commodity prices, drought, wet, floods. [Key informant 03]

This theme of terms of trade issues, particularly commodity prices in combination with climatic changes, is significant. Elsewhere during this interview the short-term social impacts of extreme weather events such as recent extreme rainfall as well as the drought are described along with the impacts of declining terms of trade and government adjustment incentives:

The last five years we were in drought, we've come out of drought with a massive wake-up and had floods. During that time that we were in drought we've had commodity prices mainly wine grapes just go, the bottom's just dropped out of it so therefore we've seen a lot of our farmers that have just hanging on, hanging on, thinking that – or hoping – that it is going to get better, going to get better, but it hasn't and there has been a lot of adjustment throughout the district and throughout the farming community and we've seen some of that adjustment forced upon them by way of pressure from, financial pressure banks etc., and there's also been adjustment via the Exit Program for the Small Block Irrigators Exit Program and to a lesser extent through Exceptional Circumstance Exit Grant. [Key informant 03]

Also, describing the February 2011 rainfall and flooding:

Yeah, well the evidence is out there that what the rain has done has, it's taken people that would have probably would have ended up out of farming albeit in 12 to 18 months' time, its accelerated their exit to a point that now it is dramatic and there's no think time, its bang it's going to happen and that in itself is, **people haven't got the time to prepare mentally for that themselves** ... we don't what the impact of that is going to be, I think that's an impact we are not going to realise fully for another 12 months, I think, and the real financial cost will probably, won't be realised you know until a year out, because there are still those out there that may not get a crop next year because of diseased vines. [Key informant 03; emphasis added]

This conversation emphasises the impacts of the 2011 rainfall and floods with particular emphasis on the social and financial impacts for irrigators. The rainfall and flooding is recognised as potentially impacting on people's ability to adequately mentally process the impacts due to the severity of the events in combination with ongoing declining terms of trade.

Frequently participants emphasise that managing weather and climate changes is integral to farming practice. One male interviewee who left farming responds to my query regarding whether his decision to leave is informed by climate change, by clearly emphasising his experience of managing drought conditions:

Josephine:

Do you see climate change as a pressure as well?

Interviewee:

Well, climate change is another good buzz word. I definitely experienced the droughts and the change in the dry seasons, and yes, it was very stressful, yes. I'm a bit on the fence with the climate change. I do agree climate changes and it's cyclical cycles, and unfortunately we went through a real tough cycle where it was very dry, extremely dry and actually it still is even though we've had a really good La Nina cycle, but it's still very dry, so climate change, yeah, it was well, I was confronted with it every day through quite a few years slash decades. I guess though, I don't believe it was actually a climate change, it was a climate cycle. [17, male, left farming]

The above quote illustrates how this interviewee prioritises his knowledge of 'climate cycles' over my emphasis on climate change as a possible additional 'pressure' with social impacts when climate change is interpreted as a component of agricultural restructuring.

The main PhD research question investigating how gender relations are renegotiated given agricultural and rural restructuring is occurring in the context of climate change is critiqued by participants in that other experiences of climate variation are identified as significant, particularly drought. Concurrently managing both drought and significant or extreme rainfall is narrated as important.

Consistent with what has been reported in the literature and throughout earlier findings chapters, drought impacts on gender relations and livelihood strategies. For example, during one interview after the interviewee describes multiple strategies to generate income to support entering farming and expand the farm size, I asked:

Josephine:

And was that diversifying related to managing the drought?

Interviewee:

Yes. Well it first started before the drought, but it certainly put us in a fantastic position to see through the droughts because we've had so many different forms of income coming in, and the cash flow was good. It was very handy, but Alex, he just

couldn't keep it up, he couldn't do 20 hour days like he was doing for three or four years and not crash, sooner or later, and he didn't crash, I did in the end. ... and now we just farm. So the boys instead of doing five or six or seven thousand, they now farm 10,000, so they're as busy as can be anyway, it's just managing time to get it all done. [13, female, farming]

Thus restructuring, livelihood strategies and wellbeing issues are all described as interrelated experience in response to the drought. Further, in this description farming and restructuring is again described as gendered.

The same interviewee also discusses managing recent rainfall and declining terms of trade:

I mean we had inches and inches. We had nine inches and it was amazing, it was brilliant, it was fantastic, wonderful. So that was very hard, and it was devastating because we had waited for ten years for this crop, but on the flip side, the subsoil moisture's there, so you know, "alright, what we could have got in one year, we might get over a period of two years." So it's all how you look at it, but you're always competing with your prices, and so we may have a really good year this year, and the prices might drop \$100 a tonne might be the case, and there goes your profits and everything, and you don't have that financial security ... [13, female, farming]

Overwhelmingly declining terms of trade are identified as having significant impacts including financial insecurity, health and wellbeing issues. Further, the impacts of declining terms of trade are intersecting with climatic changes as well as gender relations, rural masculinities and femininities. This intersection is reiterated in previous findings chapters that explore the livelihood changes / challenges and decision-making priorities integral to agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region.

I talk a lot about the mental health impact because drought and the floods have had a huge impact on the mental health of the whole community, and on a number of individuals of course. And I think women have been the strong ones in that respect [pause] women have been the strong ones because they'll put the kids first, they'll put the man first, they'll put everyone else's needs first before theirs, and while that has probably always been the case it is probably recognised now, people do have a better understanding of the role of women in the farm, in the community, in the workplace you know. I think that's definitely something that's changed.

...

Women are the nurturers as you know and they look after everyone else, put themselves last, and I guess when I said it's recognised now, it's recognised in such a way that we know we have to look after the women otherwise the whole community

could just collapse, because if all the women collapsed then you know, whose going to look after the kids and the men? (Key informant 01)

In this quote the role of women and men is explicitly referred to: women are described as having a clearly defined role in supporting men and children during challenging times.

Women's work and their capabilities are recognised and their social role confirmed for the purposes of upholding the 'community' and caring for men and children. Thus it appears that women are expected to manage challenges such as floods, drought or other compounding factors that substantially impact upon agricultural communities. This draws attention to how gender-based roles and responsibilities are reconfigured at critical times. If women are viewed as critical to managing challenges then is their role in managing change / challenges one where the focus remains on supporting others and so where do opportunities emerge for women, or where can they position themselves with alternative roles and subjectivities? In other words and given this example, does recognising women's role in managing climate challenges also permit a reinforcement of women's position to maintain a dominant rural gender order?

### ***Managing uncertainty, adaptation and future scenarios***

... a lot of Mallee farms seem to be having tight times a lot of the time ... [03, female, farming]

I mean the federation drought was the driest spell we've ever had and that went from I think late 1800's to 1907 or something. We still haven't experienced that dry. We've got exceptional – we live in the Mallee. It's marginal farming land. [22, male, farming]

... two out of five years would be a drought on average in the Mallee, so they're always there, and it's not a great phenomenon or anything, it's just the way it is ... [14, male, farming]

Several participants emphasise how agricultural restructuring and managing change is both historical and an ongoing process. This includes managing the impacts of climate variations, and adaptive capacity to change technical aspects of farm production such as crop varieties, for example, as well as adapt to climate changes. Several interviewees also discuss conditions specific to the challenges of farming in the Mallee region.

One key informant offered this description of agricultural restructuring and current climate challenges for irrigation farmers:

... so this whole area here has had this cyclical notion of, if you like, threats and challenges and learning how to deal with those threats and challenges and then

learning how to continue farming through them. So the challenges at the moment obviously we can see the whole issue of climate as, it has been a challenge but if you look back over the past one hundred years it has been as well. There have been droughts, there have been floods, there have been droughts, there have been floods and we've just gone through this horrendous you know decade of drought and now we've had incredible, severe weather event just to break it down. [Key informant 04]

A number of interviewees use similar phrases that illustrate coping and adaptation strategies:

The drought has been a trial on the farm but we've always, like Patrick said, you can't expect that the next year is going to be a good year so you plan towards it being a drought and Patrick's way of planning for a drought the next year is always pull-in the belt one more notch or one more hole, but like I say to him, well when we're out of the drought, he never says, "Well, now we can let out the belt." [laughter] He's so like that and then you get a drought, "I'll pull in the belt again now," so that's his philosophy of coping. [24, female, farming]

Further, some interviewees note that a historical perspective on agricultural restructuring supports restructuring efforts that have been beneficial to farmers and will continue to be so:

... that's the other thing the drought has taught us, to be more aware of environmentally friendly practices because they have saved us, money wise and that, because it saves soil and the moisture which is to our benefit, so I don't think they'll ever go back to their old conventional way of thinking, and the way of doing things. I think the 10 years of drought has revolutionised farming, hugely. [13, female, farming]

Further, one interviewee specifically identifies the benefit of family-based historical knowledge to support managing drought and farming challenges:

I think it's very useful to have generational knowledge because they know the family stories of things that have been tried before and haven't worked, or things that have worked, or bad seasons, droughts, floods, depression years, war years, they've been through, the family's been through all of those years so there's knowledge and there's experience and evidence too to perhaps help my son feel more resilient to all the changes and things that can happen, and through the drought years I used to remind him that, "Your great grandfather would have went through times like this," and I think it does help you keep resilient if you've got a family history of survival, and probably other resilience factors are you know the support of a rural community, and being part of a rural community where everyone's got similar issues. [19, female, farming]

Thus interviewees assert their local and historical knowledge in managing agricultural restructuring and managing uncertainties which include descriptions of recent experiences of drought, rain and flood. Direct experience of managing climatic changes is highly regarded knowledge and as the above quote demonstrates, this knowledge combined with rural community based support can enhance resilience in managing multiple challenges in farming.

Thus this research investigating how gender relations are renegotiated as women and men manage agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future scenarios and predictions, finds that multiple challenges intersect: declining terms of trade and globalisation, drought, rain and floods, for example. Climate change adaptation is not something discussed by participants as something new. Here I make a distinction between science-based discourses of global climate change with varying local impacts – including social and gender impacts – and interviewee discussions of climate change that may challenge the power of the climate change discourse as located elsewhere including in government-led responses and initiatives, and interviewee / local knowledge of their experiences of managing climate changes and uncertainty.

Participants raise many health, wellbeing and coping issues in discussions of agricultural and rural restructuring including managing drought, flood and climatic variations. The social impacts of the multiple challenges occurring are also gendered. The historical, generational and local knowledge of managing climatic changes integrates a gendered industry restructuring – after all, resilience and coping supports patrilineal family farm inheritance. The discourse of family farming continues to adapt and support agriculture as masculine and this statement does not discount women being involved or that agricultural restructuring clearly does not benefit all men (as described in other findings chapters).

### ***Gendered perspectives on climate change and drought***

Within experiences of agricultural restructuring, which includes managing climate change and climatic variations, there are gendered perspectives regarding coping strategies and managing uncertainty. This is illustrated in comparing the responses of a husband and wife couple, who describe managing the recent experiences of drought and then high rainfall:

Josephine:

Yeah, I was just wondering how you manage the change?

Interviewee:

Well I always thought that the weather would change. I always thought it would come wet again I didn't expect – because the cycles. I mean [pause] when you're dependent on the weather you know, you [pause] we know more than we could probably ever write and put down, you know, the things you know about the weather but you do know that after a long dry there's, it comes wet again. And then when it's been wet for a while you'll probably get a dry spell again and it's just the cycle in nature so – I guess my concern was whether we could hang on long enough, whether we could still be here or whether we'd have too much debt and have to pack up – with drought. [03, female, farming]

Drought and rain – we've probably covered it haven't we? It's, it's just more of the same, just got to be purely and simply aware the season that you're facing and make your decisions appropriately whether it be an opportunity which I was trying to explain, an opportunity like this year presents, or a year of very very tight margins which was what last year presented at the same time. [04, male, farming]

Agricultural restructuring including managing 'drought and rain' is discussed by the husband with the emphasis on 'opportunity' and 'margins'. Yet in contrast the wife expresses her concerns about the relationship between managing the drought and accruing debt. Further, elsewhere the above quoted female interviewee does discuss other difficulties including farm expansion to support patrilineal inheritance as well as emphasising the significance of her local knowledge of weather 'cycles' that support farming. Concerns about the drought are discussed in very different ways during the interviews. During the interview with the husband, he did not wish to linger on discussing 'drought and rain' and clearly positioned these experiences as consistent with his prior experience of farming and as part of the business of farming.

Given the importance of local and historical knowledge in family farming it is not surprising that this knowledge is highly valued in managing uncertainty, as well as climatic and weather extremes in farming. Further, several interviewees discuss their faith that a history of adaptation exists in agricultural restructuring and that this will continue. For example:

So the compensation for living out here is to sometimes have a little bit more money than you would in a regular job and a little bit more flexibility with your hours – it's a lifestyle thing, and provided the weather doesn't change too much in the future, we

should be able to keep on doing it for a fairly long time. There are always new varieties of plants that we can grow if we can't grow what we're growing now, so I'm optimistic. [19, female, farming]

I'm not a big believer in the climate change. I hope I'm right. I think that – and I haven't got any basis to put this on but I just think that the world moves in cycles. And last year is possibly proof of that. But if you go back in history there's been really, really, periods of really dry years and then we've gone through periods of wet years and I guess part of it is hope that we're not going through climate change. If it goes down that line and we do get drier and drier, they're talking we will get, and it's been the way it has, we're getting wet summers, so we will just have to adapt to that and we'll have to sow – you know last year we contemplated growing a summer crop. [20, female, farming]

To return to the proposition that agriculture not only involves substantial gender inequities but is also becoming more masculine is an argument that has consequences for considering who makes decisions supporting on-farm adaptation and industry restructuring. As one female interviewee describes:

... so I think I just think there's enough to worry about from day to day without worrying about what might happen in thirty years. I know and I suppose if I had to directly make decisions that might impact on what's going to happen in twenty years, I would have to put a bit more thought into the way things were done or that, but I suppose, I hope that Tom's just making, and I suppose the way I look at farming, is, you think well everybody's always going to need grain, it's not an industry that could disappear, I wouldn't think, so long as it can be done well and can stay economically viable. [11, female, farming]

## ***Conclusion***

The PhD research question emphasises the relationship between gender relations and managing agricultural and rural restructuring in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future scenarios. Findings reveal how women and men are managing multiple challenges including climate changes, and that responses and adaptation to climate change are informed by the local gender order that overwhelmingly continues to support patrilineal family farming. Further the 'local' gender order is coexisting with global industry restructuring processes in coping with, and adapting to, climate change and climate variability.

Climate change is an additional uncertainty in the global-nexus of agricultural restructuring. Participants critique climate change and some people do not wish to talk about it. Climate

change is an uncertainty along with the uncertainties of changing terms of trade. Given the wellbeing and coping issues in agricultural restructuring, then additional drying due to climate change potentially will continue to be managed within a patriarchal and patrilineal industry that may well further exclude women as well as farming families.



## Chapter 10 Discussion

### *Introduction*

Locating 'gender' and understanding gender relations in agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region occurs in multiple places: local rural environs and global trade spaces are gendered embodied social orders. Managing multiple changes and challenges in industry restructuring impacts on experiences, opportunities for, and critique of masculinities and femininities given industry restructuring is a dynamic embodied gendered 'social space' (see Liepins 1996). In this thesis I propose that agricultural industry restructuring means agricultural production is being consolidated as patriarchal and patrilineal. I consider changing livelihoods in response to, and in relating to, the pressures of industry restructuring including changing terms of trade, new market opportunities, climate change scenarios, drought and rain.

I argue that agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region involves a variety of gender-based social exclusions. Women and men are leaving farming at the same time as women are withdrawing from farming or pursuing alternative livelihoods that on the one hand are distinct from family farming, but on the other supports the farm to continue as a male-dominated practice, leading to an increasingly masculinist restructured agricultural industry.

This discussion chapter will now provide a summary of the key findings and then discuss a number of issues described in the literature review. First, the masculinisation of agriculture is a contrast to the 'women in agriculture' literature. The findings lead to the reconsideration of other literature that considers how restructuring and multiple pressures may establish the potential for more equitable gender relations (Alston & Whittenbury 2012; Bock & Shortall 2006). Finally, the research findings require discussion of the very issue of gender equality in agriculture, family farming, and restructuring (Brandth 2002a) and this matter is integral to the focus of this chapter and thesis conclusion.

### *Summary of key findings*

1. Agricultural restructuring involves families leaving farming *as well as* excluding family members and further prescribing gendered roles and responsibilities. In this industry

context of change (policy supporting neoliberalism, new market opportunities, ongoing effects of drought, rain, climate change, declining terms of trade) women too are leaving farming. For those who remain farming agriculture is becoming further masculinised. Thus multiple 'farm exits' are occurring at the same time.

2. Interviewees articulate gendered relationships to terms of trade and markets (the latter in turn are gendered) that potentially exclude women in new ways. Agricultural restructuring is expressed as a gendered industry context and experiences of relating to trade and markets are integral to explaining gender inequities. Global markets and trade, and local gender orders are connected.
3. Policy links restructuring to climate change adaptation yet the latter is defined as market opportunity without considering: a) local narratives of climate changes that reposition 'climate change' as knowledge of local 'climate cycles'; and b) adaptation is being appropriated as a directive of agricultural restructuring i.e. structural adjustment that potentially continues to support patriarchal and masculinist industry restructuring. If the context of climate change adaptation disappears from view in interview narratives as a matter of importance in managing restructuring pressures then it certainly appears in industry policy. The local climate change interview-based discourses emphasise 'drought and rain' and these indeed have gendered social impacts.
4. A gender analysis of family farming in the Mallee region reveals that while a patriarchal family farming system remains, the social impacts of that patriarchy do not necessarily ascribe power to all men: men and women experience tensions in restructuring, exiting farming and managing multiple stresses. Exiting farming is a process imbued with challenges to livelihoods, identity and social relationships for women and men.
5. There are lost opportunities for women to have input into industry structures and to be involved in farming. The patrilineal tradition of family farming continues to be

cemented by succession practices supporting the patriarchal tradition of family farming. Family farm structure and ownership does not necessarily prescribe equality and inclusion in decision-making practices. Further, the dominance of 'the farm' specifies income distribution priorities.

6. 'The farm comes first': men's priorities come first in the gender order and 'the farm' is a dominant masculine narrative subsuming equal opportunity in livelihood strategies and the negotiation of roles and responsibilities. Farming remains dependent on women's work but, in contrast to the literature, this work is not necessarily on-farm as women work off-farm or as farming families relocate and (men) commute to the farm. At times women support and challenge this dominant narrative 'the farm comes first'. Further, in leaving farming men may experience a loss of power and livelihood identity.
7. Leaving farming is a stressful and complex process. Interviewees emphasise the *processes* of leaving rather than any exit-outcome framework. Interview narratives also reveal a critique of farming practices and terms of trade as well as a critique of the demands on social relationships.
8. Interviewees extensively describe the distress of rural and agricultural decline as a component of restructuring. Many women and men describe managing depopulation and social and community life divested of opportunities. There is the expression of substantial grief and loss e.g. loss of livelihood, community, sense of place and the multiple pressures impacting on relationships to land and commodity production. Industry restructuring is a gendered experience. Yet adaptation, coping and wellbeing issues described also include advocacy for the value of family farming and food production in Australia, and sustainable future scenarios including for the experience of leaving farming, for family farm restructuring and for gender relations.

## ***Gender relations in the local and global: the masculinisation of agriculture in the Mallee region***

I propose that the research findings emerging from this study indicate agriculture is becoming further masculinised. This chapter section could alternatively be titled ‘what is old is new’ and this is to argue that undertaking a gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region has revealed that a patriarchal and patrilineal gender order in family farming remains. As Connell (2005) has described, hegemonic masculinity supporting patriarchy in globalisation and neoliberalism does not prescribe power to all men. My findings demonstrate that there are a plethora of experiences in farming and managing restructuring pressures. However, similar to previous research (Alston 2006a, 2006b, 2007), it appears farming continues to be masculinised as family farming is restructured and gender relations are impacted by – and respond to – neoliberal structural adjustment as well as the impacts of drought and climate change. Alston has argued that women increasingly work off-farm to support the farm as well as men increasing their workload on the farm, in response to globalisation and drought.

It is also important to further consider how ‘the farm’ is being repositioned in changing gender relations, as well as the gender issues relating to industry restructuring given this research has prioritised a gender analysis of diverse social experiences in farming and in leaving farming. In some interviews women’s perspectives challenge a farm-focus as they critique the dominance of ‘the farm’ by not wanting to be involved or no longer wishing to be involved in farming. In this region, agriculture is described as a stronghold of patrilineal inheritance and succession practice. Agriculture is male-dominated and perhaps increasingly becoming so given restructuring including changes in commodity production and terms of trade. This concurs with other feminist rural social researchers who have noted the increasing masculinisation of farming as technologies and terms of trade have changed (Brandth 2002a, 2002b; Sachs 1983). Given that I mostly worked with those involved in, or who had left dryland broadacre farming, I accept that this conclusion may be specific to this type of farming.

Those participants involved in farming describe family and livelihood arrangements which challenge the rural / urban binary, for example in the case of new developments whereby men commute to the farm. As Brandth (2002b) notes, the ‘rural’ is dynamic and rural identity is not

necessarily always spatially positioned in a rural locality as it can extend to urban spaces. In contrast to previous research focussed on women in family farming and the gendered dimensions of divisions of labour, roles and responsibilities on-farm, this PhD research demonstrates how the boundary of the family farm is changing. There are new spatial dimensions to household and livelihood arrangements that support farming in a local-global nexus of restructuring and structural adjustments. Yet while the farming family manages restructuring, feminist critique of the farm as the unit of analysis demonstrates how agricultural production continues to be supported by a gendered sociocultural and shifting rural industry context.

In this thesis I withdraw from a focus on the 'discourse of the family farm' (Brandth 2002a, p. 183) to recognise a gender analysis of restructuring in the Mallee region. Gender analysis as methodology and method supports the thesis that women and men are impacted by globalisation and neoliberalism, and the context of multiple changes. Further, by drawing on the theory of embodied subjectivities, findings demonstrate how there is the interchange of gender relations impacting upon neoliberal productivist agricultural restructuring as people explain and critique their engagement with farming and rural communities.

Further, as Bock (2006a) writes, there is the question to consider in restructuring regarding how gender relations influence change, and thus shape neoliberal agricultural restructuring processes. Given the research findings, I argue that the local-global nexus that embodies agricultural restructuring can no longer only be understood as on-farm or with a 'farm-focus'. This is because of the changing spatial dimensions to the family farm and diverse reasons for leaving farming, including those reasons why women may withdraw – or wish to withdraw – earlier from farming than men or have livelihood interests separate to farming even when their livelihood activities may support the family farm.

Given the findings, I argue that the discourse of the family farm that Brandth (2002a) describes has been extended to a discourse of sustainable farming as neoliberal agricultural restructuring that continues to consolidate the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell 2005, p. 1808) in agricultural production. Restructuring as discursive experience now includes the experiences of drought, rain and future-scenario discourses of climate change as predictors of structural adjustment. While there are changes in technologies and terms of trade that displace women or create

socially unsustainable conditions for women *and* men, there is also the continuation of gender orders in farming via the farm, farming and trade – thus multiple components of the food system – that divest the opportunity for gender equality in agricultural restructuring.

### **Gender relations in agricultural production and agricultural restructuring**

The ‘women in agriculture’ and women and farming literature considered in Chapter 3 includes feminist rural social research that previously has pointed out there is diversity within women’s experiences in farming. This prior literature review work describes individual experiences as well as research that describes social movements (Alston 2003; Liepins 1996). On the one hand there is literature that describes social movements and women’s ability to self-advocate for their interests although this may occur at a time of crisis, and so the advocacy intent is frequently supporting patrilineal and patriarchal family farming (see Liepins 1996). Literature has described women’s knowledge in farming, women’s multiple positions in relation to the farm, and critiqued women’s role in supporting the farm and patriarchal industry practices. Other literature extensively describes women’s objections to the gendered power dynamics imbued in family farming and agricultural production. This research has focussed on individual experiences as well as gender analysis including working with couples and women and men.

More recently, feminist rural social research has included working with men (Price 2010b). Previous research argues how patrilineal and patriarchal agricultural production may detrimentally impact on the health and wellbeing of men as well as women (Alston 2012; Bryant & Garnham 2013; Price 2010a, 2012). My findings contribute to this recent research trajectory, and revise the earlier focus on farming to concurrently explore gender relations in agricultural and rural restructuring, including experiences of leaving farming. As noted in the previous section, this is a feminist research position that is a critique of a farm-focus and a reflexive rural-based research practice to make critical associations between those farming and those leaving for the purposes of understanding restructuring as occurring in highly gendered industry restructuring discourses and practices. My findings also demonstrate diversity between men given the experiences of men in farming and in leaving farming.

In her writing about the gendered impacts of the drought, Alston (2006b, p. 170) describes how the gendered impacts of drought include farm women having reduced ‘negotiating strength’.

Alston also goes on to ask 'are gender and power relations destabilized by a major crisis such as drought or are they reshaped around traditional patriarchal boundaries' (2006b, p. 170). More recently, Alston and Whittenbury (2012, p. 116) in their research on the gendered social impacts of climate change in the Murray Darling Basin region ask, 'Is climate change the catalyst that will break the cycle of farm women's disempowerment?' The authors conclude that women's off-farm income generation is being 'subsumed' in support of the continuation of family farming and that concurrently women resist traditional hegemonic and gendered family farm ideology while men continue to prioritise their farm-based work and gender relations in support of the family farm.

While the gendered impacts of drought and climate change can be investigated, conversely gender relations and gendered subjectivities can be understood as impacting upon contemporary 'compounding crises' (Steffen 2011) and restructuring pressures. Here I am arguing that the findings suggest gendered priorities in decision-making practices are not so much in response to restructuring, as embodying restructuring as gendered experiences in multiple places and at various times. My findings emphasise how caring responsibilities, life stage and age are all important considerations in women and men's engagement with farming, restructuring and the decisions to leave farming. The findings concur with Bryant and Pini's (2011) argument for developing the theory of intersectionality to understand gender and rurality, whereby categories other than gender matter in responding to the issues people identify as socially significant (see also Bryant & Garnham 2013).

Participants' responses to drought and climate variations are gendered perspectives. Yet I acknowledge the disparity between my priorities as a feminist rural researcher and those of numerous participants. Findings indicate that climate change is a gendered discourse, as are those discussions whereby women are expected to support a gendered social norm in support of the farm and the rural community in managing multiple changes associated with neoliberal agricultural industry restructuring, as well as managing drought and climatic changes.

The findings also challenge our understanding of decision-making in restructuring as a lineal engagement with identifiable outcomes that consolidate predictors of a successful restructure or experience of leaving farming. This is to return to the emphasis that restructuring is an experience and process (see Chapter 7). Moreover, this is a challenge to the initial focus of the

scope of this PhD research given the guiding funding parameters. Yet importantly, if an aim of feminist research is for the researcher to respond to the issues participants prioritise (Reinharz 1992), then locating decision-making and outcomes is challenging as participants do not always easily identify a clear-cut representation of 'leaving' or when they left farming. Indeed, on several occasions these experiences were difficult to talk about – and clearly there are gender-based differentials occurring with women leaving or wanting to leave prior to men, as well as diverse coping issues for women and men.

I argue there is a 'continuum' of experience of leaving farming – there are multiple reasons for leaving (when, why and how). Gendered perspectives coexist with gendered social norms re-establishing a masculinist agricultural industry, restructured with a refusal to address gender equality in the context of change including climate change and future scenarios for the climate, the rural social order and market opportunity.

This research advocates for pursuing an understanding of the diversity of social experience for the purposes of attending to agricultural restructuring as embedded with gendered equality and social equity issues. I argue that agricultural structural adjustment is incredibly gendered: as well as families leaving farming there are women leaving farming. There are also women and men critiquing the social order in farming that emphasises the power dynamics imbued in patriarchal and masculinist industry social norms that in turn are supported by patrilineal inheritance and succession. Adjustment as farm exit is anticipated in local contexts and expected in government policy. Interviewees accounts of their experiences of restructuring and managing changes, including leaving farming, expose gender-based disadvantages for women and men – between and within gender categories. It is my proposition that a gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region involves recognising the various types of farm exits occurring. There are typologies of gender relations and negotiations that shape adaptive capacity and coping strategies necessitated by the multiple social pressures women and men experience in managing agricultural industry restructuring.

Land ownership and farm business structure is gendered. The often-cited phrase 'the farm comes first', which I established as a code and then a theme, also raises gender equality issues regarding access to land as well as land ownership. Sachs (1996, p. 46) describes the dangers for women in the separation of land ownership and management and identified the further loss

of valuing women's knowledge as well as the denial of access to land to women. My findings also add to this analysis that there are current government policy objectives that envision, support and reconfigure restructuring as involving increased contract labour (Clarke 2013). Men and women are potentially displaced in neoliberal agricultural policy. Elsewhere literature describes the social impacts of the pressure to 'decouple' farming and land ownership (Gray & Lawrence 2001).

The findings draw attention to the gender equality issues in the restructuring process as well as being informed by local rural contexts that support farm entry as overwhelmingly patrilineal. This draws attention to the importance of the social and cultural context to work. For example, Pocock et al. (2011) describe how these factors influence 'gender cultures' that have spatial dimensions that influence managing change. To understand both social experiences and impacts of agricultural restructuring we need to also acknowledge the social significance of the gendered access to land and ability to own land as well as the gendered impacts and outcomes of leaving farming.

Grace and Lennie (1998) describe how women are increasingly identifying as farmers. In contrast, my research findings suggest that there is a 'continuum' of leaving farming and this spectrum involves women also leaving farming, sometimes before men, and that women are at times simply not becoming involved in farming. This diversity of leaving farming is possibly supported by the lack of agency in agriculture industry restructuring to support gender equality values. These values interact with Mallee gender orders, local and global technologies, market opportunities and responses to climatic challenges and crisis. The consequence is the further masculinisation of agriculture as restructuring continues.

I acknowledge that it may be considered a gap in this research that I did not undertake a 'social movement' focus. The method of semi-structured and in-depth interviews works with individuals – women and men – who offer gendered perspectives. I did, however, distribute an email seeking participants through the Women in Agriculture network, which was an opportunity to seek out women who identify as farmers. With this self-reflexivity in mind I note that through conducting interviews, interviewees identified that there were very few – or even 'none' as one interviewee identified – women farming. This also raises the often-discussed matter of the gender inequity in how women's on-farm work is recognised and who gains the

occupational / livelihood recognition of being 'a farmer'. This issue, identified by previous feminist rural social research (O'Hara 1998) remains, and the research findings establish that gender inequality remains in both recognising women's work on the farm and in support of the family farm as well as rights to the family farm and thus access to land.

### **Social sustainability and wellbeing in agricultural restructuring: (re)valuing food production and gender equality in adapting to climate change**

The main research question investigates how gendered social relations are renegotiated as farming women and men in the Mallee manage agricultural and rural restructuring in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future predictions. The focus on 'farming women and men' has been challenged as research findings demonstrate some women involved in farming families do not identify as currently or previously being farmers, nor are they involved in the day-to-day activity of farming. In contrast all male interviewees either are or previously were involved in farming and identify with the current or previous occupational identity of 'farmer'.

My main research question prompted a qualitative and exploratory research project design that recognised that gender relations are dynamic and that a gender-based differential is at work in agricultural industry restructuring. I have drawn on qualitative empirical methods as well as considered policy-based discourses to further my understanding of the gender relations embodied in industry restructuring that operates in a locally-based as well as globally positioned continuum of restructuring terms of trade, markets, changing technologies, climatic variations and climate change.

In this section I will now further discuss what the findings reveal about the importance of social sustainability in agricultural restructuring. Here I prioritise literature regarding sustainability (Black 2005; Cocklin & Alston 2003; Smailes, PJ 1995) to argue how the findings indicate the social limits to agricultural restructuring. Both those involved in farming and those who have left articulate these limits. This idea of 'limits' can also be considered as articulating the limits to the discourse of sustainable farming defined as productivist and neoliberal. I argue that women leave farming prior to men, and also women and men describe their reasons for leaving farming and share their experiences. Interviewees also include women who are not involved in

farming and pursuing other livelihood opportunities. These situations, as well as the subtle critique of chemical use all problematise the social sustainability of agricultural restructuring. Moreover these findings indicate that inequitable gender relations are a key component of the coping and wellbeing issues women and men raise in interviews.

In my literature review I raise a number of key issues pertaining to descriptions of sustainability and more specifically, social sustainability. Additionally, there is the issue of 'sustainability for whom' (Cocklin & Alston 2003, p. 203). Second, there is the issue of how discussions of sustainability raise the prospect of discussing what do people *and communities* wish to sustain (Smailes, PJ 1995). Third, since sustainability involves considering local and global dimensions or multiple localities (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) as well as intergenerational and intragenerational social equity issues (Cocklin & Alston 2003).

The findings demonstrate that the Mallee region is by no means homogenous – location is experienced in multiple ways and social diversity includes diversity in gender relations as well as gendered embodied subjectivities. The findings also demonstrate that as identified in the literature review Chapter 2 (Beer, Maude & Pritchard 2003; Black 2005), 'sustainability' is indeed a multifarious discourse and experience, expressed through both undertaking empirical research and through policy expressions. Some participants describe agricultural and rural community resilience and sustainability. Others critique current opportunities and restructuring pressures as unsustainable for the community and themselves. What is clear is that a gendered agricultural and rural social order prevails and that this is an interaction between livelihood strategies, decision-making practices and gender relations. The power dynamics imbued in agricultural restructuring can be articulated through interview discussions about roles and responsibilities and how decisions are or have been made in managing industry restructuring. Further, power dynamics specifically understood as gender equality issues in agricultural restructuring, reveal that the current sustainability discourse that prevails in farming is inconsistent with the social sustainability issues that interviewees raise.

In this discussion it is pertinent to problematise this 'local' and 'global' nexus in the analysis of restructuring to assert that the local is global and vice versa as such a dichotomy risks failing to recognise the interaction of gender relations upon industry, market and future predictions. Women and men do critique and advocate for notions of socially sustainable agriculture and

this includes recognising the limits to agricultural restructuring which is gendered embodied subjectivity as a practice as well as trade related. A changing trading system has the local effects of restructuring including the renegotiating of gender relations. My findings indicate the industry is becoming more male-dominated and includes social exclusions that are gendered experiences for women and men. Local and global trade-based social interactions reconsidered as imbued with gender relations disrupt oppositional geographies of restructuring (local, global) to raise another research question – how can agricultural restructuring in the Mallee be more socially sustainable *for women and men*, and within this, promote gender equality?

Integral to this new research question is researcher reflexivity and findings that demonstrate how several participants advocate for the value of family farming and food production notwithstanding that many participants articulate the difficulties and sustainability issues in farming. In the research and interview process there have clearly been occasions where researcher-led priorities have been challenged, and feminist intentions are at odds with participants. Building on this recognition is an analysis that the findings offer the opportunity for advocating for an understanding of agricultural and rural restructuring as a process that affects women and men, and gender-based inequities need to be further understood both between and within women and men. Moreover, gender relations can be understood in terms of opportunities, distribution of resources, access to land, for example, as well as multi-sited influences that compose 'industry restructuring'. An applied 'gender-lens' now needs to further engage with future scenarios and predictions for industry restructuring to reflect upon why the industry is at risk of becoming more masculine and lacking social sustainability in terms of wellbeing and coping issues described in this research.

Yet to return to the original PhD research question there is another key issue I wish to discuss in this section, and that is the component of the research question that sought to understand how gender relations are being renegotiated in the 'context of climate change, uncertainty and future predictions'. And to write honestly (after all, I expected interviewees to be honest with me), I have been troubled by both my research strategy and the findings in response to this aspect of this investigation.

Let me further explain this discomfort: my experience is that there were clearly limits to conversations and opportunities to discuss with people how they were feeling about climate

change and future predictions. Many interviewees made it clear they had been managing uncertainty for a long time: this is historical and intrinsic to farming. 'Climate change' was overwhelmingly expressed as a political discourse and relocated elsewhere i.e. policy, government and governing processes, the future. What interviewees prioritised was the importance of declining terms of trade and the social impacts of these experiences. In some instances managing climate change and future scenarios was anticipated as a challenge that will be assisted by adaptation in terms of new technologies. Adaptation has, after all, been an ongoing feature of agricultural restructuring as ongoing and historical process. This point is consistent with the work of Anderson (2008, p. 68) who notes how climate change and drought have a historical and cultural context informing lived experience in the Mallee.

In the literature review work (see Chapter 2) I describe how policy-based discourse positions climate change as market opportunity as well as predictor of further structural adjustment. As previously mentioned, Steffen (2011) argues that in order to understand the impacts of climate change we must understand the 'compounding' factors at work. Steffen also argues social equity issues will increase in significance as climate change continues. I argue that these PhD findings demonstrate that indeed 'compounding' factors are at work and while interviewees identify the social and gendered impacts of declining terms of trade they also articulate how climate changes e.g. drought and rain, increase stress and coping issues – notwithstanding mention of opportunity. Some interviewees describe expanding during drought and / or discuss their hope of better conditions for the next season. Responses to these climate and weather events are gendered experiences with power differentials at work.

As Terry (2009b) describes, there is the important issue of differentiating coping with climate change and climate change adaptation. Adaptation to climate change is often framed as a technological and economic challenge that will be addressed with the development of new technologies (Terry 2009b, p. 15). I argue that participants describe coping and wellbeing issues in managing agricultural restructuring including climate changes and extreme weather events. Some interviewees also foresee adaptation strategies that will draw upon new technologies. Yet what is occurring is that climate change adaptation is now also a key component to agricultural restructuring in terms of government policy, yet this policy is by no means gender-neutral. As Alston (2007, p. 33) argues, women and men respond differently to climate change, drought and restructuring and thus there is 'the need not only for a gendered analysis of

climate change and climate change events, but also for detailed gender-sensitive social policy addressing the current and predicted scenarios'. The local context to agricultural restructuring is also a gendered social order – possibly increasingly masculine – and this aspect to gender relations can not be disassociated with climate change adaptation given the gender-based coping issues that have emerged in this research.

If we understand coping and adaptation as interrelated in terms of prompting opportunities for social change, including the right to gender equality in agriculture and industry restructuring, then climate change adaptation strategies for agriculture – those currently occurring and those imagined through future scenarios – need to recognise that promoting gender equality in restructuring processes will assist those who remain farming as well as those who leave farming.

Currently, discourses of climate change and climate change adaptation – there are multiple discourses – interact with expectations for more structural readjustment in agriculture. Wellbeing issues and the need to include more women and young people are also noted, at times, in future scenarios and policy planning for agriculture. Concurrently, there are social movements revaluing food production and advocating for food sovereignty – the work of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance is an example. Family farming is revalued as is the social significance of food production. Thus the 'context' of climate change is a diverse discursive space and multi-sited social interaction.

To return to my findings, what I wish to emphasise is that the findings make it clear that while climate change adaptation is both a hegemonic and contested interaction, adaptation must prioritise the promotion of gender equality in agricultural restructuring. The risk is that climate change adaptation strategies will promote a 'winners and losers' (Leinchenko & O'Brien 2006) structural adjustment strategy in agricultural restructuring. Further, as these findings demonstrate, the risk is also that this strategy will not only result in farm exits, but also women leaving farming, given that the industry currently is patriarchal and patrilineal. It is possible that women are leaving farming or not being involved in farming, as well as couples leaving farming, as a coping strategy and in response to the stresses and wellbeing issues in agricultural restructuring – this analysis requires further investigation.

Thus these findings demonstrate that there is the need for a gender analysis of agricultural policy as agricultural restructuring now includes climate change adaptation strategies as well as climate change as a predictor of further structural adjustment. There is an identified need to include women in climate change adaptation strategies as well as further investigate how women are included and excluded in agricultural restructuring processes. As Cocklin & Alston (2003) have argued, sustainability includes consideration of intra and inter-generational sustainability. The latter also involves the need for a broader food systems gender analysis – where are women located in food production and food distribution, and how can they be supported? This broader focus will enable gender analysis of agricultural restructuring which includes gender relations at work in relating to markets, as this research has demonstrated the importance of the latter.

A gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee finds that gender relations as well as gender identities (femininities, masculinities) are impacting on gender equality in agricultural production. Further, the gendered social dynamics in industry restructuring discourses and practices demarcate gendered parameters to articulating and defining market and trade structures. There are also policy-sourced discourses of opportunities in agriculture in the context of multiple changes exchanging with a regional discursive site ‘the Mallee’, that emphasise the need for structural adjustment including increased commodity production and exports, and farm exits. The proposition in this thesis is that the context to structural adjustment has been and continues to be masculinist and with a gender-based bias, and that a gender analysis of agricultural restructuring investigating diversity of experience reveals the multiple social exclusions occurring for women and some men.

I argue that these findings demonstrate that if we ask who is leaving farming, and why, and what are the outcomes, we also need to also ask who is entering farming as well as who is currently farming and who is not farming but supporting family farming and restructuring. Agricultural restructuring in the Mallee and the experiences of managing multiple and compounding changes cannot be understood without consideration of the social equity and gender equality issues in farming. The gender equality issues in farming inform gender relations in agricultural restructuring and in leaving farming.

## ***Discussion of PhD findings considering methodology, theory and reflexivity***

Analysis of data has included multiple comparisons: between those farming and those who have left farming; between women and men; between men and between women. Snowball sampling also led to the opportunity to contrast organic and non-organic farmers, irrigators and broadacre farmers. Moreover, interview conversations have been contrasted across age and caring responsibilities. Finally, feminist reflexivity involves comparing researcher intent – including advocacy intent – with interviewee priorities that came to the fore during interviews (Reinharz 1992).

Thematic analysis with feminist critical methodology involved analysis of the data that refuses to disassociate the experience of leaving farming from that of agricultural restructuring in terms of on-farm change and gender relations. I acknowledge that during some interviews women describe their significant involvement in farming. However, I argue that agriculture in the Mallee region is potentially becoming further masculinised. This assertion is also informed by interviews with those farming and those who have left farming. Interviews with men who have left farming reveal stress and coping issues in managing restructuring pressures – and those pressures are predominantly described with reference to declining terms of trade. Interrelated with changes in trade and farming practice are significant articulations of gendered social norms and relations that can compound difficulties in farming and in leaving farming.

The main research question and subsidiary questions prioritise a consideration of ‘gender’ and social experiences occurring in a changing industry. Prioritising ‘gender’ is an insistence on recognising gendered subjectivity and social experience as integral to the social conditions that support or challenge industry restructuring. Moreover, this research demonstrates that multiple aspects of the agricultural industry such as ‘the farm’, ‘markets’ and ‘terms of trade’ are embedded in highly gendered social relations. The main research question reflects a feminist political intent to bring awareness – through the research process – to industry spaces that are embodied, local and imbued with multiple daily negotiations that mark gender difference, that is to say, the different experiences of women and men in managing agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region.

Inviting women and men to share their experiences of managing industry change is an opportunity to gain insights into the processes that compose industry discourses that exist outside and within the 'household' or 'family farm'. There is clearly an overt political intent to challenge gender bias within industry and explore the social experiences for those women and men 'outside' the industry – the latter pursued through interviews with those who have left farming – and to connect the gendered social experiences to industry contexts that go beyond the policy-priority of neoliberal industry strategy dependent on people leaving family farming.

Existing knowledge overwhelmingly emphasises a patrilineal and patriarchal industry that has been challenged in recent decades (Alston 2003; Brandth 2002a; Liepins 1996). Further, there is limited research available that explores the experiences and outcomes for those that leave the agricultural industry. Agricultural restructuring is frequently expressed in policy intent, policy directed initiatives and a historical overview consistently describes that restructuring implicitly requires farming families to leave farming (Gray & Lawrence 2001).

Gender analysis in this PhD is feminist research connecting the social experiences of those currently farming with those who have left farming through a research process that refuses to isolate a cohort e.g. 'women' or 'men' or 'farming' or 'exited farming' to enable advocacy focused on opportunity and alternatives as a direct challenge to the hegemonic gendered social experiences composing an industry context. This PhD developed a research strategy to ensure a connection is made to those who are also currently farming because the industry and policy context demands a social relationship without ever naming it. Nor does it address the social impacts of this relationship and this is where the gendered politics and social sustainability of current industry experiences and policy perspectives in support of structural adjustment requires urgent attention.

What also occurred during the initial research process of undertaking the literature review and then ten initial interviews, is that the research proposal to work with those who are farming and those who have left farming was substantially deconstructed. The development of the research question(s) was first challenged in response to the literature review: an initial focus just on 'outcomes' for those who had exited farming was both disrupted and challenged by a

post-structuralist theoretically-inspired critique of the farming / exited farming binary opposition. However, as I undertook interviews it also became apparent that the neat fit of potential interviewees who are either 'farming' or have 'exited farming' was not always relevant or matching interviewee experiences. As I undertook purposive and snowball sampling, recruitment strategies that require researcher presence and conversation in the field mean I began to understand the complexities of agricultural and rural restructuring.

While this research is qualitative and has worked with a small number of interviewees, definitions of who is farming and who has left – or indeed who is thinking of leaving – emerged from interviewees' perspectives in combination with how people identify each other as well as from an interviewer / researcher perspective. For example, there are many people now commuting to the farm (which may consist of multiple locations) and yet live in a regional centre, or someone may be farming and trying to exit, or a woman in a relationship may have a different perspective on exiting to that of her husband, or that an interviewee has the life experience of leaving farming more than once – all these perspectives challenge any simple definitions of who has 'exited farming' or not.

Concurrently as I deconstructed the farming / exited farming binary opposition by undertaking a gendered analysis of multiple components to establishing the scope of research – a literature review, selecting theory, initial interviews – I gained insights into how purposive and snowball sampling provides the *opportunity* to learn about how people define themselves and others as having left farming or indeed remaining within farming. This, in turn, supported exploratory research into the gendered experiences of industry restructuring. For example, I attended one interview believing I was meeting somebody who has left farming to learn they had left living on the farm but were still involved in farming. Further, there was a marked difference in their reflections on their engagement with farming to that of their partner's. I recount this experience at this point to emphasise that this learning indicates the diversity of experiences regarding managing agricultural and rural restructuring which in turn describe the social impacts of restructuring as well as the experiences of changing gender relations as embodied and recounted during the time and space of interviews. Thus I return to make comment on the main research question: I settled on an emphasis on 'renegotiating gender relations' as I assume gender is a fluid social experience embedded in diverse, constructed and contested social relations. This research emphasises relationships between women and men.

I developed a research question with an emphasis on the 'how' in an effort to undertake research that will respect dynamic gender relations and embodied subjectivities as women and men involved in family farming manage substantial industry and rural restructuring in a context of multiple changes including climate change and climatic changes, for example. As Foucault (1991) explains in 'Questions of Method' by asking 'how' rather than focusing on a sociological problem, that is the low-income farm or the unviable farm and farm exits, in this PhD the research question developed with its emphasis on supporting critique of the gendered industry social experiences exemplified by an exploration of multiple and diverse stories and views that represent daily experience and locate the gendered politics of agricultural restructuring in the Mallee region.

Agricultural restructuring requires that people leave farming: with respect to broadacre farming, farms are enlarging to remain viable. However, I argue there are social taboos in naming this requirement along with the impacts on social relationships. There are the local social dynamics of who remain farming and who leaves and I learnt this is something that is not easily discussed. In turn, the recruitment process itself proffered the finding that the difficulties I encountered in gaining interviewees represents the many difficulties at work in opening up the conversation with people about the experiences of industry restructuring and social relationships that support production and change. Local narratives of successful restructuring are also upheld in interviews.

I am in no doubt that gender matters in managing change and industry restructuring, but moving towards articulating what the 'matters' are requires a review of the researcher's responsibilities including the very issue of representing a discourse of social change. I have read much literature focussed on the women in agriculture movement, for example, and so I was quite taken aback to hear about women's lack of involvement in agriculture, for example. I became concerned about ethical issues with the scope of research: was the assumption of restructuring pressures seeking a negative conversation predicating gendered demarcations and social stress? Herbert-Cheshire (2003) challenges the 'rural crisis discourse' to promote a discussion of local empowerment and resilience with respect to managing change. On many occasions I have reflected on stories articulating ongoing rural decline, frustrations and grief. I became concerned that through interview analysis and finding that interviewees describe women as less involved in agriculture would undermine the legacy of advocacy work that

women have undertaken for women to promote opportunities for women. I was also concerned that my descriptive and exploratory work undermines the work being done in rural communities to promote sustainable changes. This also demands further literature review work and critique of the discourses of rural resilience that currently dominate.

Fine et al. (2003, p. 198) are useful on this point:

We stretch toward writing that spirals around social injustice and resilience, that recognizes the endurance of structures of injustice and the powerful acts of agency, that appreciates the courage and limits of individual acts of resistance but refuses to perpetuate the fantasy that "victims" are simply powerless.

In researcher reflexive practice it is important to identify ethical matters and discuss personal responses to interviews. So here is an opportunity to reveal the (dis)connections that emerge during the research experience, and I hesitate in the discussion and representation of the findings to point out that on many occasions the subject matter reveals social injustices and the ongoing social distress of rural community change. These matters are a major part of the story revealed in this research and my political intent resists the discourse of inevitable rural depopulation and loss of community-based resources that may further justify an agricultural restructuring trajectory that does not consider alternatives nor the social sustainability and gender equality issues in that trajectory.

This ethical consideration regarding the scope of the research was also compounded by my response to interviews and that as Reinharz (1992, p. 34) describes, 'feminist researchers discover there is more pain in the interviewees' lives than they suspected'. Researcher responses to the 'context' of research and the 'raw emotion' of doing the research is also discussed by Scraton (2004): the research experience can be a catalyst for social change not just through the experience of the 'interview' but also the 'findings' can drive researcher advocacy and political intent.

In her discussion of her research and interviews with rural women who had or were still using services at IVF clinics, Bell (2011) argues for an ethical research practice that also considers participants' motivations for being interviewed. This extends feminist reflexivity which has a tradition of critiquing the power the researcher has at many stages in their research (Daley 2010) and refocusses methodological discussion of motivations and implications for the research practice and methods being used which is also finally represented in the research written product. By considering participants' motivations and acknowledging the 'co-

construction' of research knowledge this de-emphasises that it is solely the researcher with political or advocacy intent (Bell 2011). Consistent with some of the participant motivations Bell describes, I found that interviewees often described their intent to participate. This was sometimes expressed as a willingness to 'help' me and my research project but at times motivations were overtly expressed. Examples include:

Josephine:

There's something I'm interested in, is why did you agree to participate?

Interviewee:

Why? Because if I can give back or put input from my side where I'm now on the other side of it and it helps in some way, I would rather help than not because I sat on the other side wondering, "What if I leave? What happens and who am I?" and all those sort of questions and hopefully it can help, yes. [17, male, left farming]

Josephine:

Why were you – what is always of interest for me, why did you agree to participate in the interview?

Interviewee:

Oh look I try to be open. If it could help at all to get the story out there and as I said I'm trying to get other people to communicate and talk about things so it doesn't worry me. I mean, I've been very open and honest. [22, male, farming]

I guess in talking to you like this, I've always got in the back of my mind maybe if I could just get the message through to Jo, that she'll start to realise too that organics is important and maybe she can exert some influence somewhere that organic farming is good. [25, male, farming]

While coding I developed the code 'Interviewee reason for participation'. Sometimes interviewees expressed this in response to my direct questioning and at other times during the flow of conversation. I did not explicitly always ask for an explanation.

Further, a key informant and I had this discussion:

Josephine:

Just another reflection when I initially contacted you, you made the comment "I wouldn't be doing your research for quids" because you, and you referred to the upcoming announcement – which has now been announced – the withdrawal of EC from the region and there had been the floods on the Friday, the first Friday of

February. So I was just wondering if you could tell me more about that, I wondered what prompted that reflection you made?

Key informant:

Yeah well it may or may not have been an appropriate thing to say but I guess I can point to a raft of research that is going on at the moment in relation to you know, the viability of rural communities, the issues around you know, personal circumstances, the sort of grief and hardship etc. and I was probably anticipating that not every door is going to be open to you, that will be people be saying I want something other than someone telling me that I am suffering and feeling depressed ..... so there is a risk that I guess more research into the social impacts stuff, is, will create some angst about well, you know, "ok we've done it all before, when are we actually going to address the problem stuff?" Not that it's your issue but it will be front of mind issue for the families that you're dealing with. And there will be a lot of people who just wont want to talk about it. So that runs the risk that I guess your research gets a bit biased because you actually will be challenged to engage those who are at the in the most critical situations.

Josephine

So is that a critique of research that focuses on what's not working rather than what is working or-

Key informant:

Yes I think that's a good comment actually. We are a bit prone to go to the disease rather than the health strategy if you like in a whole range of areas ... I guess that was predicated on the belief that it was important to tell some positive stories that we need to occasionally look away from everything that is going wrong to say well let's have a look at some of the stuff that's going right, see if we can work out what it is that is making a difference. Now that's not to in any way challenge the importance of your research but I think there is a bit of a culture around that "oh my godfather are we going to look at that again", you know. [Key informant 02]

Here I articulate a research binary that I have often reflected upon and been within, during the course of the interview work I completed. So whilst I did find it difficult to recruit women and men involved in irrigation farming, or who had left irrigation farming and this may well follow another type of research saturation and focus that this key informant challenges, I also argue that it is important to understand the resistance to research that considers the social experiences and *social impacts* of restructuring pressures. 'Social impacts' imply a top-down approach to industry analysis. This is why I developed a focus on exploring the social and lived *experiences* of managing restructuring with participants. This is also exploratory research informed by Foucault's analysis of discourse and power that provides theoretical insights into

complexities in negotiating subjectivities that are not only about industry restructuring as a 'power over' economic force, but opening up a conversation to allow articulations of the possible benefits, challenges, complexities, social disparities and difficulties of managing industry changes. As previously mentioned, an important issue I have learnt along the way is that there are many sensitivities involved in actually *opening up the conversation* about how women and men are feeling about managing changes in agricultural industry restructuring.

### **Gender analysis and interviews**

In the tradition of feminist research and methodology I have asked is gender analysis 'for women'? I have asked this question as my chosen interview strategy has included working with men. Working with men is also the opportunity to explore masculinities and challenge a male-dominated industry; for example, when working with those currently farming asking men how their family support their work is about exploring with them the social relations that assist the value of their work and commodity production. In several interviews participant conversation has at times had a dominant focus on productivity and farm restructuring initiatives. I have negotiated participants' focus on economics and productivity and at times not pressed my queries and efforts to explore supporting family relationships. Have I discounted the importance of the latter in trying to keep the interview going? Have I participated in the focus on production at the expense of the critique the interview-conversation offers in challenging gender segregated roles and responsibilities that mark agricultural production as a masculine undertaking? These self-directed questions indicate the complexities of the multiple ways gender interacts with method: the researcher's gender (Manderson, Bennett & Andajani-Sutjahjo 2006; Pini 2005) and subjective gendered priorities with feminist intent; the highly gendered industry context; and the interview conversation in turn generates meaning and knowledge within gendered discourses even while prescribed gender differences may be confirmed or challenged.

### ***Conclusion***

In this thesis I position gender equality, theoretically that is, as a future scenario built into the feminist political intent in this research focus on equality of opportunity, and increasing opportunities for women in decision-making and labour processes that compose agricultural

industry restructuring. Importantly, this intent informs both framing the scope of research and analysis of interviews and restructuring discourses.

Exploring the social experiences and gender relations in industry restructuring is a move towards defining social issues and social responsibilities in promoting respectful relationships, that in turn promote equitable and just relationships imbued in 'industry' responsibilities and responses to changes / restructuring. There are multiple ways to locate gendered social orders and gender relations. In this thesis I have used methodological and theoretical frameworks that demonstrate there are differences between women and between men. In agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region both women and men may experience distress, wellbeing and coping issues in managing numerous changes and challenges. Attending to social diversity of experiences enables respecting difference and the opportunities people are seeking in managing industry restructuring and in seeking to leave farming.

## Chapter 11 Conclusion

### *Summary of PhD research*

This PhD project is feminist qualitative research supporting a gender analysis of diverse experiences in agricultural restructuring and leaving farming in the Mallee region. This research explores how gender relations are being renegotiated as women and men manage agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future predictions.

In this research I have undertaken a total of 34 interviews working with both women and men. This has included working with couples where women and men have been interviewed separately. The majority of interviews have been with people either involved in or who have left dryland broadacre farming. In this research I have used semi-structured and in-depth interview methods with participants – a feminist research strategy committed to working with the priorities that participants identify.

This research has taken a unique approach by working with women and men who are farming and have left farming. The themes identify a number of significant issues including:

- the masculinisation of agriculture in the diversity of gendered experiences of leaving farming
- the social value of revising restructuring and leaving farming as a 'process' and attending to wellbeing issues
- social sustainability in restructuring and managing changes in agriculture and rural communities.

A gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee reveals how research supporting diverse experiences of restructuring and leaving farming has led to the key finding that there are multiple types of farm exits concurrently occurring. Further, restructuring is a gendered practice both in terms of the gender relations described as well as in participants' relationships to commodity markets and other aspects to neoliberal economics and global terms of trade.

Significantly, this PhD research has been enabled by gender analysis as both the method of working with women and men, and gender analysis as a contribution to extend feminist methodology. Gender analysis, as I describe here, is an opportunity to explore gender differences and gender relations, the power differentials at work as well as those occurring between and within 'women' and 'men' experiencing agricultural restructuring in the Mallee.

Much feminist rural social research has challenged the dominance of the farm as a unit of analysis and this PhD research draws on this feminist and rural-focussed approach to understand restructuring as a gendered rural space and experience. A deconstruction of production is not to discount the social significance of productivity – but is an attempt to reveal the binary oppositions at work such as farming / exit farming or 'get big or get out' or even 'on-farm and off-farm work', and look for a way to reposition the dominance of the 'farm' and 'productivity' to leverage a research space that responds to women's and men's insights and priorities regarding managing multiple changes, and to understand the dynamics in gender relations.

As agricultural production and terms of trade have been restructured, the agricultural industry remains a male-dominated industry notwithstanding many changes and challenges in family farming and gender relations. This broad description of the agricultural industry applies to Australia, and the Mallee region in north-west Victoria. Previous feminist social research highlights the exclusion of women from on-farm decision-making; the lack of recognition of women's on-farm work; critiqued how women's off-farm work supports both the dominance and continuation of 'the farm' and frequently positions women's work as secondary to the value of men's work; and focussed on supporting the continuation of the family farm business as a patriarchal and patrilineal social practice.

Currently the government policy context that describes and actions structural adjustment is represented as gender-neutral. The agricultural industry and public policy context has livelihood and wellbeing implications for women and men. While these key social trends have been identified, women also resist patriarchal industry social norms which may include a refusal to participate in farming. Alternatively, women may claim 'farmer' identity as they actively position themselves on-farm. Further, structural adjustment trends in Australian

agriculture have resulted in reduced numbers of family farms, and farmers in total, as well as the recent trend in the slight reduction of the number of women farming.

In this research participants describe how agricultural practice is continuously managing change and adjustment processes. Participants reveal how neoliberal industry restructuring intersects with local gender social norms and gender relations, as well as globalising industry social relations that support restructuring trajectories.

This research involves undertaking a gender analysis of the social relationships embedded in a changing rural agricultural industry context. In this research a gender analysis of agricultural industry restructuring in the Mallee region has involved interviewing women and men currently involved in family farming or who have left farming. Participants offer diverse gendered perspectives on managing multiple changes to declining terms of trade, livelihoods, markets and climatic changes.

I argue that an investigation of the gender differential at work for women and men managing changes in family farming and agricultural restructuring in the Mallee demonstrates that there is a 'continuum' of leaving farming occurring. I propose that a gender analysis of agricultural restructuring indicates the masculinisation of agriculture continues to occur as well as the pressure for families and individuals to leave farming. My research suggests that farming is becoming more male-dominated, and that women are less involved in farming than in previous times as reported in the literature, or not involved at all. Further, there is evidence that women leave farming – or wish to leave farming – prior to men. Thus this thesis demonstrates that there are multiple types of 'farm exits' occurring. Both farming and leaving farming are gendered.

Agricultural industry restructuring as social and place-based experience is embodied through gender relations, masculinities and femininities. As this research demonstrates, there are many difficulties in leaving farming or withdrawing from farming. These challenges are gendered with significant wellbeing and coping issues for women and men involved. The gender order and gender relations in farming are inseparable from those pertaining to agricultural restructuring, structural adjustment and experiences of leaving farming.

Further, this research provides insights into changing gender relationships at a time of significant restructuring given climate changes and drought. I argue that the context of climate change is now a major component of agricultural restructuring. I identify that the context of climate as a powerful discourse is gendered, as well findings reveal gendered experiences of managing drought and climatic changes.

This research contributes to the growing body of feminist rural-based research committed to working with women and men in order to understand the gendered experiences and impacts of agricultural and rural restructuring in the context of climate change, uncertainty and future scenarios.

### ***Limits to the scope of research***

There are four key limits to the scope of my research. First, there is the matter of limits to the conversations with participants. I raise this issue as it was identified by a male participant who proposed that my researcher-as-outsider status will limit the issues people are prepared to talk to me about given local norms around what is and is not talked about. This raises the matter of 'truth' revealed through findings based on qualitative discussions with participants. Participants may indeed uphold local social norms that are discourses preventing discussions about critical social and gender equity issues as people manage agricultural restructuring. One-off interviews may have prevented further establishing trusting relationships with participants that may or may not have revealed other social and gender equity issues. Further, the method for analysis (thematic analysis) is a researcher-led analysis rather than a participatory and / or action research method whereby researcher interpretations are re-presented to participants for further discussion. While any choice of methods has limits, I acknowledge that, as one participant identifies, there may be many important social issues not discussed.<sup>1</sup>

Acknowledging what is possibly not discussed does not discount the significance of what is discussed in interviews. Consequently I acknowledge the limits to interview conversation as a reference that is also a finding in as much as local discourses and social norms are imbued with

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<sup>1</sup> One male participant, after the conclusion of the formal component of the interview, made the comment that he thought it was important the issue of violence against women was further researched. This concurs with another male participant who identified issues that people will not discuss with me.

power. Certainly this may also explain why I found it, at times, difficult to recruit using snowball sampling although this may also be due to the difficulties in talking about managing restructuring and leaving farming.

Second, another possible limit to this research is that it has a research scope that adopts a regional approach rather than a commodity-specific focus or even a farming style e.g. irrigation only. In this PhD I worked with women and men who self-identified as being from the Mallee. This is a regional rural-based social and cultural identity. There are many feminist approaches to undertaking rural research into farming and restructuring. For example, Sachs (1996) argues for the benefits of researching broad considerations in profiling the social equity and gender equality issues for women in agriculture and farming as well as arguing gender relations can be commodity-specific. Elsewhere Machum (2006) argues for the benefits of researching commodity-specific production issues that support feminist analysis of farming. While this PhD research did not adopt a commodity approach, as the research findings demonstrate the social significance of how women and men relate to changing terms of trade including markets, the findings indicate the potential benefits of the opportunity to build upon these PhD findings and undertake further research specific to commodity production.

Third, the PhD scope of research deconstructed a focus on the 'outcomes' of leaving farming for the purposes of articulating the social equity and gender equality issues in restructuring and structural adjustment as a hegemonic policy-based industry discourse. This refusal to isolate the experience of leaving farming also informed the PhD methods. Interviews were conducted with women and men currently farming and those who have left farming. This was not easy to undertake both in terms of analysis of data as well as the practicalities of doing the research i.e. recruitment, as I learnt about social tensions in restructuring. This is an unresolved reflection upon methods chosen and how theoretical approaches to understanding restructuring as multiple discourses can work with empirical-based research. Again, this is a matter to further investigate.

Finally, this PhD has not analysed any non-government industry / commodity group discourses. In setting limits to the scope of research it may be considered a limitation that the methods did not engage with non-government industry-based discourses. Nor did this research engage with any specific groups or supports for women in agriculture. In considering such limits I conclude

that notwithstanding the need for limiting the scope of research, the feminist praxis in this thesis emphasises locating 'industry' through the experiences of women and men farming and who have left farming. This is research engaged with the gender politics of locating industry and advocacy for investigation into diverse experiences of agricultural restructuring.

### ***Research recommendations***

The PhD research outcomes and findings result in the following recommendations:

- that agricultural policy acknowledges gender-based inequities in the industry and implements policy is further developed that promotes gender equality in food production
- that agricultural policy acknowledges the ongoing industry culture of promoting patrilineal family farm succession and inheritance by promoting gender equality in access to and ownership of arable farm land
- that industry and policy future-scenarios consider wellbeing and coping issues for women and men involved in farming and in leaving farming
- that current industry commodity-led trajectories revise the social sustainability of current on-farm practices to support social alternatives as well as farming-type alternatives.

### ***Opportunities for future research***

Undertaking this research indicates areas for possible further research:

- a gender analysis of livelihood and relationship changes for retiring and retired family farming couples
- who wants to farm? A gender analysis of farm entry and taking-up the challenge of food production
- undertaking a literature review of the food security and food sovereignty literature considering gender equality issues in food production in the context of climate change
- the question of family farming in Australia: a public policy and document analysis of how family farming and food production is (re)valued in Australia. Consider government, industry and food sovereignty social movement discourses

- inter-country comparative gender analysis of agricultural restructuring and food production – what are the opportunities for women?

## ***Conclusion***

In undertaking a gender analysis of agricultural and rural restructuring in the Mallee region, I have considered the gender equality issues for women and men in farming and in leaving farming as both are components in understanding agricultural restructuring.

In understanding the embodiment, emotions and processes at work in representing the complexities of who is farming and who is not, and the reasons why, my PhD findings are demonstrating how a gender analysis of agricultural restructuring challenges the farm / farm exit binary to reveal that there is a continuum of 'leaving' farming as there are multiple 'farm exits' occurring in this region and they are gendered social experiences.

Gender and power is a relational experience and the theoretical work of Connell (2009), Haraway (2004) and Foucault (1983) regarding 'power', all emphasise this point. This research contributes to understanding the social and gender equity issues in agricultural restructuring – in and out of family farming in the Mallee region.



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# Appendix 1: Human Ethics Certificate of Approval



Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)  
Research Office

## Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

**Date:** 1 March 2011  
**Project Number:** CF10/2409 - 2010001369  
**Project Title:** Agricultural restructuring, social sustainability and climate change in the Northern Mallee  
**Chief Investigator:** Prof Margaret Alston  
**Approved:** From: 1 March 2011 To: 1 March 2016

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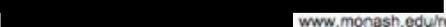
### Terms of approval

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

  
Professor Ben Canny  
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Ms Josephine Lisa Clarke

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia  
Building 3E, Room 111, Clayton Campus, Wellington Road, Clayton

  
[www.monash.edu/research/ethics/human/index/html](http://www.monash.edu/research/ethics/human/index/html)  
ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C



## **Appendix 2: Interview question prompts for those participants who have left farming**

Tell me how you got into farming?

When did you leave farming?

Why did you decide to leave farming?

How did you make this decision?

What were the important factors at the time?

How are you feeling about the decision to leave?

What have been the outcomes?

What are the changes you have experienced in earning a living?

What are the outcomes of those changes?

How is your work valued by your partner?

What are your expectations for the future?

What do you want to do in the future?

What does your partner want to do in the future?

What are your aspirations for your children?

What is the future for your community?

How would you prefer it to be?

What do you think about climate change?

How will it affect you (and your family, community)?

What does sustainability mean to you?



## **Appendix 3: Interview question prompts for those participants currently farming**

Tell me how you got into farming?

What is your involvement in the farm – tell me about your day, how do you manage your day, your schedule?

Who makes what kinds of decisions to do with the farm? In the household?

How do you see your partner's involvement in the farm? How do you see their role?

How are you managing farm viability?

How are you feeling about farming?

What are the changes you have experienced in earning a living?

What are the outcomes of those changes?

How is your work valued by your partner?

What are your expectations for the future?

What do you want to do in the future?

What does your partner want to do in the future?

What are your aspirations for your children?

What is the future for your community?

How would you prefer it to be?

What do you think about climate change?

How will it affect you (and your family, community)?

What does sustainability mean to you?



