

**“IT’S HARD TO RECALL THOSE THINGS WHEN LIFE IS SO DIFFERENT
TODAY:” THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE, MEMORY, AND AGENCY IN
UNCOVERING EXPERIENCES OF SOUTHERN ALBERTA WAR BRIDES**

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Dedication

To my parents, for their unwavering support and encouragement.

Abstract

Using the historically-specific group of Southern Alberta war brides, European women who married Canadian servicemen during the Second World War, this thesis demonstrates and contests the discursive constructions of historical knowledge. Within this context, fundamental issues of agency, discourse, memory, and experience are the focal points of this examination. This thesis provides a critical reinterpretation of these core issues to uncover what role, if any, the war brides play in the construction of their own historical images and how their identities are informed by the discursive representations of them. Using discursive representations and oral history interviews of the war brides, this thesis revisits current debates within women's history such as the role of discursive formation, the question of experience, and the debate surrounding collective and personal memory to make conclusions about the active or passive role these women play in the writing and representation of their histories.

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Chapter 1: “The Evolution of Gender History: Writing the Histories of Southern Alberta War Brides in a Postmodern Context”

Introduction:

“The writing of history, which does indeed come to conclusions and reach ends...actually moves forward though the implicit understanding that things are not over, that the story isn’t finished.” Carolyn Steedman, 1992.

While to some, history is a concept that exists simply in the past, somewhere “out there,” and somewhere beyond the reach of our present-day lives, to others, there is an acknowledgement of an unyielding present-day connection with our histories and the acceptance that historical knowledge is being constantly revised. Nevertheless, there is a perpetual question that forever riddles the discipline of history, that is, who makes history? Do we have a say in the histories written about us? Our personal identities and personal selves are largely formed due to our perceptions of the past and the past provides answers to questions such as “who am I” and “where do I come from.” However, there has been much debate as to who or what plays a role in the production of historical knowledge. Using the historically-specific group of the Southern Alberta war brides, this thesis demonstrates and contests the social and discursive constructions of the histories of women and provides an insight into what role historical knowledge plays in our current gendered world.

This thesis specifically works within the realm of gender history to apply these broader theoretical questions to the lives and roles of women in the construction of historical knowledge. Arguably, due to the historically masculine nature of society, there is belief that women’s histories have been lost and that women have had very little say in

the construction of their own histories. More recent debates within the discipline centre either on whether women play a passive or active role in the creation of historical knowledge. Within this context, central issues of agency, discourse, and experience have come to define feminist and gender history. This thesis provides a critical reinterpretation of these core issues utilizing the case study of Southern Alberta war brides in the post World War Two Canadian context. As a result, this thesis uncovers what, if any, role the war brides played in the construction of their historical images to make conclusions about whether the discursive representations, or the war brides' own accounts of their experiences, dominate the historical narrative.

The war brides are a group of women who married Canadian servicemen during the Second World War and immigrated to Canada directly after the war with their new husbands. The war brides have been idealized for their significant roles as wives and mothers within the Canadian post-war context. The war brides are ideal participants for this examination because as women in their late eighties and early nineties, their experiences in the Second World War are far removed from their present-day consciousness. However, at the same time, this unique group of women is still able to actively take part in the construction of historical knowledge surrounding their experiences. Using the histories, representations, and oral history interviews of the war brides, this thesis revisits current debates within women's history. This thesis makes conclusions about the role women play in the writing and representation of their experiences through examining the roles of discourse, experience, and memory in the making of their histories. Moreover, this thesis is concerned with how gender history *works*, about how it can be utilized to examine the language and discourses that represent

what we know about the war brides, how women's lives can still remain central to our studies, and how it can serve multiple coexisting purposes for feminism and the discipline of history.

Throughout the course of my short academic career, I have been introduced to a varying spectrum of historical and non-historical writings that have come to define, demarcate, contest, and challenge my understanding of the parameters of writing and researching gender history. As a result, as a gender historian, I am currently and continuously in the process of self-discovery in the quest to uncover how gender history *works for me* and how I can best unearth and represent the experiences of women in the past. This unending pathway of discovery is reflected throughout this thesis, and my journey as an academic is synonymous with the examination of the experiences of the war brides. The examination of the Southern Alberta war brides acts as a theoretical arena of sort, as a site of uncovering, that allows me to come to terms with some of the most pressing debates in my attempts to write gender history in our current academic domain.

This thesis tackles some of the more contentious debates that I have been grappling with since the first time I studied the lives of the Southern Alberta war brides. As an undergraduate student, I completed an honors thesis on the societal effects of the war brides in the post-war Canadian period. It was in that project that I, for the first time, conducted oral history interviews and was exposed to the differing, and sometimes conflicting, versions or "stories" about the past. Perhaps most importantly, and almost immediately, I noticed a very distinct discrepancy between the dominant ideals of who

the war brides were perceived to be in popular media and the stories the women shared with me in their oral history interviews.

The dominant discourse surrounding these women portrayed them as supreme English women who possessed expert womanly skills and who were well versed in feminine and mothering duties. However, the war brides represented a very different story in their oral history interviews, which exposed young women, many of whom had never lived away from their parents. Rather than having experience working in “feminine” type roles, the war brides spent many of their working years conducting wartime factory or office work in support of the war effort. For instance, one participant noted how, “I didn’t even know how to cook. I made an apple pie for the first time and I was carrying it out and Mac (husband) said don’t drop that it might go through the basement.”¹ Thus, as a researcher, I began to question the modes and methods from which we gather and analyze data about the past. I began to wonder what version of the past I wanted to tell, what methods I would use to uncover differing stories, and how I could best represent the experiences of women in Canadian history.

As a result of these new theoretical questions and concerns, I quickly turned to oral histories as an important avenue for examining the experiences and lives of women. Rather than relying on the discourses available to me as a historian, I instead preferred the “dynamic”² version of history that oral narratives offered. Being so concerned with uncovering the “real” or “true” version of the past, I was soon frustrated with the perceived shortcomings of oral histories in that regard. The war brides offered passionate

¹ Joan, Interview Transcription, 6.

² Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), ix.

and intriguing stories about their experiences, but I often questioned the validity of the information I was gathering in regards to the reliability of memory of my elderly participants. For instance, Sylvia (b. 1925) remarked on the, “different things...you remember,”³ and June (b. 1925) stated how difficult it was to, “recall those things when life is so different today.”⁴ As a result, rather than focusing on the stories the war brides did share, I instead began to focus on what the war brides seemed to be forgetting, and more broadly, if it was possible to gather “true” experiences of women in the past.

This process of self-discovery and the ongoing evolution of my understandings of writing and researching gender history are reflected in the structure of this thesis. In this first chapter, I reveal the historiographical trajectory that has come to have the most significant influence on how I view the evolution of women and gender history and which also has come to define *my* version of gender history. Using this theoretical foundation, this thesis tackles formidable questions surrounding who and what creates historical knowledge. Chapter Two exposes the all important, and prominent, role discourse plays in the construction of historical knowledge to provide a direct contrast to the use of oral histories in Chapter Three. Subsequently, using oral history testimonies, the beginning of Chapter Three highlights the discursive nature of historical experience to align with the view of various gender historians that “true” historical experiences are forever out of reach. However, the end of Chapter Three directly challenges the discursive nature of historical knowledge to highlight the agency and active role the war brides play in the construction of their *own* historical images. Through this, this thesis involves a deliberate theoretical unfolding to illustrate my personal realizations about

³ Sylvia, Interview Transcription, 1.

⁴ June, Interview Transcription, 6.

writing gender history. Moreover, it demonstrates that while current women's and gender historians can and should question our ability to gain authentic accounts of the past, the material lives, stories, and experiences of women and non-normative "others" continues to be the backbone of women and gender history.

Laying a Theoretical Groundwork:

This introductory chapter familiarizes the reader to who and what the war brides are perceived to be, and provides a methodological and theoretical background to my understandings of women and gender history. In recent years, poststructural and postmodern theories are frequently associated with the somewhat contemporary surge of gender history and have dominated the modes in which I have sought to conduct and analyze the histories and experiences of women in our past. While current gender historians, like myself, revel in these newfound ways in which to examine the past, it is important to consider how these current trends stem from a well-established line of historiography. Examining the historiographical developments of women and gender history provides an outline as to how both the feminist movement and the discipline of history has transformed with the ever changing, and never stationary, feminist agenda. As a woman and gender historian living within the twenty-first century, I am fortunate in my capacity and ability to question previous representations of the past and to deconstruct various social categories that have existed within our histories; however, in some cases, previous writers of women's and feminist history were not so fortunate and instead fought for the inclusive rights of women's stories within the dominant historical narratives.

Furthermore, this chapter bridges the gap between the early writers of women's history and modern-day gender historians to uncover how the past and present converge. Gender historians must still engage in a delicate balancing act that pushes the boundaries of historical inquiry while acknowledging the important contributions of women in our history. Additionally, using the examples of the literature completed on the war brides, this chapter illustrates how the linguistic turn in the development of gender historiography has not meant a complete abandonment of the historical category of "woman" that has been of paramount importance to feminism and women and gender history since their inceptions. As Denise Riley notes, "both a concentration on and a refusal of the identity of women are essential to feminism. This its history makes plain."⁵ This chapter is about uncovering that very history, the history of specific version of feminism and gender history that "makes plain" the vital importance of both the questioning of and reliance upon the category of "women" in our historical studies and the history that has come to define my own identity as a gender historian. Moreover, the historical literature on the war brides provides examples of the ways in which "women," and specifically war brides, have been both celebrated and resisted within historical writings.

In order to critically examine the historical images of the war brides, it is important to trace a trajectory of women and gender history to the type of gender history I attempt to define in this thesis. The version of gender history I examine in this thesis entails the poststructural deconstruction of multiple societal categories, the use of language and representation to expose the discursive constructions of gender, race, and

⁵ Denise Riley, *Am I that Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 1.

class as categories of historical inquiry, and the challenging of perceived fixed and stable positions within the world. However, this examination is not concerned with tracing the historiography of women and gender history to portray a type of progression towards a “better” or “final” end. Rather, this chapter demonstrates that while gender and women’s history “began from certain ordinary old-fashion premises,”⁶ the gender history that I use in this thesis would cease to exist without these ‘old-fashioned’ beginnings. This looking back and appreciation for the history and evolution of women and gender historiography is an important reminder to gender historians, like myself, currently writing and researching in the twenty-first century who may lose their roots in new postmodern ideals of deconstruction, discourse, representation, and the loss of the identifiable “subject.” Moreover, this chapter became vitally important in my quest to find a type of gender history that I seek to write as the contributions to the field that had the most significant impact on my development as a historian came to the forefront.

The questions posed by this chapter, specifically surrounding ideas of discourse, representation, experience, agency, and the broader struggles women and gender historians face in harmonizing the theories of the past and present, are prevalent in my examination of the war brides. Moreover, this genealogical transformation reflects my own struggles when researching women’s history and represents my personal discovery process as a gender historian working within a postmodern world. I have often questioned my agenda as a researcher to deconstruct the identities and experiences of historical subjects amidst my awareness and appreciation of the struggles women in the past have endured. Using the literature completed on the war brides, this chapter therefore provides

⁶ Joy Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice,” *Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (1995): 354.

an indication of the progression of my understandings of women's and gender history, delineating how it has come to define this new postmodern era and to assess how I can negotiate historical inquiries with the feminist agenda, new postmodern ideals, and the concern for the lives and betterment of women.

Thus, this chapter is fundamental to the larger thesis as it lays the theoretical groundwork that supports the remainder of my thesis on the history of the Southern Alberta war brides and tackles the contentious debates surrounding notions of discourse, representation, experience, and agency that still exist within the discipline of women and gender history. For instance, this chapter uncovers how this notion of experience has evolved from the early beginnings of historical retrieval in women's history to Joan Scott's influential essay, "The Evidence of Experience,"⁷ which questioned the agency of historical subjects in their experiences and representations of their experiences. In addition, this chapter considers how gender historians have come to utilize ideals of discourse and representation and how they have been beneficial tools in further developing the discipline of history and meeting the demands of the feminist movement.

Before analyzing the literature completed on the war brides, this chapter is used to illustrate my process of self-discovery as a gender historian and highlights the facets of women's, gender, and feminist history that has shaped my own understanding of the field. While this historiographical examination largely works within a linear timeline beginning in the eighteenth century, it also reflects my own progression as a historian from the time I was first introduced to writing and researching history. Initially, this chapter considers women's contribution to history 'before feminism' and how women

⁷ Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 773-797.

living prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used history as an instrument in which to expose and contest their position in society. Subsequently, using the formative examples of the popular histories written on the war brides, this chapter discusses the rise of women's history in the 1960s and how early writings of women's history sought to insert women into previously existing historical narratives by championing and highlighting the important contributions of exceptional and influential women in our past. This chapter demonstrates how feminism had a significant impact on women's history in the 1970s, posing the challenge to be more inclusive of race and class as well as sex in their historical analyses in order to conduct more all-encompassing histories. In this case, popular histories written on the, white, middle-classed, and heterosexual, war brides were used as examples for which historians celebrated more "normative" Canadian histories.

In addition to focusing on the two key aspects of discourse and experience, this chapter discusses how women's history drastically transformed after the highly coveted 'linguistic turn' and how the new-found gender history has been instrumental in questioning the perceived stability of social categories such as women, gender, race, ethnicity, and class. This transformation has been especially influential to my views of historical writing and is also telling in the case of the war brides as more recent literature has been critical of the varying social categories the image of the war brides has come up uphold. Moreover, this chapter comments on the varying ways in which Canadian women and gender historiography have differed from the more general movement, and how it has contributed or refuted broader discourses of Canadian identity and nationalism, much as the case for the more recent literature completed on the war brides. These understandings

aid in my discussion surrounding the war brides as these developments have allowed for the analysis of the war brides as a historically and socially-constructed category.

The Southern Alberta War Brides:

The term ‘war bride’ originated during the First World War when there was an abundance of cross-national marriages between the countries participating in the Great War. More specifically, in Canada, the term ‘war bride’ was the popular term applied to British and European women who married Canadian servicemen during the two world wars.⁸ According to Melynda Jarratt, as many as 35,000 war brides came to Canada during or after the First World War. Likewise, during the early days of the Second World War, Canadian servicemen quickly began courting and marrying, mostly British, European women. As Melynda Jarratt states, “less than forty days after the First Canadian Infantry Division Landed at Greenock Scotland, on December 17th 1939, the first marriage between a British woman and a Canadian soldier took place on January 28th, 1946.”⁹

Over the next six years, there were approximately 48,000 marriages between Canadian servicemen and foreign women. Of this 48,000, approximately 45,000 of them were from Britain,¹⁰ making up 94% of the war brides coming to Canada. This had immeasurable effects on the make-up of Canada society and as Jarratt further states, “formed one of the most unusual immigrant waves to hit Canada’s shores: all women,

⁸ Joyce Hibbert, *The War Brides* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1979), 1.

⁹ Melynda Jarratt, *War Brides: The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men the Loved* (London: Dundurn Press, 2009), 15.

¹⁰ “Marriage Stats,” Canadian War Brides, accessed January 20th 2014, <http://www.canadianwarbrides.com/marriagesstats.asp>

mostly British, from the same age group.”¹¹ While fewer in numbers, the war brides originated from many different European countries including Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Greece, and Australia.¹² However, this project focused mainly on the experiences of the war brides who were born and raised in Britain, as there existed an important cultural and societal connection between Canada and England in the Second World War period.

Evolution of Women’s, Feminist and Gender Historiography:

“As the historical record is never complete, the practice of our craft, no matter how refined, will never allow us to entirely reclaim the past worlds that are the focus of our historical imaginings.” Joy Parr, 1995.

The exceptional stories of the war brides have been well documented within the post-war Canadian context and the documentation of the war brides stories (and its transformation over time) reflects the broader evolution of women’s, feminist, and gender history. It is important to first uncover the version of the evolution of gender history that has had the most impact on me as a researcher to gain a fuller perspective as to what *kind* of history this thesis seeks to write of the war brides and the type of gender history I seek to define. Before the 1960s, when women’s history established itself as a separate and distinct discipline, influential women dating back to the fifteenth century used history as a political tool to circumvent the subordinate positions of women in society. In this case, histories of influential women were written by privileged upper-classed women, which reflected the first brand of feminist consciousness that was on the rise prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, as Judith Bennett notes, “some of our

¹¹ Jarratt, *War Brides: The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men the Loved*, 15.

¹² Jarratt, *War Brides: The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men the Loved*, 15.

greatest feminists have found inspiration in history.”¹³ Bennett discusses how early in the 1400s, Christine de Pizan (1393-1430) an aristocratic, Italian, medieval author, “turned again and again to the feminist promise of history” to “set out to rebut the misogynistic literature of her time.”¹⁴ De Pizan penned, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), which documented the histories of powerful and influential women effectively illustrating the, “grievous errors of those who lambasted the female sex as inherently weak and evil.”¹⁵ As Bennett continues to note of de Pizan, “history was a certain feminist tool for celebrating women’s past and accomplishments, rebutting the accusation of those who maligned women and urging women to greater goals.”¹⁶ de Pizan often wrote of aristocratic customs, focusing on the contributions of women in fashion, chivalry, and general social events. In the *Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir notes how de Pizan was one of the first women to “take up her pen in defense of her sex,”¹⁷ as she exposed the important contributions of women in the past. This is but one example of how history, prior to the development of an accepted or established discipline, was used for feminist action and reflected the present-day feminist agenda of the time. Here, it is possible to comprehend how history served to unify women and to act as a rallying point for women to expose the oppression they faced on a routine and daily basis. Thus, while modern-day feminists may now critique the privileged position de Pizan was writing from, or in fact the subjects of her historical inquiries, these particular types of histories nevertheless

¹³ Judith Bennett, *Why History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 6.

¹⁴ Bennett, *Why History Matters*, 6.

¹⁵ Bennett, *Why History Matters*, 6.

¹⁶ Bennett, *Why History Matters*, 6.

¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Vintage, 1989), 105.

served an incredibly important purpose and paved the way for future feminists and historians of women to come.

In a similar way to de Pizan, more recent feminist thinkers began to use history as a tool in which to ignite the feminist movement and to trigger a certain degree of feminist consciousness. For instance, Mary Spongberg, who traced the writing of women's history since the time of the Renaissance, explains how women used history before feminism to "create an intellectual environment that allowed the development of feminist ideas, and increasingly throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a sense of women's oppression was acknowledged."¹⁸ Spongberg uses the example of eighteenth-century English writers such as Delarivier Manley (1663-1724) and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) who, during a time when there was great prosecution for declarations against the status quo, wrote "secret histories" which served to "thinly disguise satirical attacks on well known political figures."¹⁹ Subsequently, when feminist consciousness and women's collective identity began to rise, notable feminist figures utilized accounts of women in history in support of their demands for modern-day political and social rights. A prime example of this is when Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) used "philosophical history to contemplate the conditions in France,"²⁰ in her piece *Historical and Moral View*.²¹ Thus, the writing of history by women prior to the 19th century, served

¹⁸ Mary Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 63.

¹⁹ Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance*, 75.

²⁰ Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance*, 98.

²¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe* (London: J. Johnson, 1795).

A online version can be found at:

http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=226&layout=html.

a purpose to expose the unequal status of women and to begin fashioning some kind of a women's and feminist identity.

Even with the contributions of the aforementioned women, prior to the rise of women's history, there were "hardly any women at all"²² in the historical narratives of the past. For instance, Gerda Lerner, writing in the late 1970s stated that, "the number of women mentioned in textbooks of American history remains astonishingly small to this day, as does the number of biographies and monographs by professional historians dealing with women."²³ In this understanding, while notable feminists did indeed utilize the researching and writing of history, it was not until the late 1960s and 1970s that women's history began to establish itself as a separate and distinct discipline and women's contributions throughout history began to be systematically studied and recorded.

Women's history arose when feminists "began to make a specific contribution to the discipline of history,"²⁴ and in large part, it was the emergence of the Second Wave feminist movement and the liberation of women in the 1960s that pushed for the drastic alteration of the discipline of history and the inclusion of women into historical narratives. These initial attempts of women's history were largely about "adding" women into history and celebrating the important feats that women in the past achieved. At that point, women's history consisted of reclaiming women's experiences, which had been lost or silenced due to male dominated histories prior to the 1960s. Thus, early writing on

²² As cited by Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance*, 1.

²³ Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 3.

²⁴ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 229.

women's history has been labeled as "adding women and stirring,"²⁵ which, at the time, was a vital and important step for the progress of women, gender, and feminist histories.

Early women's historians largely used traditional historical methods and frameworks from which to study women and "tried to fit women's pasts into the empty spaces of historical scholarship."²⁶ In this early type of women's history, women's historians could retrieve "a new version of history,"²⁷ and add women into the historical narrative. Lerner's *The Woman in American History* is a prime example of these early writers of women's history who, too, wanted to show that "women have a history worth knowing," and that it was time to finally, "set the record straight."²⁸ For instance, Lerner describes the contributions of women in traditionally male centered historical events, from the times of the colonial periods, to the Civil War, and continuing on into the twentieth century. There are numerous instances within the literature of the war brides where there was an attempt to recover and add the war brides' stories into more dominant war time narratives. There was an inclination in these early narratives to uncover the "stories" of the war brides as told by the war brides themselves. For instance, Peggy O'Hara's early work *From Romance to Reality: Stories of Canadian WWII War Brides* and Barbara Ladouceur and Phyllis Spence's *Blackouts to Bright Lights: Canadian War Bride Stories* sought to provide an avenue for which the war brides stories could finally

²⁵ Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History* (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 10.

²⁶ Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. ½ (Autumn, 1975): 7.

²⁷ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 9.

²⁸ Lerner, *The Woman in American History*, 5.

be told.²⁹ In works such as these, the stories of their experiences, as told and understood by the war brides themselves, were at the forefront of these narratives and it was the historians role to provide a means for which these stories could be heard and celebrated.

Joy Parr suggests that, in these early stages, “women’s history was first exemplified by a celebratory phase,”³⁰ celebrating the exceptional experiences of non-normative women in our past. A notable example of this type of celebratory history was shown in Veronica Strong-Boag’s early writing in which she, “championed Nellie McClung’s contribution to feminism.”³¹ In “Ever a Crusader’: Nellie McClung, First-Wave Feminist,” Strong-Boag states how McClung, “captured the imagination of her contemporaries and who in many ways embodied feminism in the late-twentieth century,”³² which effectively illustrates the significant role early writers of women’s history placed on these influential women in our past. Lerner describes this type of women’s history as writing the history of “women worthies”³³ and goes on to state that women’s historians in the early 1970s focused on “notable women” and asked questions such as “who are the women of achievement and what did they achieve?”³⁴ Ben Wick’s *Promise You’ll Take Care of My Daughter: The Remarkable War Brides of World War II* is an excellent example of the “celebration” of the war brides’ experiences. Wick

²⁹ Peggy O’Hara, *From Romance to Reality: Stories of Canadian WWII War Brides* (Ontario: White Mountain Publications, 1985); Barbara Ladouceur and Phyllis Spence, *Blackouts to Bright Lights: Canadian War Bride Stories* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 1995).

³⁰ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 23.

³¹ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 23.

³² Veronica Strong-Boag, “Ever a Crusader: Nellie McClung, First Wave Feminist,” in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History*, edited by Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 272.

³³ Lerner, “Placing Women in History,” 5.

³⁴ Lerner, “Placing Women in History,” 5.

champions the ability of the war brides to overcome the struggles and difficulties they faced upon arriving in their new and largely foreign country. In addition, as we see in the case of the war brides in Chapter Two, stories of these ‘heroic’ women contributed to larger discourses surrounding the affirmation of ideals such as nationhood, femininity, or citizenship. These stories were considered “exceptional” and were included in historical narratives of post-war Canadian nation building and were, more often than not, the type of stories that were ‘worthy’ of the early writers of women’s history.

A key aspect of the rise of women’s history, and one in which has been influential in my identity as a gender historian, is the notion of experience and the histories of experience. In large part, women’s historians sought to utilize the tools and methods of the discipline at that time and held an assumed belief that one could accurately gather the historical facts surrounding specific experiences of women. This notion of experience, and the belief in the ability to accurately capture it, was a central component to some of the early writers of women’s history. As Canning notes, “experience has been a keyword in social history, particularly histories of subjugated or invisible groups, since the 1960s.”³⁵ Thus, beginning in the 1960s, women’s history was “used in fact as a pedagogy of the emotions and of individual experiences”³⁶ of the past. For social historians in the 1960s, “this project of experience was a key concept,”³⁷ as E.P Thompson wrote, “both in theory and in practice, those junction concepts by which, through the missing term

³⁵ Kathleen Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” *Signs* 19, no. 2 (1994): 374.

³⁶ Steedman, “La Theorie qui n’en est pas une, or why Clio doesn’t care,” *History & Theory* 31, no. 4 (December 1992): 34.

³⁷ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 784.

experience, structure is transmuted into process, and the subject re-enters into history.”³⁸ This is especially telling in the early writings focusing on the war brides, as there was an assumption that one could retrieve and represent the actual “experience” of the war brides. Linda Granfield’s *Brass Buttons and Silver Horse Shoes: Stories from Canada’s War Brides* and Melynda Jarratt’s *War Brides: The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men They Loved* provide formative examples to the retrieval of the war brides’ experiences.³⁹ As we see later in this examination, uncovering the experiences of the war brides is, in fact, an incredibly difficult and challenging task.

This concept of experience is something that I have continued to grapple with as I have attempted to establish my own academic paradigm and has long been discussed by gender and feminist historians. For example, our ability as historians to acquire “true” historical experience has been challenged by Scott in, “The Evidence of Experience.” Throughout the remainder of this thesis, and long after this thesis is completed, Scott’s work on experience will continue to be one of the most influential pieces that has come to define and delimit the types of history in which I seek to write. For Scott, reclaiming the experiences that had once been lost was about much more than leveling the playing field of our historical narratives, but rather, “it produced a wealth of new evidence previously ignored about these others and has drawn attention to dimensions of human life and activity usually deemed unworthy of mention in conventional histories.”⁴⁰ As we will see later in this examination, Scott’s discussion of experience is far more complex than this,

³⁸ As quoted in Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 784.

³⁹ Linda Granfield, *Brass Buttons and Silver Horse Shoes: Stories from Canada’s War Brides* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2002); Melynda Jarratt, *War Brides: The Stories of the Women Who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men They Loved* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 776.

as she comes to reflect the changes in thought brought on by the linguistic turn that accompanied the broader transformations in the discipline in the 1970s and 1980s. However, for now, what is evident in Scott's piece is that she acknowledges the importance of this first step of women's history and how the rise of gender history could not exist without first recognizing the difference and the experiences of "others" that women's history achieved.

While women's histories sought to "add and stir," they "did not necessarily revise previous historiographies in feminist terms,"⁴¹ as they were largely working within the already defined and established male dominated discipline. According to some, it was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that feminism really began to "inform women's history,"⁴² and reconstruct the discipline of history to its very core. For instance, feminists and the writers of feminist histories, while acknowledging that adding women into the historical context was important, sought to use these histories to enforce societal change and to lift the oppression that women endured. Women historians themselves began to be ponder the ways in which additive and celebratory histories might be limiting the very progress of the feminist movement. This reflects my own internal struggles as I began to write the histories of Canadian women. For instance, the war brides' histories were among the types of histories critiqued by feminist historians beginning in the 1970s, as the war brides exemplified the all-white, middle classed, heterosexual post-war Canadian experience.

Exposing the essentialist nature of early writings of women's history, feminist historians were among the first to question and reject biological essentialism "as an

⁴¹ Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance*, 2.

⁴² Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance*, 189.

explanation of the inequalities between the sexes.”⁴³ Indeed, the constant representation of the war brides stories and their obvious roles as wives and mothers fed into more essentialist beliefs about the roles of women and the private/public divide. Therefore, historical writing in the 1970s and 1980s that aimed to reclaim women’s experience came under criticism, as feminist and gender historians established a newfound belief that experience was not something that could merely be found, but was in fact discursively and socially created. As we will see in the later stages of this examination, this strongly affected the way that I approached the examinations completed of the war brides, as it came to be acknowledged that the category of “war bride” was in itself a historically constructed social category.

While the early writings of women’s history were largely considered “compensatory,” they also fit within the category of “contribution history,” which “described women’s contribution to, their status in, and their oppression to male defined society.”⁴⁴ While these types of histories were no doubt important in the early stages of women’s historiography, feminist history sought to expose and challenge, “male defined society” that women’s history was, somewhat unknowingly, working within. It was feminist historians who used historical inquiries to dissect and dissolve these firmly held beliefs about the natural distinction between men and women. Within the narratives of the war brides for instance, there was a distinct dichotomy between the private and public spheres where the war brides were celebrated for their role as wives and mothers during a time of social strife and despair. However, feminist history served to break down these

⁴³ Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” 370.

⁴⁴ Lerner, “Placing Women in History,” 5.

gendered barriers and to expose the gendered roles these distinctions were working to uphold. Therefore, feminist history was crucial in bringing to light the disconnect between women's history, which sought to reclaim the experiences of *women*, and the feminist movement's, acknowledgement that by focusing on this category of "women" there was an assumed belief about the naturalness of the category of women itself.

That is not to say that even though our feminist agenda has drastically changed since the period of the 1960s and 1970s, women's history was not a political act as in these early stages it was in fact, "used in and outside the academy for the purpose of consciousness raising."⁴⁵ Here, it is possible to unearth how women's history and feminism intersected and how it set the stage for a forthcoming women's history that was directly influenced by the feminist movement that served political means. As Spongberg notes, "in a very real sense the writing of history can be seen as a feminist activity, as it involved the insertion of women's subjectivity into an ostensibly masculine discourse."⁴⁶ Thus feminist history and gender history found their political roots within a women's history that focused on "lost or overlooked histories,"⁴⁷ of heroic stories of strong and influential women in our past (such as the war brides). For instance, focusing on women's contribution to work, which many early women's historians seemed inclined to do, is a way in which women can cement their political and social positions and highlight their importance to the workings of society. Bennett further describes how even this version of history that sought to merely "add and stir" women into the historical record was intrinsically linked to that of the feminist movement: "in the 1970s it seemed crystal

⁴⁵ Steedman, "Why Clio Doesn't Care," 34.

⁴⁶ Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance*, 8.

⁴⁷ Steedman, "Why Clio Doesn't Care," 33.

clear that one of the battlefronts of feminism was women's history, where feminists – both in the academy and outside it – were reclaiming a lost past in their research, empowering students in their teaching, and using historical insights to inform feminist strategy.”⁴⁸ In the case of the war brides, placing their stories within the male dominated wartime discourse and exposing their central role within Canadian post-war reconstruction was inherently political as it highlighted women's important roles within the Canadian nation and within a more masculine dominated wartime discourse.⁴⁹

As women's history began to develop and establish itself as a separate and distinct discipline, the writers of women's history soon became aware of their own privileging of one set of historical experiences over another. This is reflected in my personal development as a gender historian as I, a white middle classed woman, began to become aware of the fact that I largely sought to tell stories of women who mirrored my race, class, and social status (the war brides being an example.) In this sense, I became aware of, and feminist historians began to criticize, the selectiveness of previous women's historical narratives and their focus largely solely on white, heterosexual, and heterogeneously “normative” women. While early writings of women's histories were successful in adding women into the historical consciousness, “whether it was the story of white settlement, industrialization, or movements for social reform and citizenship,” and laid the all important foundation for the changes in the field of history, only specific types of “experiences” were included and many others were often lost or marginalized. As Lerner states, “women, too, were now being included, but only in a limited way. Their

⁴⁸ Bennett, *Why History Matters*, 1.

⁴⁹ See Lois Harder's discussion of the war brides in “In Canada of All Places: National Belonging and the Lost Canadians,” in *Citizenship Studies* 14, no. 2 (2010): 203-220.

struggle for legal rights and for suffrage was the only part of their story that seemed worth telling.”⁵⁰ Therefore, even in the very early stages of the rise of women’s history, certain women’s historians began to criticize their own writings for their exclusive focus on only exceptional women in our past as, “this approach overlooks the important role of women in their own day-to-day lives, and tends to apply male values...to the study of women’s history.”⁵¹ As a result, with a connection to social history, women’s history began to tell the stories of everyday women and how the lives of these “ordinary” women changed and developed over time.

However, with the rise of the feminist movement and new theories of intersectionality, in which varying categories of discrimination could be analyzed in relation to one another, women’s history began to write multi-issue histories, which included race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability. As a result, many different avenues of women and gender historians came to celebrate the important contributions of women from a variety of different racial, classed, and gendered backgrounds. bell hooks’s, *Ain’t I a Woman? Black women and Feminism* is but one significant example of how, beginning in the 1980s, historical experiences of race and gender could be examined simultaneously.⁵² This newfound feminist history brought to light the many different types of experiences by peoples from many social categories and affected how I critically approached the narratives and experiences of the war brides.

⁵⁰ Lerner, “Placing Women in History.” 5.

⁵¹ Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, “Prairie Women,” in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, edited by Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992), 397.

⁵² bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (South End Press, 1981).

By the 1980s, as academic thought continued to move into more current theories of postmodernity and poststructuralism, the feminist movement also evolved, and as it did, so too did women's history. As feminist historians rejected biological essentialism, gender history emerged and embraced the role and power of discourse and language paving the way for the rise of gender history and the highly coveted 'linguistic turn.' It is this 'linguistic turn' of women and gender history that has had the most significant impact on the paradigm from which I approach writing the histories of women in our past. According to some, we have entered a new realm of academic thought, that of postmodernism and poststructuralism, that has come to have considerable effects on our current generation. In essence, postmodernism is about the abandonment of any sort of universal narratives and of objective theories of knowledge and is, "fascinated with the convoluted."⁵³ For instance, as Beverly Southgate further notes, "but the essential point is simple: we lack any absolute external point on which to set our lever in such a way as to get a grip on our object of study, whether that study is the earth itself or the past."⁵⁴

In theory then, we are no longer tied to the past as postmodernity has freed the current generation of any historical bounds that defined who we are and what we are supposed to be. As Southgate eloquently states, "we are no longer what we have to be, or what we are expected by others to become, or what we might be in relation to others.... we are emancipated from the constraints by which other people would define us, and left free to define ourselves."⁵⁵ There are many "big names" that are so often associated with

⁵³ David Ashley, *History Without a Subject: The Postmodern Condition* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 3.

⁵⁴ Beverly Southgate, *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom* (Florence, USA: Routledge, 2003), 11.

⁵⁵ Southgate, *Postmodernism in History*, 14.

the rise of postmodernity, such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Jean Baudrillard, to name a few. However, feminists arguably had the most influence when it came to the rise of new postmodern theories and it was gender historians who marked the ever important shift towards the linguistic turn in relation to methods of historical analysis. For my development as a gender historian, Denise Riley's *Am I that Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History* and Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* were the major contributors behind the transformation of historical writing.

The linguistic turn of women's history to gender history marked the shift from the examinations of "sex" to that of "gender." It was in the mid 1980s that gender theory really emerged and served to "reorient and even contest the path that women's history was taking."⁵⁶ Rather than simply studying the histories of those defined by their sex, gender as a historically and socially constructed category became the new topic of study and as Mariana Valverde states, "feminist history is more important than women's history...for feminist history is about gender, not women."⁵⁷ It was Scott's discussion of the questioning of the agency of experience and "her call to historians"⁵⁸ to seek the origins of our experiences that was fundamental in my understanding of this shift. As Scott's discussion of experience illustrates, simply writing the histories of experience do not expose hierarchies of power or explain why it is that women hold the particular positions in society that they do. Therefore, Scott questions "the constructed nature of

⁵⁶ Bonnie G. Smith, "Introduction," in *Women's History in Global Perspective* vol. 2, edited by Bonnie G. Smith (The American Historical Association, 2005), 2.

⁵⁷ Valverde, *The Age of Light Soap and Water*, 12.

⁵⁸ Margaret Strobel and Marjorie Bingham, "Theory and Practice of Women's History and Gender History in Global Perspective," in *Women's History in Global Perspectives* vol. 1, edited by Bonnie G. Smith (The American Historical Association, 2004), 11.

experience and how subjects are constituted as different in the first place,”⁵⁹ and while experience is important to Scott, she ultimately contends how, “the evidence of experience reproduced rather than contests given ideological systems.”⁶⁰ “The project of making experience visible,” writes Scott, “precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation, its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, and of its notions of subjects, origin, and cause.”⁶¹

Scott pushed (and continues to push) women’s historians, like myself, to “historicize rather than take as self evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented.”⁶² For Scott, documenting the lives of difference, or the lives of “others” does not clarify how and why difference has come to be manifested in the first place, or how subjects constituted as “others” perceive themselves and formulate their identities. Within the literature of the war brides, there was a distinct transformation from the earlier writings of the war brides to more critically and socially aware accounts of the *making* of the war brides’ identities. For instance, Barbara Friedman examined the mass media coverage of the British war brides to glean not just who the war brides were but how and why particular images of the war brides were created.⁶³ Friedman exposed how the mass produced discursive material on the war brides was a vital component in the maintenance of post-war gendered ideals. Friedman notes how, “just at the GIs were said

⁵⁹ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 777.

⁶⁰ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 778.

⁶¹ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 778.

⁶² Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” 375.

⁶³ See Barbara Friedman, *From the Battle Front to the Bridal Suite: US and British Mass Media Coverage of the British War Brides, 1942-1948* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2007).

to be “symbols of all that was glamorous,” the war brides too became symbols of something greater,” and were seen as “evidence of a postwar power imbalance, a proof of women’s depravity, and as a fairy-tale ending to the social upheaval of global crisis.”⁶⁴ Friedman expresses how the war brides were a “reassuring sign”⁶⁵ of the renewal of postwar domesticity as their public image bolstered normative gender roles that were prevalent prior to the beginning of the war.

While women’s history in the 1960s was largely centered on “women” and “experience,” gender history was about “discourse” and “gender.” As Louise Newman states, “in the place of experience, historians of gender speak of representations that are either present or absent in texts; in place of identities, they speak of discourse constructing subjects.”⁶⁶ The linguistic turn is additionally marked by its analysis of language and discourse in the construction of both historical knowledge and historical experiences. It is within the linguistic turn that language and discourses, rather than merely reflecting the happenings of the past, are active components in their own construction. For instance, when we think about the example of women in our past, we only know what we know of them through the representation of their experiences in the discourse and language that is made available to us.

Thus, this notion that the past, the actual realities of the past, or the real lived experiences of women, is not something which can merely be found or uncovered, but only examined through the discourse that represents it. This has become instrumental in

⁶⁴ Friedman, *From the Battle Front to the Bridal Suite*, 2.

⁶⁵ Friedman, *From the Battle Front to the Bridal Suite*, 3.

⁶⁶ Louise M. Newman, “Critical Theory and the History of Women: What’s a Stake in Deconstructing Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 2, no. 3 (Winter 1991): 58-59.

defining the modes and methods through which I seek to write gender history. As a result, I have become far more interested in how “reality” is represented rather than the “reality” itself. Arguably, representation has become extremely important within new theories of gender history because it is through representation and discourse that one can form their identity and interact with others in particular ways. As Canning notes, “what is new and controversial about the linguistic turn for social historians is the pivotal place that language and textuality occupy in poststructuralist historical analysis. Rather than simply reflecting social reality or historical context, language is seen instead as constituting historical events and human consciousness.”⁶⁷ Within this context, how the war brides’ identities have been created and recreated through complex discourse processes began to be reflected in the literature written on the war brides. Gabrielle Fortune, for instance, traces the cultural history of the war brides identities and the factors that “contributed to the formation of a war bride identity.”⁶⁸ Thus, gender history uses discourse analysis to uncover how language and linguistic processes “shape process of weighting and assigning meaning to events as they happen.”⁶⁹ Elizabeth Cowie’s piece “Woman as Sign”⁷⁰ also became important to my development as a gender historian and is yet another example of the important shift towards the examinations of language and discourse as she illustrates that “woman” is created through semiotic and linguistic signs.

It is through this type of analysis that gender historians have come to not only retell the stories of our past, but also to better understand it, to better understand why

⁶⁷ Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” 70.

⁶⁸ Gabrielle Fortune, “Mr. Jones’ Wives’: War Brides, Marriage, Immigration, and Identity Formation,” *Women’s History Review* 15, no. 4 (2006): 587.

⁶⁹ Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice,” 365.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Cowie, “Woman as Sign,” *M/F* (1978): 49-63.

women acted in the ways that they did, why and how society was structured in a particular way, and subsequently, how we look upon and remember the past. For the purpose of this thesis, Riley was instrumental in the establishment of gender history in regards to the shifting categories of gender and women throughout history. As Canning further notes, “Denise Riley also interrogated and deconstructed the category women. Riley analyzed the inherent instability of the term woman.”⁷¹ Riley had a significant impact on this notion of constructed “woman,” and suggested how we must, in our historical writings, question and challenge the ways in which women have been created and represented.

Prior to Riley and the linguistic turn, feminists largely agreed that the construction of this notion of “woman” must be deconstructed, but Riley challenged feminists stating that, “not only ‘woman’ but also ‘women’ are troublesome.”⁷² Here, Riley is challenging the previously held positions of feminist and gender historians who challenged the stable category of “Woman” to include “the more modest lower-case woman,” and the “ordinary, innocent-sounding “women.””⁷³ Riley is dismissing this notion of the fixity of identities and advocating for the acceptance of the instability of the categories of both “Woman” and “women.” As Riley continues to note, much like “Woman,” “women is historically, discursively constructed, and always relative to other categories which themselves change.”⁷⁴ This has become central in my understanding of gender history and in the case of the war brides as the once fixed and stable category of “war bride” has

⁷¹ Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” 371.

⁷² Riley, *Am I that Name?*, 1.

⁷³ Riley, *Am I that Name?*, 1.

⁷⁴ Riley, *Am I that Name?*, 1-2.

now come under question as a socially and discursively product created in the post-war period. Thus, uncovering how women, and how I myself, have come to understand how our experiences have come to be historically and discursively constructed, has opened many doors for gender historians who can now challenge the very category upon which they study and situate themselves.

Gender history in particular, has paved the way for new types of historical analysis that are used for the remainder of this thesis. For instance, “constructed” social categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, or class are now used as a category of historical analysis. Certain historians put even “whiteness,” a previously unexamined category due to its perceived “normative” existence, under the microscope.⁷⁵ With this, new opportunities of historical exploration have become possible to more fully understand the meaning associated behind gender or other social categories and shifting power structures. As Laura Lee Downs notes, “rather than to reconstruct the past as it really was, poststructuralist historians preached the analysis of discourse, or representations, and of the gendered construction of social categories,” and that, “gender is also a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”⁷⁶ As a result, this type of gender history in which I seek to write shows that, “rather than confining our analysis to the dissection and deconstruction of the range of images and identities available to women and men, then we should be striving to understand how women and men have used cultural materials, including language to grasp and indeed transform the world they live in.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See for example Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁷⁶ Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 91-93.

⁷⁷ Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 100.

Prior to the rise of the linguistic turn and the examination of numerous socially constructed categories, feminists could pin point the types of oppression women faced on a daily basis and how and why women were discriminated against in certain ways. Arguably, however, what it failed to do was to account for the reasonings as to why many women were complacent with their positions in society or took part in the construction of their own images as “women.” On the other hand, poststructuralism and gender history have been able to provide ever important answers of “why” and have illustrated the long and complex ways in which categories such as “women” have been manifested and subsequently maintained. Literature surrounding the war brides has been crucial in the uncovering of the formation and maintenance of social categories, particularly that of the category of “woman.” For instance, Franca Iacovetta illustrates the role of the representations of the war brides in “gender, family, and making,”⁷⁸ by noting how the media coverage of the “war brides’ resettlement into Canada, a major government undertaking...punctuated by the image of the fresh faced, young, white British women and their ruby cheeked children,” which was aimed to “improve the homemaking skills of all women in Canada.”⁷⁹

It is of no surprise then that the linguistic turn is of great importance to the discipline of history as it “had far ranging consequences for historical research and writing.”⁸⁰ Indeed, the linguistic turn and the rise of gender history not only had significant effects upon our understanding of the construction of social categories and the

⁷⁸ Franca Iacovetta, “Recipes for Democracy? Gender, Family and Making,” *Home* 20, no. 2 (2000): online version.

⁷⁹ Iacovetta, “Recipes for Democracy?” 15.

⁸⁰ Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” 368.

role language and discourse played in their constructions, but also on the field and discipline of history as a whole. It is widely accepted that the discipline of history was traditionally masculine in nature and has often been dominated by histories of men written by men. However, gender history has come to drastically alter the discipline, not only to add women into the mix as previous women's historians did, but also to change and challenge the discipline. As Spongberg notes, "compelling critiques of the intrinsically masculine nature of the discipline were made, as feminist historians argued that many aspects of historical practice were essentially phallogentric."⁸¹

Prior to the rise of women's, feminist, and subsequently gender history, historical methodologies and practices were largely centred on masculine approaches to historical knowledge. Gender history has significantly altered the historian's methods to reflect practices that align with our current postmodern society and to question the very place of the historian and the researcher.⁸² For instance, gender history has come to put aside traditional ideals of a 'one attainable historical reality' of the past and has instead focused on how history has come to be represented by discourse and language. As Canning notes, "in the field of history the term linguistic turn denotes the historical analysis of representation as opposed to the pursuit of a discernible, retrievable historical reality."⁸³ Moreover, historians from an earlier generation heavily relied upon facts and quantitative data in their historical analyses. Valverde notes however, "the prevailing paradigm

⁸¹ Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance*, 3.

⁸² See Chapter Three.

⁸³ Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience," 369.

among feminist scholars is based not on facts, but on the newer notion of experience.”⁸⁴ Thus, women’s experience in the past or Scott’s more complex notion of experience and its relation to agency, whether “truthful” or not, has come to be one of the main focuses in my historical writings. In my understanding, the facts, as it were, are no longer the center point to historical analysis, but rather gender historians choose to analyze *how* the “facts” have been represented through discourse and what broader societal implications these constructed “facts” have. As a result, there has no doubt been a “crisis of self confidence among social historians,”⁸⁵ and indeed among other historians alike due to these significant shifts in historical practice in a well-established discipline that once relished in factual data and historical evidence.

As a result, the linguistic turn has been met with criticism by feminists and historians alike. Gender history has been criticized by certain facets of the feminist movement for its focus on deconstructing the category of “women” itself. For instance, as discussed earlier, feminist and gender historians began to question, unmask, and deconstruct the category of “women,” which ultimately resulted in the fact “that the once unitary category woman began to fracture.”⁸⁶ While no doubt gender history and this new “linguistic turn” have signified positive strides for deconstructing the once historically limiting category of “women,” some feminists and women’s historians have criticized the rupturing of this category. Parr discusses how Joan Hoff once argued, “that by highlighting linguistic signs of difference among women, such work destroys any

⁸⁴ Mariana Valverde, “Poststructuralist Gender Historians: Are We Those Names?” *Labour/Le Travail* 25 (Spring 1990): 227.

⁸⁵ Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” 370.

⁸⁶ Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” 371.

collective concept of women upon which a political movement can be organized.”⁸⁷ This is one of the most pressing unresolved issues I face in my attempts to define the type of historian that I seek to be. For instance, on one hand, I have a desire to deconstruct the historical images of women in the past but, on the other, I also seek to keep the important category of “women” intact.⁸⁸

Those who champion and advocate for gender history have many responses to the criticism they faced from both within and outside the feminist movement. For gender historians, the temporariness and unstable categories of women, gender, race, and class have much to offer feminists and as Riley notes, is actually “in the interest of feminism.”⁸⁹ De-stabilizing categories such as “war bride” has much to offer the discipline of history and women more generally. As feminists are so concerned with the “dissipation” of identities such as women, Riley states that “it’s not that our identity is to be dissipated into airy indeterminacy, extinction; instead it is to be referred to the more substantial realms of discursive historical formation.”⁹⁰ Parr argues in a similar vein, “we should be intrigued rather than resistant if race, like gender and the power of the state, turn out to be an indeterminate quality rather than a solid substance, an elusive disguise rather than a fixed identity.”⁹¹ For gender historians then, what could be more feminist than examining how the social category of women, which has long placed women in positions of oppression, is in fact a discursive and social construct that can be dissected through our historical examinations of women in our past?

⁸⁷ Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice,” 358.

⁸⁸ See Chapter Three.

⁸⁹ Riley, *Am I that Name?* 2.

⁹⁰ Riley, *Am I that Name?* 5.

⁹¹ Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice,” 359.

While gender historians and those associated with the linguistic turn challenge the category of women, they are not putting aside the significant strides women had made since before the eighteenth century. In this understanding, gender historians acknowledge that their ability to question the stability of constructions of gender and sex has been a result of the triumphs and struggles of women in our past and how they fought against the oppression and discrimination that women faced on a daily basis. While to many poststructuralism and gender history poses a significant threat to the politics and political agendas of certain feminists, gender historians and poststructural feminists consider their work incredibly important for the political agenda. As Valverde argues “one can question the myth of the readymade autonomous subject while still being passionately committed to political action in the name of women or other groups.”⁹² This is an important example of how women’s, feminist, and gender histories, and their own successive agendas and purposes, intersect and overlap to form historical analyses that can serve multiple, coexisting purposes that serve the needs of women, feminists, and current popular academic trends.

Throughout the progression of women’s, feminist, and gender historiography, or what has now become known as Women and Gender History (WGH),⁹³ the evolution of my understanding of women and gender history is apparent, which began with highlighting and celebrating the exceptional women in our past to an, only temporary, end which challenges and deconstructs this very idea of “women” altogether. The evolution of the literature completed on the war brides effectively illustrates the broader transitions the discipline has made when writing the histories of women. However, what

⁹² Valverde, “Poststructuralist Gender Historians,” 228.

⁹³ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 1-3.

this chapter shows, is that there cannot be an end without a beginning, and that my privileged position as a gender historian living within a postmodern world, has only been realized because of the women who championed and advocated for adding women's histories to our past. As Lerner notes, "the ways in which women were aided and affected by the work of these great women, the ways in which they themselves grew into feminist awareness, were ignored."⁹⁴ Thus, while my theories and assumptions about the position of women in society has drastically changed, I have come to acknowledge that I cannot forget the early work of women's historians who brought to our historical consciousness the brave women who fought for our rights and the inclusion of women into the historical narratives so many years ago.

Canadian and Women's and Gender History:

More than the United States or Britain, for example, Canada has somewhat of a national identity crisis and often struggles to differentiate itself from its imperial ties to Britain or from our neighbor to the south. Indeed, "Canadian women's history has existed at the crossroads of, and in dialogue with, international writing particularly that cementing from the United States, Britain, and France."⁹⁵ This section of the chapter highlights my understanding of the evolution of Canadian historiography and how my identity as a Canadian has inevitably come to influence the histories I seek to write. Much of Canadian history, and the historiography of Canada are often centered on this elusive notion of a Canadian nation. Uncovering "Canadianness" and Canadian nationalism were often the starting point for many histories written in the early 1970s. As Joan Sangster

⁹⁴ Lerner, "Placing Women in History," 6.

⁹⁵ Book Review, "Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices of Canada, 1869-1924," Joy Parr, in *Social History* 15, no. 2 (1981).

notes, “Canadian women’s history does have its own peculiarities, shaped by distinct patterns of economic and social developments by Canada’s own version of colonialism, and by in and out migration, not to mention historian’s past preoccupation with the nation state and nationalism.”⁹⁶

The war brides, who were heralded as Canada’s finest type of new Canadian citizen in the post-war era, have been an increasingly popular area of study for those who seek to recreate post-war Canadian identity. Even before the rise of women’s history, notable Canadian feminists played a crucial role in Canadian race-making and Canadian nation-building. Indeed, historians have found other subjects in their fixation with Canadian nation building. For instance, Jennifer Anne Henderson discusses the example of Emily Murphy, who was among the five Alberta women who fought for the recognition of Canadian women as “persons,” argued for her own “normality” and “was empowered to serve as an expert in the enculturation of racial inferiors.”⁹⁷ Ultimately, Murphy, who was considered a prominent feminist of her time, contributed to the creation of race making and citizenship in the early twentieth century.

Early women’s writers, writing in the time of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time so crucial to the development of a Canadian national identity, sought to include women into the national narratives to validate women’s roles in the creation of the nation state, which will be prevalent in my examination in Chapter Two. Lois Harder discusses how the marital unions of the war brides with Canadian servicemen and the “Canadian state’s efforts to insulate itself from the citizenship claims of children fathered by its

⁹⁶ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 3.

⁹⁷ Jennifer Anne Henderson, “Inducted Feminism, Inducing Personhood: Emily Murphy and Race Making in the Canadian West,” in *Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 161.

armed forces personnel,” was not simply “an expression of conservative mores,” but rather, “to observe that wedlock rules had an explicit purpose with regard to defining membership in Canada.”⁹⁸ Moreover, often times, Canadian women’s historians focused on labour, work, and unwaged labor to illustrate the significant contribution of women to Canadian society. As Gail Brandt noted in 1991, “women and work seems to remain the single most important area of investigation.”⁹⁹ An early example of this would include *Women at Work: Ontario, 1880-1930*¹⁰⁰, which included numerous selections documenting the working lives of women in Ontario. Additional notable examples include Bettina Bradbury’s “Pigs, Cows, and Boarders: Non-wage Forms of Survival Among Montreal Families, 1881-1891,”¹⁰¹ Barbara Latham and Poberta Pazdro’s *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women’s Work in British Columbia*,¹⁰² and Marjorie Griffith Cohen’s *Women’s Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Ontario*.¹⁰³ As we will see for the case of the war brides, they were but one example of the bolstering of national pride and identity through the histories of celebratory women who were perceived to be an essential part of post-war Canadian society.

⁹⁸ Harder, “In Canada of all places,” 215.

⁹⁹ Gail Cuthbert Brandt, “Postmodern Patchwork: Some Recent Trends in the Writing of Women’s History in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (December 1991): 442.

¹⁰⁰ Janice Action et al, *Women at Work: Ontario, 1880-1930* (Toronto: Canadian Women’s Educational Press, 1974).

¹⁰¹ Bettina Bradbury, “Pigs, Cows, and Boarders: Non-wage Forms of Survival Among Montreal Families, 1861-1891,” *Labour/LeTravail* 14 (Fall, 1984): 9-46.

¹⁰² Barbara Latham and Poberta Pazdro, ed., *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women’s Work in British Columbia* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984).

¹⁰³ Marjorie Griffith Cohen, *Women’s Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

In later years, Canadian women and gender history evolved with the ever-changing broader movement of women's and feminist history. Similar to other strains of women's history, Canadian historiography was criticized for its inclusion of only a narrow type of "woman" in Canadian history. Stories focusing specifically and only on white, middle classed, women such as the war brides had numerous negative repercussions for those considered "non-normative" by mainstream Canada. With its long history of colonialism and oppressive colonizing practices of assimilation and discrimination of Canada's First Nations peoples, the exclusion of those from different ethnic and racial backgrounds became an incredibly important aspect of Canadian history that feminist and gender historians sought to expose. Aboriginal historians, for instance, "were keenly aware of the ways in which the dominant Canadian histories had discounted marginalized indigenous peoples."¹⁰⁴ As Canadian historian Lynn Marks states, "we can not privilege any one group identity, but rather we need to trace the inter-relationships between gender, age, class, and marital status."¹⁰⁵ Indeed, "the most important recent transformation in our understanding of women's history has been the pressure to adopt a more inclusive analysis, which takes account of ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation."¹⁰⁶

Canadian women and gender history began to include the ever-important role that the First Nations people played in the foundation of the Canadian nation state. A formative example is the work of Sylvia Van Kirk in *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur*

¹⁰⁴ Sangster, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Lynn Marks, "Ladies, Loafers, Knights and Lasses: The Social Dimensions of Religion and Leisure in late 19th century Small Town Ontario," PhD Thesis, York University (1992), 28.

¹⁰⁶ Joan Sangster, "Beyond Dichotomies: Re-Assessing Gender History and Women's History in Canada," *left history* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1995), 114.

*Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870*¹⁰⁷, which highlighted the contributions of First Nations women in Western Canadian exploration, settlement, and expansion. Therefore, in recent years, there have been an “impressive number of collections of documents and essays...which speak to the regional and ethnic dimensions of women’s experiences.”¹⁰⁸ Aboriginal historians played an instrumental role in this important step for Canadian women and gender history, as they had long been critical of the exclusive Canadian nation. As Sangster further notes, “aboriginal historians spoke of the First Nations and the white settler newcomers. Feminists influenced by postcolonialism also began to dissect the nation as an imaginary that was synonymous with gendered, racist, and ethnocentric discourses and practices.”¹⁰⁹

As a result, with the rise of gender history and in the aftermath of the linguistic turn in Canada, women’s historians began to question and fracture the notion of the Canadian nation and “Canadian women’s historians have arguably wrestled with a more fragmented notion of the nation,” and “have offered critiques of national and nationalist metanarratives.”¹¹⁰ Thus, much like gender history did with the deconstruction of the category of woman, this notion of nation also became a central category for historical analysis within the Canadian context. In regard to the war brides for instance, Sidney Eve Matrix questioned the “fictions of naturalization”¹¹¹ in the perceived immediate

¹⁰⁷ Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983).

¹⁰⁸ Gail Cuthbert Brandt, “Postmodern Patchwork: Some Recent Trends in The Writing of Women’s History in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (December 1991): 444.

¹⁰⁹ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 19.

¹¹⁰ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 16-17.

¹¹¹ Sidney Eve Matrix, “Mediated Citizenship and Contested Belonging: Canadian War Brides and the Fictions of Naturalization,” *Topia* 17 (Spring 2007): 67.

citizenship of the war brides. Through this, Matrix was able to examine the “contested belonging” of war brides into the post-war Canadian citizenship regime.¹¹² Then, Canadian women and gender history became, as Canadian historian Cecilia Morgan states, “closely tied to poststructural work.”¹¹³ For Canadian gender historians, the Canadian “nation,” has become a category, which needs its historical and social constructions exposed, as it relies so heavily upon heteronormative and ethnocentric ideals of femininity, citizenship, and nationhood.

Not only did Aboriginal and First Nations historians have a significant impact on Canadian historiography, but also Quebec and French Canadian histories further put to question previous assumptions about “one” founding nation of Canada. It is important here to draw the connection to gender history with the rise in alternative discourses surrounding the founding of “one” Canadian nation, as it is with gender history that we began to be more inclusive of the different types of experiences and subjects in our historical inquiries. For instance, as Sangster notes “as our historical gaze shifted to the streets, the home, and the workplace, older nationalist versions of history, so closely tied to the narrative of nation state building, Quebec’s social and women’s history was shaped by a distinct cultural history and a concern with Quebec’s own national subordination.”¹¹⁴ Thus, narratives of the nation state, of a one, unified, Canadian nation, while public discourse is ever in search of it, is questioned by gender historians who seek a more inclusive, diverse, and fragmented idea of multiple and coexisting Canadian nation(s).

¹¹² Matrix, “Mediated Citizenship and Contested Belonging,” 67.

¹¹³ Cecilia Morgan, “The Use of Theory in Teaching Women’s History,” in *Teaching Women’s History: Challenges and Solutions*, edited by Bettina Bradbury (Edmonton, 1995).

¹¹⁴ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 5.

On a related note, not only is Canadian historiography fraught with discourses of nationalism and Canadian identity, but in recent years, the Canadian government has manipulated and used history in such a way to further bolster a strong, unifying image of a Canadian nation. In this, the past has been used as a centre point for Canadian collective identity as “the remembered past is collective.”¹¹⁵ More specifically, national identities are formed through a collective understanding of a unifying past as the past can serve as a rallying point for its peoples and citizens of any given nation. A prime example of this, and one in which the case of the war brides certainly relates, is the current debate about the Canadian government’s decision to use history and memory to suit their political and national agendas. With the current “1812 campaigns,” the Canadian government is manipulating and controlling the national memory of our collective past in order to rally a certain level of nationalism (or for political gain of the Conservative party) that has arguably been lacking in Canadian society, especially in comparison to our American counterparts. Then, national symbols and nationalism find themselves in our past and the past is used as a reaffirmation and validation of Canadian collective identity.¹¹⁶

This elusive notion of a one and distinct Canadian nation is one in which certain Canadian historians constantly seem in search for, but never fully grasp. The remarkable stories of the war brides have become foundational images of post-war Canadianness while at the same time representing the very ideals in which the stories of “others” are working to deconstruct. Perhaps it is because Canadian “nationhood” is so ambiguous that Canadian historians are so incredibly fascinated by it. Gender historians, like myself, who may not be particularly interested in finding one true Canadian national identity, still

¹¹⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (London: Cambridge, 1988), 194.

¹¹⁶ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 41.

largely focus on this idea of the constructed nation and its effects upon women in Canadian society. For instance, while this examination shows that the war brides were integral tools in the formulation of a exclusive and imagined Canadian national community, I am still grappling with what it means to be a Canadian, what is “Canadianness,” and how this might have an impact on the lives and roles of the war brides.

At the (temporary) end of my historiographical journey, for now, I have come to embrace the linguistic turn of gender history which has allowed me to analyze how it is that we have historically and socially come to understand ourselves in the way that we do through analyzing the language and discourse that represents us. Scott has been incredibly influential in my understanding of gender history. For instance, Canning attributes the rise of gender history to Scott as she states that Scott “posed a fundamental challenge to the historical profession with her path breaking essay of 1986, “Gender: A useful category of historical analysis” and it was this essay that, “marked and theorized the shift from women’s history to gender history.”¹¹⁷ However, the questioning of the agency of experience is still an incredibly contentious debate among women and gender historians and is one that is tackled throughout the remainder of this thesis. Chapter Two further develops how discourse and discourse processes have come to define the war brides’ experiences through the constant representation and re-representation of their histories, while Chapter Three seeks out ways in which the “agency” of women is still prevalent in historical narratives.

¹¹⁷ Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historizing Discourse and Experience,” 372.

In relation to the war brides, the rise of gender history has allowed for the deconstruction of the “war bride identity” and the social, political, and national tools that have come to define it. Gender history has also allowed historians to push their own personal boundaries and has been instrumental in the development of the discipline itself. In addition, as a Canadian, women and gender history has allowed me to be critical of our own “Canadianness,” and the processes of nation building within our own country which is what this project hopes to do for the case of the war brides. However, as Carolyn Steedman notes, “the story isn’t finished,”¹¹⁸ and I, and other women’s and gender historians, will continue to reinvent ourselves to help to better understand our lives, roles, and representations as women. Therefore, it is without a doubt that women’s and gender historians will continue to push the boundaries of theoretical and methodological thought in regards to historical inquiry and continue to be at the forefront in terms of challenging both historians and feminists to grapple with new and innovative ways of thinking about the lives of women in the past.

The Participants:

This study focuses on war brides residing in the Southern Alberta region in order to create a picture of a group of women in a regionally specific area of a vastly diverse country. The specific region of Southern Alberta does provide a unique account of the war brides’ experiences. For instance, the majority of studies and literature completed on the war brides has focused specifically on the regions of central Canada and the Maritime provinces. Therefore, as the war brides in this examination all, at some point or another, resided in Southern Alberta in the years directly after the Second World War, this project

¹¹⁸ Steedman, “Why Clio Doesn’t Care,” 49.

provides a differing, regional perspective to the experiences of these women. For this project, the participants all met the social requirements of a “war bride.” The participants were born in Britain¹¹⁹, married Canadian servicemen during the Second World War and immigrated to Canada in the final year of the war or in the post-war period. While the participants meet the collective standard for this project, they all brought unique and personal backgrounds and perspectives to this examination.

This study consists of completing interviews with twelve war brides living within the Southern Alberta region.¹²⁰ All the participants in this examination agreed to have their real names used throughout this thesis and for the remainder of this thesis I will refer to the participants by their first names.¹²¹ The participants include:

Ann (b.1923)

Ann was born on March 19th, 1923 in Eastbourne, England, one of the most heavily air raided towns in Great Britain. It has been noted that there were approximately

¹¹⁹ With the exception of Hahn, who was born in Holland.

¹²⁰ See Appendix A For List of Participants.

¹²¹ This project was approved by the University of Lethbridge Research Ethics Board. Once approved, permission was given to contact known war brides in the Southern Alberta region. Contact was initiated through telephone calls in which I explained who I was, gave a short descriptive background to the project and requested a meeting in person. This was then followed by an introductory meeting in which I formally introduced myself and distributed both the letter of consent and a list of the questions I would be asking in the interview. The letter of consent, in which the participant would consent to be interviewed for the project, consisted of a short explanation of the project and a description of the interview process. Attached to the letter of consent were a series of documents: the first was consent for the participant’s interview to be placed in an archives, either directly after the project was completed or after the participant has died, while the second document determined whether the participant’s real name was to be used or for a pseudonym to be used throughout the project and in any other projects that may result from the research. The third document was a letter that would be attached to the transcribed interview, explaining to the participant that they had thirty days to make changes and send the interview back. And finally, the last document was the letter that would accompany the edited transcribed interview thanking the participant for their involvement in this study.

110 bombing raids in Eastbourne alone during the years of the Second World War.¹²²

Ann grew up as the youngest of eight children and her family “didn’t have very much money, we were very poor in fact.”¹²³ However, her family also had plenty to eat as her father rented land and grew vegetables and fruit throughout the year. Along with her other siblings, when Ann was eighteen years old, she joined the air force in 1941 and was stationed on the Isle of Man during the war. Ann met her husband (Derek) when she went home for Christmas and went to a local dance. Ann began a courtship with Derek that lasted for fifteen months before getting married at the age of twenty-one. Ann moved to Lethbridge, Alberta with her new husband on March 9th, 1946. The newlyweds lived above a funeral home, where her husband partook in his family business. Ann and Derek divorced in 1970 when he met a “young girl and they moved to Medicine Hat.”¹²⁴ To support herself, Ann got a job in a retail store and sold clothes before she retired. Ann is the only participant in this study to have eventually divorced from her first husband.

Betty (b. 1921)

Betty was born on January 20th, 1921 in London, England. Betty is the daughter a famous English writer who wrote “hundreds of books.”¹²⁵ Betty went to school in a convent in England and worked at Phillips prior to the war. When the war began, Betty and her family were evacuated into a mansion in the country. She met her Canadian husband (Doug) when he “dragged”¹²⁶ her into a dug out during a country air raid. After

¹²² “Easbourne at War,” accessed, January 6th 2014, <http://www.eastbourneherald.co.uk/news/local/eastbourne-at-war-remembering-lives-lost-and-damage-done-1-1593452>

¹²³ Ann, Interview Transcription, 1.

¹²⁴ Ann, Interview Transcription, 6.

¹²⁵ Betty, Interview Transcription, 1.

¹²⁶ Betty, Interview Transcription, 1.

a few short months, Betty and Doug got married in a registry office and ten months later had her first child. Betty had two young children when she travelled to Canada in May of 1945. Betty and her family eventually settled in Calgary where her husband worked at the *Albertan*. Her husband passed away on May 16th, 1968.

June (b. 1925)

June was born in Leicester, England in 1925 and was the oldest of four children. June left school at the age of fourteen and was apprenticed by her father in his clothing business and learned how to be a tailor. June worked as a tailor until the war began. June then made air force and army uniforms in support of the war effort before following in the footsteps of her father and brother and joined the navy in 1942. June was stationed on the HMS Westcliffe during the war. June met her husband in the navy when he asked to take her out for supper. June, despite not knowing where he was and only having a general post office address, continued to write letters to him until 1944 when, having the urge to go ashore, she ran into him in a railway station. They eventually married on December 9th 1944. June travelled with her nine-month-old baby to Canada in 1945 and initially lived in Montreal until they eventually settled in Calgary, Alberta.

Sylvia (b. 1925)

Sylvia was born in Rugby, Warwickshire on January 3rd, 1925. Even though her father worked as an engineer, her family was “hard done by in the depression.”¹²⁷ As a result, her mother worked as a cook in the local school. She remembers having no gifts at Christmas but how a local charity donated a decorated Christmas tree to her family during the holidays. Sylvia finished school at fifteen and had a scholarship to attend

¹²⁷ Sylvia, Interview Transcription, 1.

college, however, because it was required to purchase their own uniforms, she could not attend because her family could not afford it. Sylvia got a job as a nanny before making sparkplugs and tanks for airplanes during the war. Sylvia met her husband in her own home as he was looking for relatives on her side of the family. At the time, Sylvia was engaged to an English soldier but they soon broke off their engagement and Sylvia started a courtship with her soon-to-be Canadian husband. Two years later, Sylvia and her husband married in 1945 and she made her travel to Canada in 1946. Sylvia and her husband lived with her husband's family for six months while her husband worked at a grain elevator in Manitoba. Sylvia and her husband eventually came to settle in Calgary, where her husband was based after he reenlisted into the Canadian army.

Daphne (b. 1926):

Daphne was born on January 16th, 1926, making her the youngest of the participants. Daphne grew up in Surrey and went to school until the age of fourteen. Prior to the war, Daphne worked as a nanny in a “real rich ladies place”¹²⁸ and looked after and tended to the children. During the war, Daphne worked in the inspection line in a parachute factory. Daphne met her husband when he was stationed at camp near where she lived. The Canadian soldiers often went to the local park and played music to the children. Daphne accompanied her younger brother to one of these events and then “this one (Canadian) soldier followed us home.”¹²⁹ Daphne and the Canadian soldier started a two-year courtship before marrying, however, Daphne's travel to Canada was delayed by many years due a prolonged illness. Daphne finally embarked on her travel to Canada, where they initially lived in Wasaga Beach before eventually moving to Calgary.

¹²⁸ Daphne, Interview Transcription, 1.

¹²⁹ Daphne, Interview Transcription, 2.

Daphne's husband died in 1990 and to support herself Daphne worked in a nursing home for many years.

Edith (b. 1921)

Edith was born on September 24th, 1921 in a military hospital in Aldershot England. Her father was part of the British army and her family spent many years travelling to various parts of Britain. When her father came out of the army and joined the government they "had a nice life."¹³⁰ Throughout the war, Edith worked in an office for the government. Edith was eager to join the military but because she already worked for the government they would not release her to join. Edith met her husband at a hall dance when he asked her to dance. Her husband was stationed in various places throughout the war before they eventually got married. Edith and her husband came to settle in Lethbridge where her husband worked for Canadian Western Natural Gas. They initially lived with her mother-in-law until they were able to build their own house.

Kay (b. 1919)

Kay was born in England in 1919. Kay remembers meeting her husband at a local dance and thought highly of the Canadian soldiers. Kay and her husband began a courtship and were soon married during the war. Kay and her husband eventually settled and lived in Calgary. Kay had significant difficulties in trying to remember and recall her specific experiences of being a war bride. Nonetheless, the information did she provide and the experiences which she did remember were valuable to this project and provided yet another perspective into interviewing elderly participants and to the varying obstacles that memory brings.

¹³⁰ Edith, Interview Transcription, 1.

Kathy (b. 1923)

Kathy was born on March 18th, 1923 in London, England. Kathy and her family lived in a “rough district” in London and remembers how nobody on their road had electricity and that “the streetlights were gas and the lamp lighter use to come along with his pole and put the lights on and our road was made up of railway tires.”¹³¹ Kathy’s father died when she was only three years old. Her mother remarried in 1940 but Kathy chose to live with her Aunt and she worked in a solicitor’s office prior to the war. During the war, Kathy decided to join the Women’s Land Army. She met her husband at a railway station and went on a date the following week. Kathy married her new husband six months later and travelled to Canada in 1945. Kathy and her husband had difficulty in their initial years, as “you couldn’t get any place to live or anything,” and ended up living in “two attic rooms”¹³² for the first year of their marriage. Kathy and her husband eventually settled in Lethbridge where they had “over fifty years together.”¹³³

Joan (b. 1920)

Joan was born on September 16th, 1920 in Essex, England. Joan remembers having a very happy childhood and attending private school. Joan’s mother and father divorced when she was eleven years old, which she remembers as “quite unusual”¹³⁴ for the time. Joan remembers how her and her siblings “hated her stepfather...we just hated him, he was a horrible man.”¹³⁵ Joan was accepted to Cambridge University but because her mother and stepfather filed for bankruptcy after an attempt to start a new business,

¹³¹ Kathy, Interview Transcription, 1.

¹³² Kathy, Interview Transcription, 2.

¹³³ Kathy, Interview Transcription, 3.

¹³⁴ Joan, Interview Transcription, 1.

¹³⁵ Joan, Interview Transcription, 2.

“there wasn’t any money for me to go up to Cambridge.”¹³⁶ When the war began, Joan worked in a reserve occupation, instructing truck drivers of their routes, which was deemed essential in wartime England. Joan met her husband at a local dance. Joan initially turned down his marriage proposal before they eventually married on January 13th, 1943. Joan travelled to Canada in May of 1945 and spent her first few years in Toronto before settling in Lethbridge, Alberta.

Hilda (b. 1924)

Hilda was born in 1924 in Wooditton, England and was the fourth eldest child in a family of thirteen. Instead of attending college like her elder siblings, Hilda decided to work and did housework until the war began. When the war started, Hilda completed land work but, ironically, decided not to join the Land Army, as she “didn’t want to leave home.”¹³⁷ Hilda met her husband (Ted) when her sister, who was in the army division for ladies, brought him back to meet her family. Hilda was initially not interested in Ted because she had no interest in coming to Canada but soon Hilda had to “eat her words.”¹³⁸ Hilda and Ted eventually married even though her father did not want her to move to Canada. Hilda remembers how on the day she was due to leave “he hopped on his bike and my mother said “Hilda’s going today,” but he never said a word, he never said goodbye.”¹³⁹ Hilda’s husband worked at the Case Company¹⁴⁰ in Lethbridge, Alberta where he worked for thirty-five years before he died. Hilda passed away in 2012 at the age of eighty-eight.

¹³⁶ Joan, Interview Transcription, 2.

¹³⁷ Hilda, Interview Transcription, 1.

¹³⁸ Hilda, Interview Transcription, 2.

¹³⁹ Hilda, Interview Transcription, 2.

¹⁴⁰ I believe Hilda was referring to the Case Agricultural and Farm Equipment Company.

Nora (b. 1919)

Nora was born on February 19th, 1919 in London, England. Nora's father worked as a detective in Scotland Yard and she had a twin sister. Nora had a privileged upbringing and often travelled all over Europe with her family prior to the war. When the war began, Nora joined the army and was attached to the brigade of guards. In 1943, Nora met her husband (Bob) through a mutual friend. Bob began spending his leaves with Nora and her family and they eventually married in May 1944. Nora travelled to Canada in February 1945, and initially settled in Bob's hometown of Maple Creek, Saskatchewan. Nora remembers it being "a shock" coming "from a city of eleven million people to a town of eleven hundred."¹⁴¹ Nora's husband eventually acquired his PhD and they eventually came to live in Lethbridge.

Hahn (b.1924)

Hahn is the only participant in this study who was born outside of Britain. Hahn was born in Holland in 1924. Upon their arrival into Canada, Hahn's husband worked for the Department of Indian Affairs and Hahn became close with the First Nations people in the region. Hahn and her husband came to live in Lethbridge, Alberta. Hahn now has family ties with the First Nations people of Southern Alberta.

The interviews took place within the place of the interviewee's choice, usually within their own homes and typically lasted anywhere from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half.¹⁴² As this examination will show, each of the participants recalled collective experiences, which reinforced more dominant discourses about what their experiences

¹⁴¹ Nora, Interview Transcription, 2.

¹⁴² See Appendix B for List of Interview Questions.

were while also engaging in personal, distinctive, and humorous stories of their unique experiences of being World War Two war brides.

Chapter 2: The Discursive Nature of History: Southern Alberta War Brides and the (Re)creation of Discourse

“It ought to be possible for historians to make visible the assignment of subject positions not in the sense of capturing the reality of the objects seen, but of trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced, and which processes themselves are unremarked and indeed achieve their effect because they are not noticed.” Joan Scott, 1991.

Introduction:

It is often a surprise that even amongst our changing world, particular representations or discourses of women *seem* to transcend societies and remain prominent over a significant period of time. This chapter exposes the historical images of the war brides through uncovering the discursive processes that have created and maintained their post-war gendered images. This chapter serves as a direct contradiction to the use of the oral history interviews in Chapter Three. The historical positions of the war brides and their experiences have been captured through previously written historical inquiries and their identities, as “war brides” have not, until recently, been challenged. “Woman” and “women”¹ have been placed within language and within broader discourses of identity and subjectivity across the consciousness of Western historical identity. Therefore, while discourses of womanhood and of femininity, contain a certain degree of fluidity, they remain prominent in various societies and can often jump from one generation to the next. For instance, if we think about the feminist movement, which would assumingly

¹ There has been much debate on the difference between “woman” and “women.” Women is often referred to as actual women who have experiences on a daily basis where as “woman” is referred to as the category of “woman,” the perceived characteristics which we associated with “woman,” which is what feminists most often try to dissect. Even more recently however, theorists such as Denise Riley (2003) have even tried to problematize the term women as well.

dismantle various discourses of womanhood and create “breaks” in the historical record, “woman” is still a central figure. The feminist movement, “torn between fighting against over feminization and against under feminization,”² does attempt to change the realities of women on a daily basis, yet cannot escape the very image of the “woman” as it forms the backbone for the movement itself. Therefore, it is evident that the discourses of the war brides and, by extension, of femininity, motherhood, and womanhood, has longer and more complex discursive processes or genealogical paths,³ that create and recreate a certain degree of *perceived* inherent characteristics. Through the examination of discourse processes, it is possible to uncover how the war brides’ historical identities have been discursively created, which highlights the “productive quality of discourse,”⁴ which gender historians so often focus. Thus, this chapter examines how the war brides “are constituted discursively,”⁵ and exposes the discursive processes to show how the war brides “experiences” and identities have indeed been historically and socially produced.

While discourses of “woman” and of war brides appear to be constant, this does not mean that there is not a discursive process at play, after all, as this examination illustrates, discourses do indeed have histories of their own. This examination therefore is about that very history, about the history of a discourse of the war brides and about the process of discursive creation. Therefore, as gender historians have come to shift their focus from that of “experience” to that of “discourse,” this chapter pays specific attention to how the war brides have been constituted as historical subjects through discursive

² Denise Riley, *Am I that Name: Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 3.

³ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Vintage, 1982).

⁴ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 793.

⁵ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 793.

processes. As Scott notes of gender historians, “we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences.”⁶

Following the influential work of Scott, this examination will expose the discursive constructions of war brides within the broader Canadian national context. Specifically focusing on the period of the Second World War and onwards, an analysis of how discourses were originally produced and then subsequently reproduced of war brides in Canada will illustrate the discourse processes at play and how the socially constructed category of “woman” is a discursively created product that plays an important role in the post-war Canadian context. Perhaps most importantly, as discussed in Chapter One, this chapter consists of an attempt to engage in writing a type of gender history, which works to understand certain formalities about women, and more specifically war brides, in our histories. As Denise Riley notes, “the apparently transparent category of woman, the place in which the real lived experiences of woman as a group can be found against the vagaries of ideological distortion and fantasy that accrue to the category of woman offers in fact no such transparency.”⁷ This apparent lack of transparency, is what this chapter hopes to problematize by showing how and why “the category of women offers in fact no such transparency,” and how this more concrete ideal of woman that has been discursively created in our past.

In the post-war Canadian context there are particular reasons as to why discourses surrounding war brides have retained a certain degree of continuity. The war brides served a particular purpose in the period of post-war Canada and played an incredibly important role over thirty years later amidst the significant increase in the writings of

⁶ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 779.

⁷ Riley, *Am I That Name*, 18.

women's histories and the desires to give women a voice in the historical record, especially in regards to a masculine dominated event such as war. As expressed in Chapter One, early writers of women's history and Canadian history, sought historical experiences that would highlight the important role of women in Canadian society. Again, this is not to further reproduce ideological ideals of "woman" but rather to show this process of creation, how we have come to know what we know, why we consider particular ideas to be true, how familiarities are manifested, and how this may affect our identities and subjectivities as women. Following the example of Scott's "Women Workers in the Discourse of French Political Economy, 1840-1860," this chapter examines "the workings of discursive construction, to consider where discourses begin and end and how they are constituted and transformed,"⁸ to uncover how exactly the war brides identities have been naturalized in our histories.

Certain feminist groups, as was illustrated in the discussion in Chapter One, were on a quest for equality and often relied on the "natural" roles women assume which has more recently come under criticism by poststructuralists and postmodernists alike. For instance, Riley compares her approach to social change with that of Sojourner Truth's (1797-1883). Riley describes how Sojourner Truth famously quoted, "Ain't I a woman?," which at the time created awareness surrounding gender inequalities of African American woman and brought about changes for these women for the better. However, Riley wishes to go one-step further posing the question of "Ain't I a fluctuating woman?"⁹ This project hopes to take that step and bring the importance of discourse and postmodern

⁸ Kathleen Canning, "Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 378.

⁹ Riley, *Am I That Name*, 1.

ideals to the forefront, to show that while Sojourner Truth's identity as a woman is important in her political and social quest for equality, this category of "woman" is in fact a process of discursive creation: a identity that is in flux, fluid, and malleable. As Riley notes, "feminists need to be submitted to discursive analysis, exposed in its historical mutations,"¹⁰ which is similar to that of Michel Foucault's approach to the past in that "the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation."¹¹

While the work of gender historians is the major influence on this chapter, this analysis will also follow the works of both deconstructivists and poststructuralists to historically examine how discourses or language have come to impact identities and representations of war brides. For instance, Jacques Derrida's influential work illustrated the important effect of writing on language, meaning, and representation and how, writing, as opposed to speech are the important components of the mediation of us.¹² The work of Foucault, specifically *The History of Sexuality* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and his discussions of discourse, language, genealogical paths, "the archives," and the episteme are especially useful throughout this examination. Dorothy Smith also analyzed discourses of femininity and applied methods of discourse analysis when studying women, arguing "a fact is something that is already categorized, already

¹⁰ Riley, *Am I That Name*, 18.

¹¹ As quoted in Riley, *Am I That Name*, 4.

¹² Ferdinand de Saussure followed a logocentric line in thought in the development of the linguistic sign. Saussure created a hierarchy and essentially stated that sound images become the place for signification and the written word is only a representation of the signification originally produced in the sound image. See Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (Open Court Publishing, 1983).

worked up to conform to the model of what that fact should be like.”¹³ Likewise, feminist and feminist historians have long acknowledged the need to analyze discursive formations within our own histories. Riley uses a historical foundation in order to uncover the category of women in various discursive constructs. Riley deconstructed the category of women and illustrated the inherent unstable nature of the category of *women* in opposition to the more essentialist ideals of radical feminists.

In addition, this examination consists of a critique of compensatory “popular” histories written on the war brides in Canada, which is an integral part of the overall process creating long lasting discourses around women. As discussed in Chapter One, modern day gender historians have altered historical methods since the time of the early writing’s of women’s history in the 1960s and 1970s and have had much to say about the “foundationalist” accounts of the past. This chapter applies Scott’s argument that “historians have had recourse to many kinds of foundations,”¹⁴ to that of the historical accounts of the war brides in Canada. As Chapter One illustrated, much has been debated in regards to writing women’s history and early works focused largely on the desire to validate and create a space for women’s history to offset previous traditional and more masculine histories. Indeed, Ruth Roach Pierson refers to a type of “historical retrieval,” that attempts to ‘level the playing field’ which has merit in its desire to reverse the silences in the historical record and bring women’s history to the forefront. However, as Joan Sangster notes, “simply locating women’s actions was presumed to be a valid goal...yet this still seemed a difficult endeavor when one relied so heavily on the records

¹³ Dorothy Smith, *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1990), 23.

¹⁴ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 780.

left by those in power.”¹⁵ Therefore, with the more recent rise in modern feminist thinking, there has been an acknowledgement that even in our attempts to ‘level the playing field’ in our reclaiming of women’s experiences, our efforts to challenge the assumptions about what we ‘know’ about women have been lost in this idea of creating a space for women’s history. Sangster, Pierson, and Scott are but some examples of the more recent debate surrounding writing women’s history and the calls for more non-normative ways of documenting the lives and experiences of women and the transition to the ‘linguistic turn’ in gender history.

In addition, Mary Louise Roberts’s analysis of the construction of gender in post-war France, which illustrates the imagining of the female self in order to fulfill a national discourse of the time, is useful as this chapter specifically focuses on the interconnected nature of discourses of war brides, nationhood, and femininity in post-war Canadian rebuilding. Moreover, Ann Laura Stoler illustrates feminist attempts to engage in gender politics of imperial cultures, the importance of sexual control, and the restrictions of European women in colonized nations. Likewise, Mrinalina Sinha uncovers the mutual constitution of the discourses of nation and of modern gendered identities while Enaska Dua’s article on the notion of “exclusion through inclusion in female Asian migration in the making of Canada as a settler nation,”¹⁶ proves additionally useful in the discussion surrounding the war brides’ migration to, and the making of, the Canadian nation after the Second World War.

¹⁵ Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women’s History* (Athabasca: AU Press, 1991), 50.

¹⁶ Eniska Dua, “Exclusion through Inclusion: Female Asian Migration in the Making of Canada as a Settle Nation,” in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History* 6th edition, edited by Mona Gleason, Tamara Myers, and Adele Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Using these particular theoretical and methodological frameworks concerning discourse creation and the writing of deconstructivist women's history, which is essentially challenging the epistemological assumptions about what we know, this analysis focuses on the discourses that surrounded the war brides from the time of their arrival in Canada to more recent retrieval of their pasts through compensatory history. As I progressed through the development of this analysis, I thought it would be best to approach discourse creation of the war brides within various "phases" to not only show that multiple avenues for the creation of discourse exist, but ideally to also connect the phases into a larger pathway of discourse creation. I approach this "pathway" not as a systematic chronological account of events, but as a complex cycle in which all phases, in some way or another, are reliant upon the other and to illustrate the interconnectedness and messiness¹⁷ of discursive analyses. The messiness of discursive analysis is thus not about uncovering or finding an "end" to this pathway or one answer to why and how discourses of war brides retain lasting prominence, but to provide just one outlook to an avenue of discourse creation. Thus, this analysis will focus on four phases of discursive production of the war brides to show how and why particular discourses are created and maintained to create what I referred to earlier as a discourse of lasting prominence of women in our history. These phases include: 1) the moment of (re)creation, 2) the (re)creation of discourse, 3) the creation of compensatory history, and finally 4) the recycling of the "original" discourse.

¹⁷ The messiness of social science research is essentially the complexity of the nature of the research, and the inability in a lot of cases to come up with a distinct, definite answer to any given question. See John Law's *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (London: Routledge, 2004).

1. The Moment of (Re)creation:

Discourses are comprised of various statements or utterances, which together form particular rules, which formulate the discourse itself. Then, statements are “primary building blocks of discourse”¹⁸ as they create and manifest the foundation of discourses themselves. Once a statement arises then there are, as Sara Mills states, “support mechanisms which allow it to be said and keep it in place.”¹⁹ However, in order to become a statement that ultimately constitutes a discourse, it must have particular backing or be validated in such a way that makes it seem as some sort of truth in that it must be stated and routinely restated before it is seen as “truthful.” Thus, statements are central to ideas of identity and as Foucault notes, “the constancy of the statement, the preservation of its identity through the unique events of the enunciations, its duplication through the identity of the forms is constituted by the functioning of the field of use in which it is placed.”²⁰ In turn, the statement creates what Foucault refers to as the episteme, which is essentially what a particular society or culture views as “truthful” at any given moment in time. As Mills further notes, “Foucault attempts to chart these changes systematically so that he can map the discursive limits of an episteme, that is the set of discursive structures as a whole within which a culture formulates its ideas.”²¹ Therefore, we can conclude that through poststructuralist approaches and the process of signification we can begin to see how female subjects begin to be formulated in different

¹⁸ Sara Mills, *Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 50.

¹⁹ Mills, *Discourse*, 45.

²⁰ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 4.

²¹ Mills, *Discourse*, 51.

moments in history. Thus, we can begin to see the process of subject formation²² of war brides and the role these women were perceived to play.

Before we can begin to analyze the discursive formations at play in regards to war brides in Canada we must first look at the very statement “war bride,” how and why it came into play and what this term may imply about the episteme of Second World War Canada. However, it is important to first note that the term war bride was not a new phenomenon in the Second World War Era. War bride originated during the First World War, when there was an abundance of cross-national marriages between the countries participating in the war. Directly after the First World War, approximately 30,000 war brides came to Canada, thus transferring the term from a more global phenomenon to a at home reality. However, in our more common Canadian contemporary ideals of what “war bride” infers, we most commonly associate it with British or European women who married Canadian servicemen during the Second World War and then immigrated to Canada directly after the war.

When thinking about what may be implied, whether consciously or not, about the specific statement “war bride,” numerous representations come to mind, which can tell us much about the discursive episteme of the Second World War era. However, it is important to first understand the signification process within semiotics that is so central to poststructural analysis. Essentially, semiotics is the study of signs, not just literal signs such as road signs or billboard advertisements, but of any and every “visual sign” that we come in contact with on a routine and daily basis. As Daniel Chandler notes, “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. Semiotics involves the study not

²² See Bronwyn Davies second chapter entitled “The Process of Subjectification” in *A Body of Writing* (New York: Altamira Press, 1992) for further information.

only of what we refer to as signs in everyday speech, but of anything that stands for something else.”²³ Therefore, signs can exist in a multitude of ways through speech, gestures, words, and images. But semiotics is not simply an account of what these particular signs consist of, but rather semiotics studies “how meanings are made and how reality is represented.”²⁴ In relation to semiotics then, how is meaning made through the use of language? How do signs and signification mediate our lives?

There are numerous “founders” of this so called semiotics movement, including Ferdinand de Saussure whose logocentric²⁵ focus stated that speech was the pure and natural form of language, where the signification process took place and was then represented through writing. However, Saussure’s logocentrism was soon criticized due to his views concerning the neutral role of writing and written language in the role of signification. In contrast, Derrida placed emphasis on writing and stated that in fact, “writing itself is the origin of language.”²⁶ For instance, Derrida’s critique of Saussure included: “what Saussure saw without seeing, knew without being able to take into account...is that a certain model of writing was necessary but provisionally imposed...as instrument and technique of representation of a system of language.”²⁷ Written language then, for Derrida, the language we come in contact with on a routine and daily basis, represents meaning, constitutes our knowledge about our identities, and determines our interactions with others. Thus, Derrida initiated the move away from Saussure’s more

²³ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

²⁴ Chandler, *Semiotics*, 2.

²⁵ See Ferdinand de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1997) for further information regarding logocentrism and Jacques Derrida’s subsequent *Of Grammatology* for poststructural critiques of logocentrism.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 104.

²⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 103.

structural view of semiotics into the new realm of poststructuralism and deconstruction. Therefore, language does not carry with it some inherent meanings that it in itself is merely representing, but rather, that language and written language, brings with it constructed meanings, which permeates into our societies and mediates our actions and identities.

In this sense, what did the written term war bride signify, what then does this statement produce, and how does it mediate the identities of war brides in post-war Canada? Firstly, when thinking about the term “war” we can see a signifier that is in flux, that is manifested as a result of two or more nations during a time in which alliances, networks, and cooperation between nations was so ever important. Here, we can see the importance of the war brides, not just for one nation, but also for a multitude of nations time signifying the importance of cross-national relationships for the morale of the allied nations in the Second World War. For instance, if we think about the connection between Canada and Great Britain during the Second World War, Joyce Hibbert notes how the war brides illustrated “faith in the Empire” by Canadians and that these British-Canadian unions were an attempt to “build a bridge” in that alliance.²⁸ Thus, the term war bride implied these cross-national unities that were vital in times of strife, uncertainty, and despair of a total, global war.

The term “bride” also has numerous implications. As opposed to the more maternal figures of wives and mothers we often associate with the war brides, the term “bride” is more sexually and erotically suggestive. This stark feminization of the war brides themselves represented larger ideals of womanhood and nationalism at that time.

²⁸ Joyce Hibbert, *The War Brides* (Toronto: PMA Books), i.

The female body therefore plays numerous roles within warring societies. Firstly, what is most striking here is the eroticization of the female subject through the use of the linguistic term “bride.” Sinha notes of the role of eroticized images within times of war when stating “the representation of the nation through a language of love in eroticized nationalism,” creating a discourse “capable of arousing enormous passions from the members of the nations.”²⁹ Thus, eroticism of the female subject during times of war, which not only assisted in reversing the social crisis of masculinity that war time typically brings, had a hold “on the emotion of people.”³⁰ This investment in gendered identities or gendered kinships through the eroticization and feminization of the female subject as Sinha refers to it, “created a place for themselves within the national family, and it also fixed them in certain relations within the national collectivity.”³¹

Therefore, upon the moment of creation of the category of war brides we can see the positioning of these women within a particular ideal. The use of the term war brides then creates these women as subjects, subjects of various nations within wartime. Categorizing these women within a group with perceived common characteristics created discursive categories, which then constructed their lives and the world in which these women lived. Louis Althusser comments on this idea of subject formation when stating, “it is clear that you and I are subjects, like all obviousness, including those that made a word, “name a thing,” or having meaning, the obviousness that you and I are subjects—and that does not cause any problems—is an ideological effect, the elementary

²⁹ Mrinalina Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” in *Women’s History in Global Perspective* Vol. 1, edited by Bonnie Smith (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 250.

³⁰ Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” 251.

³¹ Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” 251.

ideological affect.”³² Thus in ‘naming a thing’ as was the case with war brides, subject formation began not only in the larger consciousness of the national context of the time, but also within their own subjectivities. Discursive processes, the creation of statements or utterances to categorize various groups, initiate larger discursive ideals of war brides. As Bronwyn Davies notes, “each person in a social group both share a set of obviousness and is positioned in relation to them--the nature of the positioning depending in large part on the individuals perceived category memberships.”³³ Therefore, creating a collective group of women, constituted itself through discourse, is a first and necessary step in this process of discourse creation in which women’s historical identities and more present-day consciousness were (re)created as “poststructuralist theorizing enables us to see is that the very specificity of those experiences...need not be the markers of a bounded self, but, rather, the moments at which an experiencing being comes to know the possibilities being made available by virtue of their presence within the collectivity.”³⁴

2. The (Re)creation of Discourse:

Upon the process of categorization and the beginning states of subject formation, groups of statements or utterances come together to begin the next phase in the discursive process. Here, it is evident that various other utterances, statements, words, or terms begin to be routinely associated with the term “war bride.” This creates what I referred to earlier as the episteme. As Mills notes “an episteme consists of the sum total of the

³² Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1984), 45. Although Althusser is routinely referred to as a structural ideologist, his theories are often used in relation to subject and subject formation. For more on Althusser see, to name a few, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, and *Politics and History*.

³³ Davies, *A Body of Writing*, 23.

³⁴ Davies, *A Body of Writing*, 31.

discursive structures which come about as a result of the interaction of the range of discourses, circulating and authorized at that particular time.”³⁵ Thus, groups of texts make up the structures of a particular episteme, which according to Mills can be understood as “the ground of thought on which at a particular time some statements and not others will count as knowledge.”³⁶ An example of the episteme would likely be most evident within discussions surrounding medicine or scientific method. For instance, there was previously the evolutionary theory of the “transmutation of species” which was first proposed by Jean Baptiste Lamarck in 1809, which suggested that there was a belief that human species were not evolved from one another. At that specific episteme, this theory was considered legitimate and acceptable.³⁷ However, Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* 1859 soon became the acceptable theory of evolution and Lamarck’s theory was soon rejected, making Darwin’s theory the acceptable theory in that particular episteme.³⁸

Thus, if we think about the particular social setting of the Second World War era and the types of discursive formations at play, we can begin to analyze groupings of statements that were used in relation to the war brides and were authorized by the national context of that time. That particular episteme consisted of ideals of patriotism, nationalism, mobilization, and morality. Within this particular episteme, various texts were created of war brides and this is what I refer to as "the creation of text" within this phase of the discourse process. In order to achieve this, we must look back at the sources

³⁵ Mills, *Discourse*, 51.

³⁶ Mills, *Discourse*, 51.

³⁷ Abdul Ahad, “Evolution without Lamarck’s Theory and its Use in the Darwinian Theories of Evolution,” *International Journal of Bio-Resource & Stress Management* 2, no. 3 (2011): 363.

³⁸ Ahad, “Evolution without Lamarck’s Theory and its Use in the Darwinian Theories of Evolution,” 363.

that were created at the time when the moment of (re)creation (phase one) began. I have scanned the *Lethbridge Herald* for clippings regarding the war brides to analyze the discursive patterns and the more general statements, themes, languages at play. This discussion is mainly to provide a sense of what statements and utterances were included in the discussion of war brides as allowed for by the episteme of the Second World War era. The reasoning for this is because a discourse is not simply what is being said and when, but the “set of rules and procedures for the production of particular discourses. Discourses are sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think.”³⁹ Indeed, most theorists are far less concerned with the statements themselves, but I do believe it is necessary before we can begin to analyze the particular impact of these statements.

There was an abundance of newspaper clippings of the war brides from the Second World War era in *The Lethbridge Herald*. Often times, when the war brides were documented in the local newspaper, they were often coupled with that of ideals of domesticity, motherhood, and “setting up house.” As a *Lethbridge Herald* article dated March 15th 1946 stated, the war brides “are impressed with the many ‘separate houses’ here and enjoy the attractive but overly heated homes filled with wonderful labour-saving aids and they also enjoy “queue-less” shopping.”⁴⁰ In addition, another newspaper clipping stated, “too many are imagining that there is not a place in this country for the household things for which they have been accustomed to.”⁴¹ A further example, a April

³⁹ Mills, *Discourse*, 55.

⁴⁰ “Happy in their New Homes,” *The Lethbridge Herald*, March 15th 1946, 9.

⁴¹ “Woman’s Point of View,” *Globe and Mail*, January 11th 1944.

29th, 1945 article from the *Lethbridge Herald* stated, “Magrath’s first English war bride and children were welcomed on Sunday and the newly wed stated, “I appreciate coming to a fine home and having such a nice mother here.”⁴² Moreover, an example from the CBC digital archival collection entitled *Love and War: Canadian War Brides*, notes, “Canadian cookbooks and guides helped British war women learn about Canadian customs and eating habits. *Canadian Cook Book for British Women* offered this advice: Feathery light steamed and baked puddings are liked in cold weather but suet pudding you would be wise to avoid unless your man acquired a taste for it overseas.”⁴³ These types of text clearly indicate how war brides were routinely associated with heteronormative feminine type roles, which as we will see, played a very important role in the process of discourse formation of not only the war brides themselves, but of larger discourses of womanhood and motherhood in the Second World War era. Furthermore, it is through discourses such as these that assisted in the assimilation of war brides into Canadian culture being taught the right ways to be a respectable Canadian citizen.

In examining “what was being said” in regards to the war brides, it is equally important to examine what is not being said. This notion of exclusion and Foucault’s notion of “silences” within the production of discourse is incredibly important as they make up an integral part of dominant discourses. For instance, Foucault notes, “there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such thing, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or

⁴² “Soldiers Family Home in Magrath,” *The Lethbridge Herald*, April 28th 1946.

⁴³ CBC Archives, *Love and War: Canadian War Brides*, accessed November 14th 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/second-world-war/love-and-war-canadian-war-brides/topic---love-and-war-canadian-war-brides.html>

which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.”⁴⁴ This is what Foucault refers to as the “order of discourse”⁴⁵ in which “he describes the processes of exclusion which operate on discourse to limit what can be said and what can be counted as knowledge.”⁴⁶ In regards to the representations of the war brides, in creating dominant discourses of how war brides were perceived, while there was also the creation of who women should be and what their characteristics should adhere to, there was also the establishment of what and who women should not be. A subtle example from the September 29th 1944 edition of the *Lethbridge Herald* states, “it took me just a few minutes to come to the conclusion that she must be a war bride...this one was different, the other girls noticed it too, maybe it was the fact that she had an experience in England that they had not.”⁴⁷ In referencing the worldly experiences that this particular war bride had, the author was also positioning those who did not have these experiences as a less inferior ‘other’ contributing to Foucault’s notion of exclusion.

Silences were also prevalent within the CBC digital archival collection *Love and War: Canadian War Brides*, which documents and preserves the experiences of a “generation of women who found love”⁴⁸ in an online national website. Indeed, throughout *Love and War* discursive power relations clearly existed and therefore one dominant discourse about the experiences of the war brides arose over a marginalized

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (United States: Pantheon Books, 1978), 27.

⁴⁵ Mills, *Discourse*, 57.

⁴⁶ Mills, *Discourse*, 57.

⁴⁷ “Left Hand Corner,” *The Lethbridge Herald*, September 29th 1944, 4.

⁴⁸ *Love and War: Canadian War Brides*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/second-world-war/love-and-war-canadian-war-brides/topic---love-and-war-canadian-war-brides.html>

‘other.’ For instance, in *Love and War* there was an idealized image of the war brides being welcomed with open arms to their new country, however, an alternative discourse exists in which the war brides had difficulty obtaining and maintaining their Canadian status because of the enactment of the 1947 *Citizenship Act*. Sidney Eve Matrix discusses the “mediated citizenship and contested belongings,”⁴⁹ of the war brides in Canada in which some war brides had difficulty gaining Canadian citizenship because of the amendments made in the *Citizenship Act*. However, this conversation has become part of this silenced discourse of the war brides’ experiences in Canada.

While *Love and War* did provide some information on war brides who encountered difficulties and some who even left and returned to England, it was formulated in such a way that it became the non-normative exception to the dominant discourse. As *Love and War* notes, “some of the greatest culture shock may have been experienced by war women who married aboriginal Canadians...a red cross nurse remembered a war bride who took a taxi to an address that turned out to be a Nova Scotia reservation...but at the end of the year she was ready to go home to London.”⁵⁰ Within this example, not only was this particular experience marginalized because she had married an ‘aboriginal Canadian,’ but Said’s discussion of ‘othering’ within colonized nations is also prevalent. As Mills notes of Said’s notion of ‘othering’ “Said argues that these colonized countries were described in ways which denigrated them, which represented them negatively, as an other, in order to produce a positive, civilized image

⁴⁹ Sidney Eve Matrix, “Mediated Citizenship and Contested Belonging: Canadian War Brides and the Fictions of Naturalization,” *Topia* No. 17 (Spring 2007).

⁵⁰ *Love and War*, accessed November 14th 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/second-world-war/love-and-war-canadian-war-brides/topic---love-and-war-canadian-war-brides.html>

of British society.”⁵¹ This example alludes to the fact that if this woman had married a “Canadian,” not an “aboriginal Canadian,” (here even this distinction, that of “white,” Canadians being referred to as Canadians, and members of the aboriginal community as “aboriginal Canadians” contributes to this ideal of othering) she would have had a normative, ‘regular’ experience as a “war bride.”

As a result of the combination of text, utterances, and statements produced within a particular episteme, dominant discourses arise. While discourse is often used in every day language, narrowing down one particular definition of discourse is often quite challenging. There are often numerous, sometimes conflicting and ambiguous definitions of discourse but for the purpose of this project, Roger Fowler’s definition of discourse is most apt here when he states:

Discourse is speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies; these beliefs etc. constitute a way of looking at the world, an organization or representation of experience – ideology in the neutral non-pejorative sense. Different modes of discourse encode different representations of experience; and the source of these representations is the communicative context within which discourses are embedded.⁵²

As a result, discourses are produced from the social settings from which they came, and are a visual expression of these very ideals. Text, speech, writing, and language formulate discourses which carry with them their own particular rules and systems and in turn influence how individuals formulate their identities and express themselves. Foucault, for instance, was less concerned in “the actual utterances/texts that are produced than in the rules and structures which produce particular utterances and

⁵¹ Mills, *Discourse*, 96.

⁵² Roger Fowler as cited in Hawthorn, 1992, 48.

texts.”⁵³ Thus, we must think not only about the types of texts that were produced of the war brides in Canada but why and how these particular texts were produced and what purposes they served. In addition, as the discussion earlier on semiotics illustrated, particular signifiers of womanhood and femininity signify discourses of what being a woman consists of. These signification practices produce discourse. Cowie discusses this notion of the “woman as sign” and that woman as sign is a social and cultural production through discursive processes. Cowie uses the example of films stating, “what must be grasped in addressing women and film is the double problem of the production of woman as a category through film as a signifying system.”⁵⁴ Then, for Cowie, film produces meaning through signifying elements. Likewise, this analysis is showing how, signifying elements through *text* produce the category of “woman.”

Firstly, discourses of post-war femininity, motherhood, and womanhood were produced as a result of the text created of the war brides during that time. The constant references to these women as domesticated women indicate not only women’s private role within the family unit, but also how images of the domesticated mother contributed to post-war Canadian nation building. Louise Roberts completed an analysis of the imaging and discursive representations of the female self and its role in post-war France and focused on three figures, that of “the mother,” the “single woman,” and the “modern woman.”⁵⁵ This examination will specifically focus on the image of the “mother” as “the mother represented unalloyed goodness and purity itself, contributing to the reconstruction of France through her reproductive and educative labors in the home.

⁵³ Mills, *Discourse*, 6.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Cowie, “Woman as Sign,” *M/F* (1978): 48.

⁵⁵ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Equally important, she constituted a living link to the prewar world, an icon of continuity whose timeless and unchanging maternal labors offered a comforting sense that all bridges to the past had not been burned.”⁵⁶ Indeed, traditional gender roles were suspended due to the onset of the war, but immediately after the war had ended, there was a strong desire to return Canada back to its prewar state: a transition in which the war brides were an integral part.

For instance, *Love and War* created dominant ideologies of the desire for heterosexual love, which in turn reproduced heteronormative ideals of family romance, the nuclear family, and the central role of the tight knit family unit within nations. As Sinha further notes, “a family constructed as a natural heterosexual and patriarchal unit performs a variety of critical ideological services in the constitution of the nation.”⁵⁷

Nowhere was this ideal of the heterosexual family unit more prominent than in the discourse of love within *Love and War*. The title itself, “*Love and War*,” represents this very ideal, that “love” a more feminine prescribed term, couples nicely with that of “war” a hyper masculine event, bringing together a “woman” and a “man” in a heterosexual union. This implies that even amidst times of incredible strife and despair, within that of war, love, feminine love, and therefore heterosexual love can still thrive and prosper.

This ideal of heterosexual love is ever apparent within the text of *Love and War* itself. A caption for an audio recording of a war bride reminiscing on her experiences of a war bride notes, “surrounded by falling bombs, strict rationing and nightly blackouts, a generation of young women found love,” while another stated that “love with a Canadian

⁵⁶ Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without the Sexes*, 98.

⁵⁷ Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” 247.

was probably the furthest thing from the minds of single British women as the Second World War began. With the British men fighting on faraway fronts and Americans not yet in combat, Canadian servicemen based in the United Kingdom were often the only men at country dances.”⁵⁸ Here, it is possible to uncover the discursive formations at play which not only reproduce discourses of love and romance but which further reproduce distinct gender roles, that are so central to heteronormative and heterosexual love. British women were portrayed as feminine women, attending dances and waiting for their men to come home, while the men were “fighting on faraway fronts,” securing their masculinity on a personal and national stage. Sinha illustrates this very fact through stating, “at moments of perceived crisis the defense of national and of normative gender and sexual identities often become intertwined.”⁵⁹ An audio recording entitled, “Canadian Soldiers Find Romance in WWII Britain,” stated, “with death and destruction so close, thousands of couples met, dated and married hastily, determined to live for the present”⁶⁰ which indicates the belief in the unswerving nature of heterosexual love and that even amongst “death and destruction,” love conquers all.

These representations of heterosexual love and romance within *Love and War* placed the heterosexual family unit at the center and core of national identities. Here, we can see the intersection of feminist ideologies of gender roles prescribed within heterosexual love with that of postcolonial thought on the creation of nations and national

⁵⁸ *Love and War*, accessed November 14th 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/second-world-war/love-and-war-canadian-war-brides/topic---love-and-war-canadian-war-brides.html>

⁵⁹ Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” 249.

⁶⁰ *Love and War*, accessed November 14th 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/second-world-war/love-and-war-canadian-war-brides/topic---love-and-war-canadian-war-brides.html>

identities. As Sinha further notes regarding heterosexual love: “it allowed for women to create a place for themselves within the national family, and it also fixed them in certain relations within the national collectivity. The nation’s hold on the emotions of people, indeed, would be hard to understand outside of its investment in gendered kinship relations and in the poetics of heterosexual love.”⁶¹ This ideal of the family, the family as the central unit to the nation, is evident throughout *Love and War*. For instance, *Love and War* chronicled the arrival of the war brides upon the Queen Mary in June of 1946 and the reaction of Prime Minister Mackenzie King who noted in a *Globe and Mail* article the, “fine character of the young and the exceptional healthy, wholesome and happy appearance of the children.”⁶² This example signifies that these women and their marriage to their Canadian soldier produced “happy and wholesome” children: children of the Canadian nation.

In phase one, where war brides constituted a more eroticized cross-national ideal, this phase shows that this image transitioned to a more domesticated maternal image of the receiving nation of Canada. In *Love and War*, the war brides were often heralded for their roles as domesticated mothers and wives. For instance, a CBC digital archival clip entitled “War Brides Getting Settled” stated, “Married life is a learning experience for any new bride. But for war bride Jacqueline Bing Hall, it's life in Canada that's been a real education. Calling the butcher by his first name was easy enough, but getting the cut of meat she wanted proved more challenging. Apparently, Canadians don't eat shoulder

⁶¹ Sinha, “Gender and Nation,” 250-251.

⁶² *Love and War*, accessed on <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/second-world-war/love-and-war-canadian-war-brides/topic---love-and-war-canadian-war-brides.html>.

of mutton.”⁶³ This type of discursive formation indeed places women in the role of the domesticator in contrast to her “man,” the breadwinner. Ultimately, this type of the separation of the spheres, which feminists have long discussed, created this ideal which Laura Lee Downs calls the “public citizen discourse.”⁶⁴ As Downs states, “transforming women, marked by mere differences of sex, into the opposite sex, beings whose particular feminine nature condemned them to a purely private domestic existence,” created this ‘public citizen discourse’ in which there was a connection between the private home and the public nation.”⁶⁵ Therefore, this particular ‘public citizen discourse,’ rooted in these discursively constructed ideals of femininity and maternity, worked within broader Canadian citizenship discourses.

Continuing on with this theme of the “receiving nation,” which migrant theorists⁶⁶ often use, citizenship through ideal “coupling” is extremely evident and exposes the larger political and social context of Second World War era. For instance, the very fact that Canadian men were coupling with white, Anglo-Saxon middle classed women was seen as ideal for the “receiving nation” of Canada as they contributed to heteronormative ideals within Canada. Gayle Rubin’s discussion of the trafficking of women and the political economy implications of sex are useful in this discussion. Rubin discusses the “exchange” of women within patriarchal societies, which “further

⁶³ *Love and War*, accessed on November 14th 2013, <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/second-world-war/love-and-war-canadian-war-brides/topic---love-and-war-canadian-war-brides.html>

⁶⁴ Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (Bloomsbury, 2010), 148.

⁶⁵ Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 148.

⁶⁶ For prominent migration feminist theorists see Stephanie Nawyn’s, “Gender and Migration: Integrating Feminist Theory into Migration Studies,” *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 9 (2010): 749-765. Glenda Bonifacio (eds.) *Feminism and Migration: Cross-Cultural Engagements* (London: Springer, 2012).

perpetrated the pattern of female oppression.”⁶⁷ According to Rubin, marriage is a central component of this exchange most specifically within the realm of kinship and how women were used to establish economic relationships between two tribes or families. Thus, women through marriage and the “trafficking” of women from tribe to tribe, or in this case from one nation to the next, has social, political and economic gains for the “receiving nation.” War brides, because of the ways in which they were represented were seen, due to their perceived feminine abilities such as motherhood, as prime examples of how cross-national migration and “ideal” coupling. This ultimately resulted in social, political and economic gain for the Canadian nation, as these women were seen in themselves as a form of a commodity.

Through the text and representations of the war brides during and directly after the Second World War, specific discourses were created about these women, that of their believed inherent abilities as “women,” mothers and wives, and their impeccable status as new Canadian citizens. As we will see, these very ideals have had a long lasting effect within Canadian consciousness regarding who these women were, which, arguably, still forms the basis of ideal Canadian citizenship in the more present day context.

3. The Production of Compensatory History:

In order for a discourse to have lasting effects upon our consciousness, it is not simply enough to leave it unattended assuming that it will, on its own, continue to be authorized. Rather, as Mills notes, “Foucault remarks that the constitution of discourse also have internal and external mechanisms which keep certain discourses in existence.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, edited by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), 5.

⁶⁸ Mills, *Discourse*, 60.

If we think about the case of the war brides, one would still be able to, over half a century later, retell their significance and importance along a similar vein to that of the original discourse manifested in the 1940s and 1950s. Why is this so? How do discourses maintain prominence in our existence? How, in the war brides' case specifically, can we still prescribe certain characteristics to these women who were war brides so very long ago? Foucault notes that the first one of these "external mechanisms" consists of commentary. Foucault notes:

We may suspect that there is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of graduation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced; and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again.⁶⁹

Mills uses the Bible as an example of this action, as she stated, "the bible could be considered a text of this nature, upon which commentaries have been written and will continue to be written; in a sense, these commentaries keep the bible in existence."⁷⁰ Thus, it is clear that these very particular external mechanisms are keeping the discourses of the war brides in existence and as I argue, external mechanisms routinely promote discourses of femininity, motherhood, and womanhood, due to their centrality to the inner social workings of Canadian society. In large part, the reasoning as to why discourses of femininity in regards to war brides did not 'vanish as soon as they have been pronounced,' was because of the integral role these discourses played in the national context of the time, which became entrenched into Canadian national identity.

⁶⁹ Foucault, 1981, 56.

⁷⁰ Mills, *Discourse*, 60.

Within this section, there are numerous mechanisms, which could be discussed to explain the long lasting effect of the discourses surrounding the war brides in Canada. However, this analysis specifically focused on only one aspect, which I think could be considered among one of the most important: the creation of popular, ‘compensatory’ histories of the war brides after the period of the 1950s until the present day.

From a modern day gender historian’s perspective, I have the ability to look back on early examples of women’s history, not to criticize their motives or goals, but to better understand their roles in the creation of discourses of gender prior to the rise of the linguistic turn. As we saw in Chapter One, much has been debated about the purposes, usefulness, and methods of writing and examining women’s history and the type of history that is produced of women in our past can both hinder or help our struggles to dismantle previous discourses of femininity, motherhood, and womanhood. What this phase aims to problematize in regards to women’s history is that, as Joan Scott suggests, “history has been largely a foundationalist discourse. These foundations are unquestioned and unquestionable; they are considered permanent and transcendent.”⁷¹ Of course, these compensatory histories have merit in their desires to reverse the many years of histories written by men, of men; however, in fact much of these compensatory histories have been written by, as discussed in Chapter One, “white middle class feminist historians,”⁷² who, in this case, seek to further cement ideological ideas of citizenship and womanhood of “Canadianness” in the post-war era. Numerous examples come to mind when thinking about the Canadian war brides in Canada. These include Joyce Hibbert’s

⁷¹ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 780.

⁷² Ruth Roach Pierson, *Writing Women’s History: International Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 93.

The War Brides, Melynda Jarratt's *The British War Brides of New Brunswick and War Brides: The Stories of Women who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men They Loved*, and Linda Granfield's *Brass Buttons and Silver Horseshoes: Stories from Canadian British War Brides*.

Compensatory, corrective, and additive histories are further problematic when we think about the sources used to write them. As Joan Sangster notes, "simply locating women's actions and voices was presumed to be a valid goal for feminist historians, yet this still seemed a difficult endeavor when one relied so heavily on the records left by those with power."⁷³ This brings to mind Foucault's notion of the "archive."⁷⁴ In essence, Foucault's archive is similar to that of the notion of the episteme, which essentially limits "what can be said, in what form and what is counted as worth knowing and remembering."⁷⁵ Using this framework we can assume that power structures, those who hold power, determined what is 'worth knowing and remembering' thereby producing the type of sources women's historians use in writing compensatory women's history. For instance, throughout this examination, the legitimized CBC digital archival collection *Love and War* has been referred to in previous sections as it deals directly with statements and quotations from the war brides during the time of the 1940s and 1950s. However, as these quotations now comprise a public archive, they could as well be included in this section, as it preserves and produces information on the war brides that is considered "worth knowing and worth remembering." Another example of the war

⁷³ Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History* (Athabasca: AU Press, 2011), 50.

⁷⁴ For more on the archive see Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002) and Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook's "Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 1-19.

⁷⁵ Mills, *Discourse*, 56.

brides' story being one well worth remembering is a quotation from a public website entitled the *Canadian War Brides* that seeks to provide information about the "war brides to the public" which states that "the story of the Canadian war brides and their journey to Canada is one of the most fascinating and romantic of World War Two. Why nearly 45,000 British and European women would leave behind everything that was familiar to start a new life in post-war Canada is a story worth telling."⁷⁶

There are many examples of these types of "celebratory" and "compensatory" history of the war brides that championed femininity, domesticity, and nation building that was discussed in-depth in Chapter One. For instance, Hibbert's *The War Brides* was a cornerstone in documenting the experiences of war brides. In her introduction, for instance, Hibbert further cements women's roles in the post-war era when stating, "the brides were issued with Canadian books; it would be interesting to know what was in them. The recipe for something more practical than pumpkin pie was probably in order, though there is not real preparation for anything as radically different from Europe as the North American continent."⁷⁷ Documenting this type of experience further reinforces the role that the war brides were expected to play. Moreover, Jarratt advocates for the importance of women's perceived inherent roles as wives and mothers when she states that "together with their husbands and families, they helped shape the Canada we know today, reinforcing British cultural traditions and fostering emotional ties with the Mother Country that have been passed on with pride to the next generation."⁷⁸ Not only does this type of discourse reestablish women's important roles as mothers but also promotes an

⁷⁶ "Canadian War Brides," accessed on January 13th 2013, www.canadianwarbrides.com

⁷⁷ Hibbert, *The War Brides*, xv.

⁷⁸ Jarratt, *The British War Brides of New Brunswick*, 32.

ideal Canadian identity which focuses on superior “British cultural traditions,” of the Anglo-Saxon race. This is but only one example of how Canadian writers of women’s history are forever bound with images of what constitutes “Canadianness,” and a nostalgia for Canada as a white settler nation.

Statements like these further reestablish old discourses of femininity, similar to those that would have been issued from the Second World War era itself. “Woman” and the category of woman is, in this case, the “main character in the historical saga.”⁷⁹ This is problematic and as Hilda Smith notes, “woman as a collective noun is as full of traps as it is convenient; as a unit of analysis for a historical narrative it is awkward and dangerous.”⁸⁰ Here, “woman,” is reproduced, and thus discourses of femininity and womanhood from the Second World War era, are further reinforced as they “remain said, and are to be said again.”⁸¹ Assumingly then, as this phase ultimately shows, I argue that compensatory histories actually act to further reinforce the powered structures that had ultimately created them, and just as Scott stated, can actually reproduce ideologies, rather than contest them.

In another case, as discussed in Chapter One, women’s histories often include the biographies of “exceptional” women and in this case, the war brides definitely fill this role. The goodness of women and the femininity of woman was often a central component when writing compensatory histories. As Sheila Ryan Johansson notes, “until very recently...the vast majority of books on the history of women have centered around

⁷⁹ Hilda Smith, “Feminism and the Methodology of Women’s History,” *Liberating Women’s History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 402.

⁸⁰ Smith, “Feminism and the Methodology of Women’s History,” 402.

⁸¹ Foucault, 1981, 56.

the theme of woman's intrinsic goodness or badness."⁸² There definitely seems to be some inherent belief in the exceptional nature of the war brides and their "goodness" as women in our history. The title of Jarratt's book, *War Brides: The Stories of the Women who Left Everything Behind to Follow the Men They Loved*, suggests a particular kind of self-sacrifice from the war brides themselves, which could be heralded as the perfect characteristic of a mother and wife. For instance, Jarratt chronicles a war bride who stated that "basically we girls came out to Canada, by and large not knowing what to expect, the vast majority of us dug in, adapted, compromised, made homes for our husbands and families and became good contributing Canadian citizens."⁸³ The documentation of these types of quotations is important to consider. Jarratt purposefully and deliberately utilizes certain quotes from the war brides that reproduce images of the ideal Canadian citizen and the "goodness" of the war brides as women. Another example of this includes Eswyn Lyster's *Most Excellent Citizens: Canada's War Brides of World War II* as the title itself suggests how the war brides were indeed considered the ideal new Canadian citizen.

In relation to the reproduction of ideals of Canadian citizen and discourses of femininity surrounding war brides, the notion of nostalgia comes to mind. In this case, within the historian's unconsciousness there may be a nostalgia for the ideal all white/settler nation of post war Canadian society. David Lowenthal argues, "if the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it the foreign country with the healthiest tourist trade of all," and that "people love nostalgia and firmly believe that what is old is

⁸² Sheila Ryan Johansson, "Herstory' as History: a New Field or Another Fad," in *Liberating Women's History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 400.

⁸³ Jarratt, *The War Brides of New Brunswick*, 15.

necessarily good.”⁸⁴ This nostalgia for, and the seemingly unquestioning belief in the past, reproduced dominant idealized discourses of the history of women and in this context, of the war brides in Canada and of what Canadian citizenship should consist. For women’s historians then, nostalgia involves a looking back to when women were making significant strides forward, which resulted in “history being recycled as nostalgia almost as soon as it happened.”⁸⁵ Continuing on with this theme of a settler nation, Marlene Goldman and Joanne Saul note how settler nations have a certain degree of “unsettledness and unfinished business,” resulting in “lost histories.”⁸⁶ Thus, in a settler nation such as Canada, we are amidst what Goldman and Saul refer to as a ‘pastless’ society; one which is haunted by the very notion that our past is inherently lacking. Therefore, recounting the past, such as the histories of the war brides, becomes an important and historical “haunting” that plays a very particular role in the Canadian settler nation and in the process of nation building.

Additionally, the authors producing these popular, compensatory histories were writing in a particular social setting that warranted the retrieval of discourses of war brides from the 1940s and 1950s. Uncovering the particular reasoning as to why these histories were reproduced illustrates how these discourses were reinforced for a particular purpose rather than suggesting any level of permanency in these discourses themselves. Masculine histories have long dominated the histories of war and wartime societies and women are routinely left out of the discussions and remembrance of the World Wars in twentieth century western culture. However, the stories of the war brides

⁸⁴ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (London: Cambridge, 1988), 4.

⁸⁵ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 6.

⁸⁶ Marlene Goldman and Joanne Saul, “Talking with Ghosts: Haunting in Canadian Cultural Production,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2006): 648.

offer an accessible way in which to bring women's historical contribution to wartime to the forefront. These stories of sacrifice, of love, of loss, and of romance provided a history of glorified patriotism that wartime histories so often seek. Women's historians then, willfully used the stories of the war brides to provide an accessible and comprehensible avenue into wartime histories, further cementing the importance of women's history, which was evidently debated around the time of these writings.

Thus, popular compensatory histories were produced from a particular social setting that merited, valued, and sought exceptional histories of women, and these histories fit within the more masculine domain of wartime to further legitimize the need for the inclusion of women in historical writings. As a result, the discourses that were so apparent in the 1940s and 1950s were reproduced and reconfigured to serve particular social and political purposes over thirty years later. Perhaps most importantly, these histories were used in the post-war period to aid in the creation of a certain type of Canadian nationalism and collective Canadian identity. Above all, "the facts of the past, the stuff of which men write their histories, are used for many things besides the manufacture of history."⁸⁷ As J.C.D. Clark states, without such histories, "society could not have only a disembodied existence. It would have lost all those many things which made itself."⁸⁸ It is useful to end with a quotation from Foucault commenting on the role of the historian in discourse creation suggesting that, "each time that a discourse appears in the midst of historical narration, for example, when the historian reproduces

⁸⁷ Herbert Butterfield, *The Historical Novel: An Essay* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1924), 7.

⁸⁸ J.C.D. Clark, *Our Shadowed Present: Modernism, Postmodernism and History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13.

someone's words or when they themselves intervene in order to comment upon the events reported, we pass to another tense system, that of discourse."⁸⁹

5. The Recycling of the “Original” Discourse

As we have seen through the creation of particular compensatory histories and the ways in which we choose to remember the war brides, we recycle the very discourses from which they originated and in turn create dominant ideals of the perceived inherent nature of what it means to be a woman, or in this case a war bride. This is where normalization practices come into play. Sandra Schmidt for instance, discusses the normalization of woman in United States history and analyzes history curricula in schools and how they aid in reinforcing gendered ideals. Schmidt notes, “history, despite its enable reputation for presenting the important facts about our pasts, is influenced by considerations other than the simple love of truth. It is an instrument of the greatest social utility, and the story of our past is a potent means for transmitting cultural images and stereotypes.”⁹⁰ Essentially, Schmidt is arguing that norms of woman are produced through decisions made about the representations of our past, which is what this chapter is essentially attempting to do. The category of “woman” thus, is “defined in the telling’s of history”⁹¹ in numerous ways. The fact that the war brides were represented as idealized women in the time of the Second World War and were further glorified by compensatory historical writings, created a prominent long lasting discourse of war brides, which in turn affected larger ideals of discourses of femininity, nationhood, and citizenship.

⁸⁹ Benveniste, 1971, 110 as cited by Mills, 5.

⁹⁰ Sandra Schmidt, “Am I a Woman? The Normalization of Woman in US History,” *Gender and Education* 24, no. 7 (2013): 708.

⁹¹ Schmidt, “Am I a Woman?” 719.

Conclusion:

This chapter illustrates how producing history from a poststructuralist standpoint, questioning the epistemological assumptions about what it is that we know, can further lead to understandings of the processes of normalization of the category of woman in our histories such as the case for war brides. The use of discourse as an analytical tool when writing gender history has proven useful in that it can allow us to better understand how the war brides' identities are formed and maintained. Uncovering discourse processes is vital as only then can we begin to uproot and challenge ideologies built by language and discourse. Using methods of gender history to understand the past can, as Davies notes, "change not only the nature of the research, but the nature of understanding brought to the detail of every day life."⁹² This level of understanding is precisely what this examination is after: to understand the processes at play that create dominant ideals and dominant discourses of the war brides in a larger Canadian context.

Therefore, a gender history investigation such as this one is imperative to the history of women and to the category of "woman" itself. Only by illustrating that social categories and identities such as the war brides are in fact discursively constructed and created, will we be able to undermine these very processes. Ultimately, this chapter has exposed the undeniable discursive nature of the construction of historical knowledge surrounding the war brides living in Southern Alberta. This examination has made clear that more dominant ideals and perceptions about the war brides play a vital role in what we know about the past and how our knowledge of the past is created.

⁹² Davies, *A Body of Writing*, 9.

Chapter 3: “Evidence of Experience?” Exposing the ‘Collective’ and Uncovering the ‘Personal’ in Feminist Oral History Interviews with Southern Alberta War Brides

Introduction:

The belief in a historian’s ability to accurately represent the experiences of those in our past has been something in which the discipline of history has long relied upon and has given our discipline both legitimacy and authority within the academic world. From the time of early empirical historians, there has been a firmly held assumption about our position as historians as the collectors, keepers, and tellers of historical “experience.” However, as we have come to see in the earlier stages of this thesis, in more recent years, social, and most notably gender historians, have begun to question our ability to accurately gather the “truth” about the experiences of those in our past and have instead focused their efforts on the role of discourse and language. Through questioning our own subjective roles as researchers, the reliability of historical memory, and the role that language and discourse has played in the historical production of knowledge, our ability to truly uncover “experience” has become a contentious and compelling debate. While some may say that the “true” experiences of those in our past are forever out of reach, others continually seek to uncover the experiences of otherwise marginalized or silenced groups of people in our histories.

This chapter serves as both a contrast and complement to Chapter Two and revisits the postmodern debate of female experience and our ability as gender and feminist historians to accurately uncover it. While Chapter Two illustrated the formative role that discourse plays in the creation of historical knowledge, this chapter comments

on whether women too, can play an active role in the creation of their *own* histories. This notion of “female experience” has consistently been the center point of feminist oral history discussions and is still the focus of debates regarding the agency and authority of women whose stories we seek to tell. As Joan Sangster notes, “exploring and revaluing women’s experience has been a cornerstone of feminist oral history, but the current emphasis on differences between women – in part encouraged by post-structuralist writing – has posed the dilemma of whether we can write across the divides of race, class and gender about other women’s experiences, past or present.”¹ Whatever side of the debate one may lie, uncovering the “experience” of a group of women in the past, in this case the war brides, is undoubtedly important. Focusing specifically on feminist oral history, this chapter explores the war brides’ experiences and their intersections with that of memory in order to use memory “as a category of cultural and historical analysis in order to gain new insights”² into the experiences of the war brides.

This chapter tackles both sides of the academic debate surrounding our ability to capture the reality of those experiences and examine the war brides as both subjects and actors in the “creation of their own histories.”³ Using memory-based stories from elderly women, this chapter compares the war brides’ collective memories, which have come to hinder our ability as historians to portray an authentic account of their experiences, with that of their “personal” memories, which seek to empower and give agency and authority to the participants in the retelling of their experiences. Therefore, following the example

¹ Joan Sangster, “Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History,” *Women’s History Review* 3, no. 1 (1994): 15.

² Melissa Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories: Memory and Meaning in Oral History* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 4.

³ Joanna Bornat and Hanna Diamond, “Women’s History and Oral History: Developments and Debates,” *Women’s History Review* 16, no. 1 (March 2007): 20.

of many notable oral historical inquiries, this chapter explores how dominant discourses and representations of the war brides have been “inscribed or contested,”⁴ in the interviews collected for this examination.

This chapter also analyzes the role of memory in the creation and contestation of dominant historical knowledge. It examines the specific experiences the war brides chose to share and what shared experiences molded the war brides’ sense of a collective and public past. Additionally, this chapter exposes personal and more subjective memories of their past to illustrate how the war brides make sense of their lives and how feminist oral histories can challenge conventional histories about the experiences of women. The first section of this chapter addresses “the discursive character of experience,”⁵ and how collective memory is used in the creation of a “community of memory.”⁶ These “communities of memory” reinforce the dominant discourses and representations of war brides, which have been created and recreated in the discourse process as outlined in Chapter Two of this thesis. As we have seen with discourse, these communities of memory are “inherently political: it is about defining us against them,” and creates a “group with a recognizable past to which it can lay claim.”⁷ In contrast, the second section of this chapter seeks out any hints of the “evidence of experience”⁸ which is so often refuted by gender historians who are associated with the linguistic turn. Through this, the second section of this chapter highlights the war brides’ personal experiences of

⁴ Laurie Mercier, *Anaconda: Labor, Community, and Culture in Montana’s Smelter City* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 3.

⁵ Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 787.

⁶ Initially coined by Sociologist Robert N. Bellah.

⁷ Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, 6.

⁸ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience.”

their past and how, through their own retelling of their histories, they express feelings of empowerment, female independence, agency, and diversity. Moreover, through the use of feminist oral history methodologies, it becomes apparent that the war brides' subjective thoughts and feelings can be uncovered to ensure that the telling of their experiences can, and should, remain at the heart of feminist oral history narratives.

The “Discursive Character of Experience”⁹ and Collective Memory:

“To remember, we need others.” Paul Ricoeur, 2004.

With the rise of gender history, previous firmly-held assumptions about our ability to grasp the authentic accounts of women's experiences began to be questioned by modern day social, gender, and feminist historians. While documenting the lives of others and their experiences “produced a wealth of new evidence previously ignored...and has drawn attention to dimensions of human life and activity usually deemed unworthy of mention in conventional histories,”¹⁰ gender historians began to question the credibility of the experiences which we examined. Prior to the linguistic turn, within documenting “experience,” there was an assumption that historical subjects were autonomous beings who could and did express their own true, authentic experiences. However, gender historians began to question how experience itself might be a product of social construction and “about how one's vision is structured.”¹¹ Thus, gender historians have been hesitant about the very fact that it is possible to gain unique and personal experiences of groups of people who have undergone similar social situations, the war brides being a prime example, due to the social construction of their collective histories.

⁹ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 787.

¹⁰ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 776.

¹¹ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 777.

When it comes to female “experience,” gender historians no longer “take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented,” but instead examine the “discursive character of experience,” acknowledging that “subjects are constituted discursively and experience is a linguistic event.”¹² It is within this first section of this chapter that the “discursive character of experience” is measured, to uncover how the war brides’ recollections of their experiences through oral history interviews have been socially and discursively created which further questions our ability as historians to grasp any sort of “evidence of experience.”¹³ Moreover, upon establishing the “discursive character” of the experiences of the war brides, this chapter exposes the influence of the discursive character of experiences on the ways that the war brides act and present themselves as historical subjects. Furthermore, as Scott notes that, “experience is collective as well as individual,”¹⁴ this chapter exposes how individual accounts of the war brides’ experiences have often been muted and the “collective” accounts have come to dominate our perceptions of the their pasts.

As discussed in Chapter One, when women’s history was on the rise, early writers of women’s history heavily relied upon traditional methodologies when studying the lives and experiences of women. However, as women’s history began to be more inclusive of the lives of “others” or the day-to-day experiences of ordinary, non-exceptional stories, oral history as a method to uncover silenced stories began to be utilized. Thus, using models of oral history, historians could explain the lives of “any woman” and “raised a

¹² Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 793.

¹³ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 773.

¹⁴ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 790.

different set of questions to be explored”¹⁵ in historical inquiries. Oral histories have become an effective way to research histories of those “on the margins” and “are particularly valuable for uncovering women’s experiences.”¹⁶ However, oral historians and those who practiced oral history methods quickly became aware of the ways in which oral histories are co-constructed texts and how oral history participants often revise their stories under differing circumstances that may not accurately reflect the past. Thus, oral historians have grappled with ideals of experience, authority, and agency when conducting oral history interviews and it is in these interviews that the debates surrounding these very ideals are routinely contended. The oral histories conducted with the war brides in this instance highlight the ways in which the “collective” often dominates oral history narratives in numerous ways.

There are numerous examples of the “collective” silencing the “personal” in the interviews of the participants. For instance, perhaps one of the main issues Scott had with the uncovering of experience is that “whether conceived through a metaphor of visibility or in any other way that takes meaning as transparent, reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems.”¹⁷ Essentially, Scott is concerned with the extent to which “making experience visible” reproduces the terms and workings of the “systems”¹⁸ that gender historians and poststructuralists aim to deconstruct. For example, when labor historians document the more feminine roles prescribed to the private sphere that women

¹⁵ Sherna Berger Gluck, “What’s So Special About Women?” in *Women’s Oral History: The Frontier Reader*, edited by Susan Armitage, Patricia Hart and Karen Weathermon (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 3.

¹⁶ Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analysis,” in *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 11.

¹⁷ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 778.

¹⁸ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 778.

in certain periods in our history often held, there is the possibility of the reproduction of the public/private dichotomy. Likewise, Chapter Two illustrates how the constant recreation of discourses of the past, of the war brides' experiences in this case, reproduced post-war ideologies of femininity, citizenship, and nationalism. Indeed, this type of reproduction of ideological systems through retelling of the war brides' experiences in oral history testimonies is most certainly evident. After all, the war brides often represented an image of the pristine wife and mother of the post-war Canadian period.

There are numerous instances throughout the interviews where making "visible" the war brides' stories reproduces ideologies that feminist and gender historians are working to deconstruct. For instance, while most of the participants did work in some sort of "war-time" occupation, once the women were married and eventually moved to Canada, they assumed their womanly roles as wives and mothers. For example, Edith (b. 1921), who came from a family who had a long and rich history in English military service, discussed her role during the war when stating, "of course by the time the war had broken out, I had started to work. I worked in an office and I had one sister that joined the forces, I did apply for the forces too but I was working for the government and they wouldn't let me go." This is in direct contrast with her activities after getting married, which were far more related to roles prescribed to the family and her community of Lethbridge, Alberta, "I joined the choir right away and so I was in St. Andrew's choir for thirty-four years and then we had a group, a singing group called the "Treble Clefs"...I taught at Sunday school and also I was in a women's group in the church and

of course in those days, we put on a lot of teas and baking and things like that.”¹⁹ This transition from the public into the private sphere after the war was not unique to the war brides specifically, as it represents the broader trend of the time. However, according to Scott, it is the very retelling of these experiences that simply does not challenge the ideological categories that have historically limited women. Within this framework, it is possible to conclude that Edith (b.1921), even upon reflection nearly seventy years later, did not reject or contest her transition back into the private/family sphere, making the feminist challenge to the private/public dichotomy incredibly difficult (yet we cannot know for certain her feelings about working outside the home at the time she made the transition).

An important aspect of the collective and the questioning of the authority of experience, and something which ultimately plays an integral role in discourse formation, is the notion of memory: how memory is made, how our memories are recollected, and subsequently, how our memories are represented. Historians have long debated this notion of memory, and in more recent years, there has been a surge towards the acknowledgement that memory is inherently flawed and upon completing oral history interviews, it is widely accepted that, due to the limitations in which memory brings, we can never and will never gain the particular account of the past that historians seek. As Paul Thompson notes, memory is “not held in fixed boxes...but rather as a dynamically alive system.”²⁰ Poststructuralists and postmodernists in particular have paid specific attention to the socially and discursively constructed nature of memory, which has played

¹⁹ Edith, Interview Transcription, 7.

²⁰ Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past: Oral History* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000). Online version.

a significant role in the postmodern loss of the autonomous subject. In essence, within these types of theories and indeed within the arguments made by Scott and other gender historians, our individual memories are never just our own: we do not have an independent authority over our memories and what we recollect about our pasts, but rather, memory is shaped by the dominant discourses, values, and institutions that surround us. As a result, “individual memory, as a purportedly original agency, becomes problematic,” while “collective consciousness is one of those realities whose ontological status is not in question.”²¹

The term “collective memory” has been widely used to discuss and explain this type of phenomenon and has pushed the notion of individual memory to the margins. According to Jeffrey Olick, the “contemporary use of the term collective memory traces itself largely to the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs.”²² Halbwachs suggests that, “collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society.”²³ Thus, our memories and recollections take place within larger social contexts and our memories are in large part formed by social cues and discourses that propel us to think, feel, and remember in particular ways. It is this notion of collective memory that this portion of the chapter examines and how the war brides will forever be informed by their inclusion into a collective group, which

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 95.

²² Jeffrey Olick, *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16.

²³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40.

could explain why the individual and personal accounts of their “experiences” are so difficult to attain.

Collective memory is used as a societal tool, which aids in the formulation of group identities and imagined communities, and often holds a very powerful influence over one’s individual memory. As Thompson notes, “the context of remembering is also crucial: in a group situation, such as a local celebration, or a memorial service, or in a pub, collective perspectives of memory are likely to exercise much more power than in more private reflections.”²⁴ In the context of war, the influence of the “collective” seems especially telling. Alastair Thomson, for instance, illustrates how Australian First World War veterans “were lionized in public as the heroes who had first crystallized Australian identity,” and how “social groups create the myths which they need.”²⁵ Similarly, the collective memory of the war brides experiences that were created within the Second World War era, were influenced by and created in the context of a post-war imagined national identity and in a time when the social category of woman played numerous roles in the war and post-war efforts. Thus, it is evident that the sustaining image of a collective identity of war brides was imperative in the “function to provide a usable past for the creation of coherent individual and group identities.”²⁶

While arguably, oral histories do provide an arena in which to “enable people to tell stories that had been silenced because they did not match the dominant cultural

²⁴ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*.

²⁵ As discussed in Thompson, *Voice of the Past*. See Alastair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁶ Joseph M. Turrini, “Well I Don’t Care About History: Oral History and the Making of Collective Memory in Punk Rock,” *Notes* 70, no. 1 (September 2013): 60.

memory,”²⁷ women often, whether consciously or not, aim to reproduce ideals of what the common perceptions of their experiences were. For instance, even though the women married quite young, often knowing their husbands for only a few months before getting married, the war brides avoided discussions surrounding any negative aspects of their early marriages appearing to uphold the widely held assumption of the positive nature of the war brides’ marital unions. Here, it is possible to see why gender historians would be critical of the ways in which memories and identities are formed and have instead sought new means in which to study the “experiences” of women in the past. For gender historians, examining the experiences of groups of women, quite simply does not disrupt this larger ideological and social process through which our memories and experiences are made. As a result, this section of the chapter uncovers how and why collective memory is produced and what implications it may have on our ability to uncover the “experiences” of women, reaffirming assumptions made by gender historians that we must find alternative means to examine the lives and experiences of women rather than focusing on a unattainable true, authentic “experience.” Thus, in continuance with Chapter Two, this chapter seeks to uncover how the “modern collectivity of women,”²⁸ more specifically the collectivity war brides, has been established as gender history aims not to focus solely on the experiences of the category of war brides, but more importantly, “what lies beneath.”²⁹

²⁷ Alistair Thomson, “Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History,” *The Oral History Review* 34, no. 1 (2007): 56.

²⁸ Denise Riley, *Am I that Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 8.

²⁹ Riley, *Am I That Name*, 8.

Within this particular type of framework then, even though we often associate memory as a “fundamentally individual phenomenon,”³⁰ the war brides often seek the validation of their memories by ensuring their statements aligned with that of the other participants and within the more general imagined community of the war brides. Indeed, as Olick explains, “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.”³¹ Thus, the war brides look to societal interpretations and the collective agreements of what their experiences were in the formulation of their memories and the subsequent recollection of them. It is through social processes and interactions that our experiences and our identities as “groups” or “collectives” are formed. Sociologists would refer to this process as the “social construction of reality,” which is the result of “the historical process by which our experiences become put into categories and treated as things.”³² According to William G. Roy, “people deal with what they experience in terms of categories, then act on the basis of those categories.”³³ In this case, the war brides reflect upon their experiences not solely through an individual lens but as a unified whole. Through this, it is perceived that the war brides experienced similar events, thoughts, and feelings, which in turn allows for the further reproduction and validation of the broader category of war brides and of their collective experiences.

There are numerous examples from the interviews that suggest both the ways in which the war brides seek the validation of their memories from their peers and refer to their experiences in a collective sense rather than on a personal level. When discussing

³⁰ Olick, *The Collective Memory Reader*, 16.

³¹ Olick, *The Collective Memory Reader*, 18.

³² William G. Roy, *Making Societies* (London: Pine Forge Press, 2001), 5.

³³ Roy, *Making Societies*, 5.

national belonging and the possibility of any remaining emotional ties to Britain, Sylvia (b.1925), whose family struggled financially during her childhood, responded with “I’m a Canadian. I’ve lived in Canada more than I lived in England. I’m a British subject, but I am a Canadian. Is that what most of the ladies say?”³⁴ In this case, Sylvia seeks the collective validation of her response, as she could have potentially been fearful of the interpretation of her response of her loyalty to Canada over that of her home country. Additionally, Ann (b. 1923), who eventually came to divorce her husband in 1970, when talking about the difficulties and challenges faced when she first arrived in her new country stated, “and the hardest part coming, whether the other girls said this, when you are barred up in one place and you come over here and of course I had no mother-in-law and I didn’t really know anybody and the hardest thing was walking down the street and not knowing anybody.”³⁵ When discussing a difficult personal moment she endured in her first few months in Canada, by mentioning the possibility of “other girls” enduring similar feelings, Ann validated this particular experience making it a collective rather than a personal recollection. Ann may have been aware of the fact that she was expressing a more “negative” experience that did not correlate with the more dominant ideal of the war brides. Thus, Ann attempted to construct this more personal experience of loneliness into a collective phenomenon to ensure that her recollections of homesickness and fear were not unique or unusual feelings that only she felt. Furthermore, the following example is when Betty (b. 1921), who even though for the first few weeks in Canada lived in a chicken coup covered in bed bugs with her husband,

³⁴ Sylvia, Interview Transcription, 11.

³⁵ Ann, Interview Transcript, 3.

sought the collective affirmation of the fact that she was not scared upon arriving to
Canada:

LY: Did you have any difficulties when you first came over here to
Canada?

PB: ...No I never had any hard life at all, I don't remember, of course, the
worse part of it was in London during the war in the air raids you were
terrified.

LY: So the black outs, was that every night?

PB: Yeah we had black blinds up, you couldn't show any light outside, it
was awful. Where I lived, this one big raid, there were houses that got
flattened right opposite us, all our windows were blown out and down the
road they were demolished and a lot of people got killed, but no, we were
lucky, we escaped it. Those were the scariest times of my life.

LY: So coming over here didn't seem so bad.

PB: Didn't scare me at all. Did you talk to anybody else who said they
were scared?

LY: Not really no.

PB: Yeah we were just happy to get back and settle with the kids and your
husband.

In this case it is possible to glean that, "at some stage...collectivities experience
the need to impose a test of credibility on certain events and narratives because it matters
to them whether these events are true or false, whether these stories are fact or fiction."³⁶
Here, Betty was "imposing a test of credibility" on her personal feelings of not being
fearful upon her arrival here in Canada to ensure that her experience as a member of a
"collective group" indeed fit within that very collective. It is apparent that a major part of

³⁶ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 11.

the collective story of the war brides is the romanticized, glorified version in which the war brides had triumphant experiences moving and settling into Canada and did not suffer from homesickness, regret, or fear. Indeed, Thompson further discussed how various Australian First World War veterans were hesitant to discuss how they remembered often feeling “shocked or afraid”³⁷ due to their public mythologized image as national heroes. Indeed, other commentators of oral history narratives have noted how participants often emphasize moments of triumph in order to silence or marginalize the stories that would directly contrast these more dominant collective narratives.

Directly related to the notion of memory, both personal and collective, is the ways we are systematically inclined as individuals to forget certain, mostly negative or unfavorable events in our pasts. Paul Connerton outlines seven different types of forgetting, including “forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity,”³⁸ which is the type that aligns most closely with particular experiences the war brides appear to forget. Connerton notes that, “the emphasis here is not so much on the loss entailed in being unable to retain certain things as rather on the gain that accrues to those who know how to discard memories that serve no practical purpose in the management of one’s current identity and ongoing purposes.”³⁹ In Chapter Two, I analyzed the discursive process that formulated our ideas about who and what the war brides are, and as a result of the “discursive character of experience,” the war brides “forgot” certain aspects about their experiences that seemed at odds with their collective identity.

³⁷ As Discussed in Thompson, *Voice of the Past*.

³⁸ Paul Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting,” *Memory Studies* 1, no. 59 (2008): 12.

³⁹ Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting,” 13.

Thus, it is apparent that, forgetting, much like remembering, is a product of the social and discursive cues that surround us. If our experiences or memories directly contrast what our experiences are expected to have been, those memories can often be lost or muted. Connerton uses the example of grandparents whose “small acts” of forgetting are “not random but patterned.”⁴⁰ “The forgetting of details of grandparents lives,” Connerton writes, “that are not transmitted to grandchildren whose knowledge about grandparents might in no way conduce to, but rather detract from, the effective implementation of their present intentions.”⁴¹ In this sense, expectations, and the expectations of the experiences of the war brides, are crucial to understanding the difficulties in attaining authentic and personalized experiences of their narratives. As Connerton continues to note, “to perceive an object or act upon it is to locate it within this system of expectations.”⁴²

In the oral history interviews, the war brides are referring to a time in their lives that was surrounded by war and wartime mentality, which did not warrant complaints and fear of those living on the home front. As Kathy (b. 1923), who even had a miscarriage during her first pregnancy with her Canadian husband notes, “I think the war changed people because you lived from day to day not knowing what was going to happen,”⁴³ and Edith (b. 1921), who worked for the government during the war, stated how the war brought out the “British bulldog in you,” and how “you just adjust to things.”⁴⁴ Historian Jonathan Vance completed an examination of Canadian collective memory of the First

⁴⁰ Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting,” 13.

⁴¹ Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting,” 13.

⁴² Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.

⁴³ Kathy, Interview Transcription, 7.

⁴⁴ Edith, Interview Transcription, 6.

World War and states that “we must realize that those people who lived under the shadow of the war may have had a very different understanding of it than we have expected them to.”⁴⁵ Due to the broader societal influences, there are “mythic versions”⁴⁶ constructed of wartime events, which have a significant impact on the ways those who were involved remember their own experiences.

The war brides appeared, at first glance, to have forgotten their negative experiences that did not correlate with the expectations of women on the home front during the war. Subsequently, the war brides subconsciously silenced, from the oral history interviews, their negative feelings and troubled experiences. When asked about feeling any level of homesickness, for instance, which would have been understandable given the circumstances, only one participant⁴⁷ out of the twelve admitted to being so. As a result, the essence of a collective identity is that not only are people perceived to “have a great deal in common,” they have also, “forgotten a great deal.”⁴⁸

Moreover, poststructural concerns, associated with the linguistic turn in gender history, with the authentic nature of experience are attached to the long-standing discussion surrounding the subject’s relation to his/her personal present. As Rolph-Trouillot states, “the past is only the past because there is a present.”⁴⁹ Therefore, it is important to consider what the present state is in which the war brides are remembering and recollecting their experiences in the oral history interviews conducted with them.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Vance, *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 4.

⁴⁶ Vance, *Death so Noble*, 3.

⁴⁷ See Ann, Interview Transcript, 6.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey K. Olick, “The Ciphered Transits of Collective Memory: Neo-Freudian Impressions,” *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 1.

⁴⁹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 15.

Within postmodern theory, the notion of historicity is incredibly important to consider; it refers to the fact that we cannot escape the historical period from which we come and are forever embedded within the historical present in which we live. “Where knowledge of the past is transmitted,” writes David Lowenthal, “the past is perceived entirely in terms of present accounts.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, Norman Knowles indicates that when approaching the “vernacular past...recollections are malleable and undergo constant revision in the light of subsequent knowledge and present need.”⁵¹

In relation to the war brides in particular, their current present reality lies within the fact that these women range in age anywhere from eight-eight to ninety-four years old and are therefore far removed from their experiences in the 1940s and 1950s that are the topic of this study. In this case, the war brides are “not inventing nonexistent past experiences, but they are retelling them within the language, perceptions, and mandates of their present.”⁵² As June (b.1920), whose husband passed away nearly twenty-two years ago notes, “it is hard to recall those things when life is so different today, you know.”⁵³ Knowles writes about how elderly participants endure “feelings of disenchantment with the present and the idealization of the past expressed in the reminiscences.”⁵⁴ As a result, these women are in a process which is referred to as “life review,”⁵⁵ in which elderly participants look favorably upon their past experiences to offset the realities of the coming present. Within this stage, the war brides have had years

⁵⁰ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 7.

⁵¹ Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 32.

⁵² Emily Honig, “Getting to the Source: Striking Lives, Oral History and the Politics of Memory,” *Journal of Women’s History* 9 (1997): 154-155.

⁵³ June, Interview Transcription, 6.

⁵⁴ Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists*, 33.

⁵⁵ Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists*, 33.

in which to reflect on their experiences and look upon their experiences in drastically different circumstance, forever altering their experiences as they remember them.

Interesting, for instance, all of the participants had lost their husbands many years earlier, some as many as thirty years ago, and when asked about the difficulties they had in the early years of their marriages were able to reflect upon those times with a certain degree of distance and reflection.

Ann (b. 1923), whose husband eventually left her for a younger woman, when asked about whether or not she had heard about any difficulties other war brides faced stated, “a lot of the husbands seemed to drink and I think the war had something to do with that, we don’t really know, I only know what I went through in the bombing and a lot of these fellows that went overseas you don’t really know what they went through. We often wondered, we chatted about that over the years, you know, about the different gals whose husbands did that.”⁵⁶ Through this, it is evident that Ann, while eventually divorcing her husband, has been able to contextualize and make sense of her relationship with her husband after having many years to reflect upon it. Harriet Wrye and Jacqueline Church note that the life review process and reminiscing about the past “meets another major need of the aged, given the fact that old age is a time beset by losses of all kinds.”⁵⁷ Similar to Ann, Joan (b. 1920) who stated that “well my husband and I...oh you all have your fights and stuff,” even though she was often very candid regarding her opinions

⁵⁶ Ann, Interview Transcription, 7.

⁵⁷ Harriet Wrye and Jacqueline Churilla, “Looking Inward, Looking Backward: Reminiscence and the Life Review,” in *Women’s Oral History: The Frontier Reader* edited by Susan Armitage, Patricia Hart and Karen Weathermon (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 147.

about her experiences when asked about any difficulties with her husband responded with:

He liked to party and things you know when he came back. We didn't have much in our house except Sherry or Port at Christmas; I wasn't brought up that way so it sort of annoyed me. I think I was kind of hard on him though, and I've thought about things a lot since, I think I was hard on him, I didn't realize how much he'd been through, memories and stuff and that was our main bone of contention.⁵⁸

It is likewise apparent in the remaining of the interviews that, in the twilight years of their lives, the life review process functions as a coping mechanism in which the war brides dealt with the losses of their husbands and difficult times early in their marriages. Therefore, when interviewing elderly participants, or even just those who have had a significant amount of time to reflect upon their experiences in the past, it is difficult to gain perspective into the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the time that is being studied. As a result, much like other oral history projects, rather than gaining "experience" as it existed in the past, this project is actively gathering the "experiences" of the war brides that are continuously and presently being created and recreated.

In addition to questions concerning memory and self-reflection, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee has significant influences upon the types of narratives and "experiences" gathered in oral history interviews. In this case, the effect the researcher has on any given interview plays a significant role in silencing various experiences of the war brides. The role of the researcher in the creation of academic research has, especially with the rise of the postmodern era, become at the forefront of the current academic debate surrounding knowledge production. In recent years, it has

⁵⁸ Joan, Interview Transcription, 7.

become widely accepted that “the notion that findings are created through the interaction of the inquirer is a more plausible description of the inquiry process than objective observation.”⁵⁹ This especially rings true when conducting oral history interviews as both the interviewer and the interviewee play active roles in the creation of any given interview. As Sherna Gluck notes, “the interview is a transaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and their responses to each other form the basis for the creation of the oral history.”⁶⁰

The age, social standing, and mannerisms of the interviewer have a significant impact on how interviewees position themselves in their narratives, in the responses given in the interview, and in their performance as a participant. In this instance in particular, I believe my age, twenty-four at the time I conducted the interviews, altered each participant’s mindset as to what message she hoped to communicate and what picture of her past she wished to paint. As a result, the perceptions the interviewee holds of the interviewer him/herself play an imperative role into the performance of the participant. As Carly Adams remarks of her interview with an elderly participant Betty stating, “How Betty (potentially) constructed me as a researcher and the influence this had on the interview reinforced the intersubjectivity of the oral history performance.”⁶¹ For instance, the war brides were often recollecting experiences from when they were in their early and mid-twenties, the same age as me, the interviewer. It was evident that the

⁵⁹ E. Guba and Y. Lincoln, “Completing Paradigms in Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues,” in *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*, edited by S.N. Hesse-Biber and P. Leavy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

⁶⁰ Gluck, “What’s So Special About Women?” 13.

⁶¹ Carly Adams, “(Writing Myself Into) Betty White’s Stories: (De)constructing Narratives of/through Feminist Sport History Research,” *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 411.

war brides sought to set themselves up as examples for how young women today should act, think, dress, look, and feel. It was common for the participants to comment on how young women, young mothers, or young wives are presenting themselves or how their actions differ greatly from their actions when they were young women. One instance with Betty (b. 1921), whose husband worked for the *Albertan* for twenty-five years, portrays the type of interaction evident of this occurrence:

PB: I have five boys in that little tiny house with two bedrooms in Bowness; can you imagine cooking for seven people? Breakfast, dinner, supper, and I don't even remember being...and I always use to be dressed up. I got pictures of me with the kids, nice dresses, and my hair done. When you see some of the mothers these days, they don't look after themselves, you know they walk around.⁶²

Additionally, later in the interviews, the war brides would often begin to ask questions about my personal life and provide comments or advice on various matters of present-day life. At one point or another in the interview, half of the participants switched their positionality in the interview from the role of the interviewee to the role of the interviewer.⁶³ This, according to Melissa Walker, holds various social meanings. As Walker notes oral histories and “stories about the past also served didactic purposes; they told stories about the idealized past in an attempt to convince a younger generation these values were worth preserving.”⁶⁴ When the participant’s “collective future is threatened,” continues Walker, “they seek to maintain their value by binding themselves to the past,” and “provide narrators with a tool to convey a sense of what was possible – of what the

⁶² Betty, Interview Transcription, 3.

⁶³ Unfortunately, it wasn't until I began writing this chapter that I realized that these moments had importance. As the war brides often asked these questions at the end of the interview, in some cases, I had already turned off the recorder and was unable to collect these moments of interaction. However, I was able to collect a few of these instances to include them in the analysis of this chapter.

⁶⁴ Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, 7.

future might look like if it combined the best features of the past and present.”⁶⁵ Arguably the war brides consider themselves “as a group in decline,” as many of them have already passed on or are around the age of ninety and thus feel the need to “assert the value of the life they had lived,”⁶⁶ on the younger interviewer. For instance, returning to Betty, who was married in her very early twenties and had five children with her husband, began to ask me about my private life at the end of the interview:

PB: Oh I love Calgary. Were you born here?

LY: I was born in Lethbridge.

PB: Have you got lots of brothers and sisters?

LY: I have a twin brother and an older sister and then I have a half brother and sister who live in England.

PB: Did your mother marry twice?

LY: My father married twice.

PB: What happened to your other one?

LY: They got divorced.

PB: Who is your mother now?

LY: My dad got married, he’s quite a bit older than my mom, and had two kids and got divorced and then married my mom in England and then my mom and dad immigrated to Lethbridge from England and then had three kids here. My mom wasn’t married before.

PB: They are quite young still then.

LY: Yeah my mom is. My dad is a little older.

PB: How old was your mom when she got married?

⁶⁵ Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, 7.

⁶⁶ Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, 7.

LY: She was twenty-eight or twenty-nine I think.

PB: Oh I was going to say she must have been getting...she had never been married before?

LY: No.

PB: Oh for heaven's sake. You're not married yet?

LY: No I live with my boyfriend.

PB: Oh do you? That's nice. They all seem to live together first...⁶⁷

Likewise, when reflecting upon her earlier life prior to the war and her experiences as a "war bride," Joan (b. 1920), who boarded at a private school, remarked:

"But at school we took all kinds of subjects, I loved school, I really enjoyed it. I know we took scripture, which isn't in any courses now, we took geography, history, history I loved in fact I could have told you all the dates years ago, we took English, literature, English composition and English grammar. We took biology, and physics and chemistry, all separate subjects, they say they haven't got time anymore, we took French and there was a choice between German and Latin and I took Latin which I think is very good, they don't teach it anymore."⁶⁸

Arguably then, through commenting on present-day activities, the workings of present-day society, and the positions that young women hold, the war brides seek to validate their current place within the world through oral history interviews. As Walker notes of Southern farm people, "rural southerners did not, however, engage in such memory work simply to express the boundaries of a community of memory...They also used their stories to address serious matters in their present worlds...Southern farm people framed their stories about the past by consciously contrasting those days to the present."⁶⁹ Likewise, through these types of actions, the war brides are able to maintain a

⁶⁷ Betty, Interview Transcription, 6-7.

⁶⁸ Joan, Interview Transcription, 1.

⁶⁹ Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, 7.

certain level of value to their experiences that was so highly regarded in the period directly after the war.

While collective identities, self-reflection, and the life review processes influence the nature of the experiences oral historians can gather, it is not simply the war brides themselves who control and monitor their memories, but rather various social institutions also play a role in monitoring the war brides experiences which results in the silencing of the more personal narratives of the past. This is due to the fact that oral narratives are constructed and created through our daily interactions with discourse and the representations made available to us. For instance, "...work emphasizing the genuinely collective nature of social memory has demonstrated that there are long-term structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individuals to escape them," and as Olick continues to write, "powerful institutions, moreover, clearly support some histories more than others, provide narrative patterns and exemplars of how individuals can and should remember, and stimulate public memory in ways and for reasons that have little to do with the individual or aggregate neurological records."⁷⁰ Not only that, but for the most part, it is these powerful institutions that control and monitor the discourses which are available to the war brides on their own experiences in the post-war era.

In addition to that, it is perhaps "that in all modes of experience, we always base our particular experiences on a prior context in order to ensure that they are intelligible at all; that prior to any single experience, our mind is already predisposed with a framework

⁷⁰ Olick, *The Collective Memory Reader*, 20.

of outlines, of typical shapes of experiences objects.”⁷¹ Thus, as Connerton further notes, “to perceive an object or act upon it is to locate it within this system of expectations.”⁷² These predisposed frameworks that validate our particular experiences as “true” are indeed shaped and created by discourse and representation. In this sense then, it is possible to uncover how and why gender historians question “the evidence of experience” due to the role discourse and representation plays in the formulation of our own identities and memories. In Chapter Two for instance, we saw the example of *Love and War*, an online archives that has been preserved by the federal government of Canada, which serves as an informative site to gain access into the lives and experiences of the war brides.

It is specifically these types of discourses that are made available to the public that have an influence on the collective memory of the war brides more personally. As a result, it is no wonder why “students of collective memory have chiefly been interested in the memory practices a community undertakes to maintain publicly available symbols of the past, with memorials and commemorations, along with the practices of the media, art, education, and other cultural and political institutions.”⁷³ Therefore, public history that has been created of the war brides and which dominates the research completed on these women plays a central role in the community of memory formed by the war brides.

Throughout this thesis, the connection between history, our knowledge of the past, and the notion of the “nation” has been exposed and in relation to collective

⁷¹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.

⁷² Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 6.

⁷³ Arien Mack and William Hirst, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): xi.

memory and the recollection of our past, the “nation” is still ever present. In combination with dominant discourses of Canadian national identity and the experiences of the war brides, the war brides’ collective pasts served to create what Billie Melman refers to as the “feminized version of the national memory.”⁷⁴ In the creation of a feminized version of national memory there is “an attempt to historicize individual women and integrate them in the public memory, with a new notion of the relation between the public and domestic.”⁷⁵ The case of the war brides certainly fit this mold, as the creation of the term war bride itself was an attempt to historicize individual experiences into a group phenomenon that portrayed certain characteristics of wartime nationalism and post-war reconstruction in a more public sense. Certain narratives, much like the narratives of the war brides, “have been invented to include them into the collective memory, the national memory or the memory of elites.”⁷⁶ Through the construction of a collective narrative, the war brides stories were a way in which to include women’s narratives into the national history. Moreover, dominant national narratives and discourses had an effect upon the recollection of their experiences as often times the war brides sought to cement their narrative into the “the feminized version of national memory.”

There are numerous examples that indicate how the broader national discourse of patriotism and nationhood seeped through into the personal recollections of the war brides’ experiences. For instance, Hilda (b. 1924), whose father was too distraught to say goodbye on the day she left for Canada, when asked about any problems other war brides might have encountered in their first few years in Canada stated that “they naturally feel a

⁷⁴ Billie Melman, *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace 1870-1930* (Toronto: Routledge, 2013), 8.

⁷⁵ Melman, *Borderlines*, 13.

⁷⁶ Melman, *Borderlines*, 5-6.

little homesick and miss the family, but as for the country, the country's so good."⁷⁷ At the end of June's (b. 1925) interview for instance, she remarked, "...and you will be able to say how we built Canada, I know I built Canada up by six children, they all did well, and I've got a daughter that's a principle and I've got a daughter that's a teacher, a daughter that's a bank manager, and my son is a captain in the army, so they all did their bit for Canada."⁷⁸ Here, the historization of June's experience into public discourse is prevalent as her private memories and recollections have been transformed on a national stage to reflect a very "feminized version of national memories."⁷⁹

Many of the participants had similar comments. For instance, Edith (b. 1921), who often took part in church and community events in the Lethbridge area, when asked if she had any closing remarks added, "just as I say, Canada has been very good to me," and Nora (B. 1919), who was highly educated and came from a privileged London family, likewise stated, "there were thousands of us, it must have had some effect, they brought different ideas, they brought different educational criteria. There were people here who had never met anybody like us and so it must have had some effect...and every one of these I would say have at least one child, some of them had four or five so that increased the population."⁸⁰ The collective memory of the war brides then, "unfolds primarily within the bounds of the nation state," illustrating how indeed, "the past is largely a national project."⁸¹ Evidently therefore, the war brides' collective memories are

⁷⁷ Hilda, Interview Transcription, 4.

⁷⁸ June, Interview Transcription, 10.

⁷⁹ Melman, *Borderlines*, 8.

⁸⁰ Nora, Interview Transcription, 6.

⁸¹ Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, "Introduction," in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, edited by Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 2.

forever embedded within national projects of state formation and nation building using their roles and positions as mothers to solidify their experiences in a “feminized” Canadian nation state. With this, it is possible to see just how “collective memory has played a critical role in discussions of collective, and in particular, national identity.”⁸²

With these new understandings surrounding the discursive and collective nature of “experience,” the current debate surrounding subjectivity, and individual versus collective identity, it is possible to see just how difficult it is to attain the war brides’ personal stories of their past. It can be said then that in this sense, “a person remembers only by situating himself within the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or several currents of collective thought,”⁸³ thereby stripping historical subjects of their autonomous experiences and, to some degree, their authority. It has become evident that the significant social, political, and linguistic influences on the war brides memories effectively serve to silence the personal and glorify the more dominant collective. However, that is not to say that we have nothing to learn from the collective stories of women in our past. Whether they may be inherently truthful or not, the ways in which the women chose to remember their stories, the stories they chose to omit, and the ones they chose to include can tell us much about the social surroundings from which the war brides situated themselves in the post-war period and the broader national and regional narratives of post-war Canadian society. What is evident is that in the case of the war brides, their collective memory and identity is not solely formed from their interactions with one another, but rather their experiences and stories fit within a much larger discourse of idealized images of post-war citizenship, femininity, and Canadian nation

⁸² Mack and Hirst, xi.

⁸³ Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 121.

building. Thus, their stories and selected memories not only serve to validate their roles and images as war brides but also aid in the validation of a much broader identity of an exemplary Canadian citizen.

Experience, Agency, and Authority:

While there are considerable limitations in oral history narratives in regards to obtaining authentic and unique accounts of women's experiences, feminists and oral historians continue to argue for the agency and authority of women in the retelling of their experiences. On the surface, formative and often persuasive ideals of collective memory and identity and the masking of one's true thoughts and feelings seemingly dominate discourses surrounding oral history narratives. However, collective memory "provides us with, at best, an incomplete picture of the relationship between history and memory."⁸⁴ After all, collective memories are located within "and articulated by the individual in order to play any role in social or political life."⁸⁵ Thus, this section of the chapter illustrates the role of the individual in the creation of historical memory and how the participants understood and made sense of their own experiences. Indeed, this thesis has been riddled with discussions surrounding gender historians and their use of representation and discourse in their historical inquiries, which can arguably remove any glimpses of agency those of marginalized groups hold. For instance, Louise Tilly notes how, "the focus on method and text (whether a formal statement or language or binary oppositions expressed in everyday phrases) seems to me, however, to downplay human

⁸⁴ Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, 8.

⁸⁵ Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, 8.

agency and tip the scales towards an overemphasis on social constrain.”⁸⁶ However, feminists and writers and conductors of oral history argue that if we look beneath the surface of oral history narratives, unique and personal recollections of the past are continuously present.

It has been well documented that the use of oral history is especially compatible with writing women’s history as it provides an avenue for which to uncover women’s agency in the retelling of their experiences. Indeed, oral history, “beyond simply documenting oppression, it illuminates the strategies women have adopted to cope with their situation, and the ways they have come to terms with, compensated for, and even challenged the limitations they faced.”⁸⁷ Thus, while many would argue that the rise of postmodern gender history has posed a formative challenge to the agency of women in our past, when it comes to studying the lives of women, individual agency still remains central in feminist studies. Even Scott, in her questioning of agency and the evidence of experience, still maintained that, “subjects do have agency.”⁸⁸ It is important to note however that, “even if Scott rejects the notion that historians can capture experience in the sense of “lived reality” or “raw events” she concedes that “experience is not a word we can do without.”⁸⁹ Thus, this chapter uncovers what evidence of experience can be

⁸⁶ As quoted in Margaret Strobel and Marjorie Bingham, “The Theory and Practice of Women’s History and Gender History in Global Perspective,” in *Women’s History in a Global Perspective* vol. 1, edited by Bonnie Smith (American Historical Association, 2004), 12.

⁸⁷ Nancy Grey Osterud and Lu Ann Jones, “If I say so myself: Oral Histories of Rural Women,” *Oral History Review* 17, no. 2 (Autumn, 1989): 3.

⁸⁸ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 793.

⁸⁹ Kathleen Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse And Experience,” *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 375.

found within the oral histories of the war brides, and how the war brides enacted moments of agency, resistance, and authority.

For feminists and oral historians then, the evidence of the experiences of women and a conception of agency are crucial in decentering the belief that discourse and representation continuously and incontrovertibly create a sense of our experiences and our histories. While to some, language and discourse reign supreme in the representation of women's pasts, the location of women's experiences should remain on the agenda of the gender historian. As Sangster notes, gender historians should not "totally abandon the concept of experience, moving towards a notion of a de-politicized and 'unknowable' past. We do not want to return to a history which either obscures power relationships or marginalizes women's voices. Without a firm grounding of oral narratives in their material and social context, and a probing analysis of the relation between the two, insights on narrative form and on representation may remain unconnected to any useful critique of oppression and inequality."⁹⁰ Therefore, exposing and highlighting women's agency in the retelling of their stories is thus a vital aspect of historians of women who continue to seek to give women a voice within dominant historical narratives. As Canning notes "a conception of agency as a site of mediation between discourse and experiences serves not only to dislodge the deterministic view in which discourse always seems to construct experience but also to dispel the notion that discourses are...shaped by everything but the experiences of the people the text claims to represent."⁹¹

This section of the chapter serves the very purpose to dispel the idea that women have no experiences outside of discourse and directly contradicts the discourses that were

⁹⁰ Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes*, 22.

⁹¹ Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn," 378.

created of the war brides, as we saw through complex discourses processes in Chapter Two and the “silencing of the personal” in the first half of this chapter. Even though the war brides are often positioned within a postmodern emphasis of collectivity and the loss of the subject, this section of the chapter exposes the multiple and sometimes conflicting identities of these women and how the war brides contested the broader societal discourses that supposedly portrays who these women are and what their experiences have been.

Throughout this section of this chapter, I impose moments and methods of self-reflexivity, which I believe to be crucial in feminist oral history methodologies and in the uncovering of women’s experiences. Reflexive historians and practicing self-reflexivity when conducting oral history interviews can assist in the decentering of the discursive and dominant representations of the war brides’ experiences and can aid in the uncovering of women’s experiences as a whole. Locating oneself within one’s work or “writing myself into the oral history process,”⁹² can allow for researchers to become aware of how their actions can and do affect the experiences told by the oral history participants. As Alan Wong suggests, a more self-reflexive historian “reminds oral history practitioners of their own positionality...and thus helps keep the power balanced between those on both sides of the table.”⁹³ A reflexive researcher is a researcher who does not merely discuss the outcomes of their research, but one who actively engages in their own interpretations of the research project. According to Douglas Booth, a “fully reflexive historian will engage with her or his ontology, epistemology, sources, theory,

⁹² Adams, “(Writing Myself Into) Betty White’s Stories,” 403.

⁹³ Alan Wong, “Conversations for the Real World: Shared Authority, Self-Reflexivity, and Process in the Oral History Interview,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43 (2009): 245.

ethics, morality, politics, viewpoints, concept of time and space, context, narrative, rhetoric, genre and field.”⁹⁴

There are many methods for conducting oral history interviews but feminist oral history methodologies are particularly useful for uncovering women’s experiences and highlighting the agency of women in our past. As Adams notes, “the feminist agenda of centralizing women’s knowledge and women’s subjective experiences has been increasingly taken up through the incorporation of oral histories and personal reminiscences as a methodological recognition of diversified perspectives on (and constructions of) the past.”⁹⁵ Feminist oral history utilizes qualitative research tools such as a more informal interview setting, intersubjectivity (the acceptance of the mutual co-creation of historical narratives by the researcher and the participant), and allowing the interview participant to determine the tone and direction of the interview itself. Unlike more traditional or scientifically quantitative methods of conducting oral history narratives, subjectivity rather than objectivity is celebrated within feminist methods of oral history. Objectivity, within the realm of feminist historical practices, is far from ideal as “objectivity is difficult to attain as emotional responding and engaging with an interviewer produces a far more personal and in-depth account by the narrator.”⁹⁶ Thus, if conducting the interview properly, the interviewer should be able to urge the participant to tell “stories that lie beyond the constraints of acceptable discussion.”⁹⁷ Feminist

⁹⁴ Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 212.

⁹⁵ Adams, “(Writing Myself Into) Betty White’s Stories,” 402.

⁹⁶ Jason Ruiz, “Queering Oral History: Reflections on the Origins of the Twin Cities LGBT Oral History Project,” in *Queer Twin Cities*, edited by Kevin Murphy et al. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 11.

⁹⁷ Anderson and Jack, 11.

inquiries of oral history interviews should therefore allow the space for the realities of the participant's feelings and experiences. As Sherry Thomas notes of oral history narratives, "it was a matter of not taking generalized assessments but rather digging down into a particular period of time, a particular feeling, trying to go beneath the surface."⁹⁸

While I am not suggesting that the methods of feminist oral history inquiries were perfect throughout this entire examination, there were moments in which traces of women's agency, authority and diversity were evident in the interviews. For instance, the war brides contested previously prescribed gendered assumptions about their domestic skills and feminine nature as proper British women who far exceeded the domestic skills and abilities of their Canadian counterparts. As was uncovered in Chapter Two, the war brides were largely heralded as "proper English women" who possessed superior "womanly skills." A January 11th, 1944 *Globe and Mail* article was even fearful that "too many are imagining that there is no place in this country for the household things for which they (the war brides) are accustomed to."⁹⁹ However, the war brides often counteracted these previously assigned assumptions about their abilities and were hesitant of being portrayed as this perfect type of woman. For instance, Joan (b. 1920), who moved to Lethbridge after the war with her Canadian husband, stated of her first few years in Canada, "I didn't even know how to cook. I made an apple pie for the first time and I was carrying it out and Mac (husband) said don't drop that it might go through the basement (laughs)."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Sherry Thomas, "Digging Beneath the Surface: Oral History Techniques," in *Women's Oral History: The Frontier Reader*, edited by Susan Armitage, Patricia Hart and Karen Weathermon (Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 2002), 57.

⁹⁹ "Woman's Point of View," *Globe and Mail*, June 11th, 1944.

¹⁰⁰ Joan, Interview Transcription, 6.

Likewise, Ann (b. 1923) who also settled down in Lethbridge and lived above a funeral home for the first few years of her marriage remarked how, “I couldn’t cook because, being the youngest in the family, I never had to and then the rationing came along and I didn’t know anything. I thought well I’ll boil an egg and I thought it would take three minutes. Well that didn’t work because I put it in cold water (laughs). My father-in-law gave me a cookbook but mind you it was an American cookbook so it was a lot different. But at least it helped and the first thing I cooked was bacon and eggs and I had never cooked bacon and eggs before.”¹⁰¹ In this case, the war brides serve as an example for which personal narratives contest and contradict dominant meanings and discourses paving the way for moments of the “personal” in direct contradiction with the “collective.” In this case then, as Kristin Langellier notes, the “telling of personal narratives may resist dominant meanings in a transformation of meanings.”¹⁰²

Practicing inter-subjective oral history within feminist oral history methods alternatively aids in producing and uncovering the war brides agency within the retelling of their experiences. As Kristina Minister notes, “once narrators are free to take some responsibility for the project, and once researchers have explicitly placed themselves in a subjective position within the project, chances improve for the dialogic relationships that can support examination and disclosure of narrators’ life experiences as women.”¹⁰³ Throughout the interviews, there were examples of such mutual subjectivity between the researcher and the interviews, which created a narration of the war brides’ stories that

¹⁰¹ Ann, Interview Transcription, 9.

¹⁰² Kristin M. Langellier, “Personal Narratives: Perspectives on Theory and Research,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 9 (October 1989): 271.

¹⁰³ Kristina Minister, “A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview,” *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 36.

went beyond the more dominant ideals of what their experiences were believed to be. For instance, in Chapter Two and in the former half of this chapter, the war brides and the representations of the war brides illustrated courageous and fearless women who moved and settled in their new country with very few difficulties and few feelings of homesickness, regret, or despair. However, in my attempts as the researcher to dig beneath the surface utilizing a feminist methodology of a co-constructive and mutually subjective text, some of the participants moved beyond conventional ideals of their thoughts and feelings and shared their more “negative” and difficult emotions. For instance, with Ann (b. 1923), there were moments throughout the interview where I approached the interview in varying ways, subconsciously shifting between more traditional and “feminist” practices of oral history interviewing, producing different and contrasting results. The beginning of the interview was far more structured and followed that of a traditional interviewer/interviewee relationship:

LY: Okay so could you just tell me when and where you were born?

PA: March 19th 1923.

LY: And were you born in Eastbourne?

PA: Yup.

LY: And where about in England is that?

PA: In the southeast, about sixty-five miles southeast of London. Like on the English Channel. And I still miss the ocean.

LY: So that would be why you were bombed so much. So maybe could you just tell me about your life growing up, your early life.

PA: Well I was the youngest of eight children and we didn't have very much money, we were very poor in fact and when the war came along and I got to be eighteen, I joined the air force and went home on leave and on Christmas

eve, I went home to a dance and that's where I met my first husband and he asked me to dance.

LY: So what did your parents do, what were their occupations?

PA: Well my dad rented land and grew vegetables and fruit, we always had a big garden with fig trees, I don't know if you have ever tasted fresh figs, they are beautiful, lots of apples and pears, everything.

LY: Did you go to school?

PA: Yeah, in Eastbourne, I think I was about sixteen when I left.

LY: Okay.¹⁰⁴

In this instance, while Ann is answering the questions, she keeps her answers short and brief and often devoid of any great detail and personal thoughts, emotions, or feelings. In the same vein, I, the researcher, instead of responding to Ann's answers simply moved on to the next question. As a result, as Adams notes of her similar experience, "by asking a completely unrelated question I managed to unintentionally imply that I had heard enough about her experiences, about that moment."¹⁰⁵ Thus, in this instance, I as the researcher, failed to provide a safe place for Ann to "expand, explain, and meander in ways that were meaningful to her."¹⁰⁶ However, as I became more comfortable as the interview progressed, I was able to indulge in a more inter-subjective approach to the interview:

LY: Other than that, how did life change when the war started? How different was it than before?

PA: Well it was kind of scary; I had never gone through any bombings or anything like that. I know when I came over here and lived over the funeral home on 3rd avenue, all the ambulances and fire trucks seemed to go up 3rd

¹⁰⁴ Ann, Interview Transcription, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Adams, "(Writing Myself Into) Betty White's Stories," 410.

¹⁰⁶ Adams, "(Writing Myself Into) Betty White's Stories," 410.

avenue and when the siren sounded I was always scared, I thought it was an air raid siren.

LY: Yeah, that's funny some of the other war brides mentioned that when they came over here I think one of them heard a car backfire and her instinct was to get under the table. I can only imagine how scary it would be to have your houses bombed.

PA: Yeah, another war bride told me she lived near a train station in Saskatchewan and they seemed to make a noise and she was scared and she dived underneath the kitchen table and they laughed at her, but it takes a long time to get over it.

LY: I can only imagine how scary it would be to have your houses bombed.

PA: Yeah, it wasn't very much fun.¹⁰⁷

In this example, through both listening and personally engaging with Ann's responses, I was able to create a safe space for Ann to share moments of her experiences that have remained meaningful to her for over sixty years and to uncover more "personal" stories that contradict the more "collective" ideals of the war brides.

During the interview process, in addition to uncovering alternative or diverse stories of experience or stories that directly contradicted the dominant representations of the war brides, the participants experienced feelings of empowerment and female independence in the retelling of their stories. However, due to the "interpretive conflict in oral narrative research," feminist interviewers often overlook these moments of female empowerment.¹⁰⁸ For instance, over the course of this project, it became apparent that there were moments in which meaning was constructed "on two levels

¹⁰⁷ Ann, Interview Transcription, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Katherine Borland, "That's Not What I Said: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," in *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*, edited by S.N Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 522.

simultaneously.”¹⁰⁹ On one hand, there was an assumption by me, the researcher, that the remarks of the war brides were simply a reflection of the “collective,” while on the other hand the participants were in fact portraying something quite different. Thus, within oral histories, really listening to what the participants are saying can produce alternative meanings to their once perceived “collective” remarks. As Anderson and Jack note, feminist researchers can often “short circuit the listening process,” and Adams, a feminist researcher, also confessed that, “I do not always listen carefully to responses, and I always have my own agenda and expectations.”¹¹⁰ However, if feminist researchers are aware of these shortcomings, oral history testimonies can allow for the participants to reenact their experiences on their own terms, which can result in moments where women can portray their independence and importance resulting in a type of empowerment for the participants.

While these moments may not be against the grain of the dominant discourse, create new or alternative “experiences,” or necessarily challenge conventional notions of femininity or womanhood, the moments the participants chose to share are the ones that ensured that the women *themselves* felt empowered. After all, who or what is the oral history interview about if not the participants themselves? For instance, when asked about what sorts of things she did on a daily basis when she first arrived in Canada, Betty (b. 1921), who already had two children by the time she made her voyage to Canada stated:

¹⁰⁹ Borland, “That’s Not What I Said: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research,” 522.

¹¹⁰ Anderson and Jack, 12; Adams, 404.

“Well I know when I first came here, like during the war, we were rationed for clothes, we only got so much and so when I came, I got a lot more money than the English that married English men right the Canadian was a lot better, twice as much. When I first came to Medicine Hat the first thing I did was went out and got some nice clothes because we were rationed in England, you couldn’t get very nice clothes. We were there about two months I think and came to Calgary. So I don’t remember being scared, it’s a wonder I wasn’t scared coming out to a strange country. My kids were so well behaved, my boys they were shy, of course they were scared stiff I guess, coming over on the boat, I was fourteen days on the boat because war wasn’t over and there was land mines all around us and we had to go around them, fourteen days and we had to wear life jacket of course on the boat and I had to carry three life jackets on the boat. And some of them were deathly sick, I wasn’t sick at all from seasickness, and the kids were sick, but mine weren’t, nothing wrong with mine.”¹¹¹

There are many instances in this passage that suggest feelings of empowerment including Betty’s portrayal of her financial independence. This quotation is especially telling when Betty discusses how she had to carry “three life jackets on the boat,” and endure fourteen days of travel with her two young boys without the help of her husband. This, for woman in her early twenties who had never lived away from her parents, can be considered a formative endeavor and through her retelling of this experience, Betty is highlighting her strength, perseverance, and independence when encountering new and difficult situations in experiences as a war bride.

Betty’s account also implies a sense of financial security and independence and how she, making the decision to go and buy new clothes upon her arrival, had financial autonomy. Through this, Betty showed her awareness and apparent knowledge of her and her husband’s financial situation and how she had some authority in the matter of what she chose to purchase. While Betty’s shopping endeavors clearly do not challenge conventional ideals of “the domestic woman” living in the post-war period, it was, at that

¹¹¹ Betty, Interview Transcription, 3.

time, an avenue for which she could exert her own independence and express feelings of empowerment.

Similarly, Sylvia (b. 1925), who often talked about the difficulties with rationing during the war in England, expressed her financial independence when describing how her mother came over to visit her from England for the first time. Sylvia remarked how, “my mom came over, just once. I paid for her to come over one time. She didn’t know anything about it, I made all the arrangements...And it was so funny, in England I don’t think the women hardly ever knew how to wear a different bra, their boobs were always way down and I just hated that (laughs)...I took my mom to Sears over at North Hill and I had her fitted for three new bras. And I bought her two pant suits, she had never worn a pant suit in her life but she loved how ladies were wearing them here, so I bought her two.”¹¹² While these types of arguments might very well be considered outdated, and recent feminists, due to their present knowledge on the structures and ideologies that have come to limit women, would be wary of making these statements, this type of “independence” was memorable and notable for the participants and was situated from within a social context and gendered norms of the post-war era. Often, academics enter into oral history interviews with a preexisting set of knowledge existing from scholarly work, and this level of knowledge of “structural forces that shape and influence participation of the past,” are often “peripheral, invisible, and unrecognized by the participants involved.”¹¹³ Indeed, the participants for this examination were not necessarily concerned with, or aware of, my poststructural feminist attempts to deconstruct the feminized representations of the war brides.

¹¹² Sylvia, Interview Transcription, 5-6.

¹¹³ Adams, “(Writing Myself Into) Betty White’s Stories,” 411.

Likewise, June (b. 1925) recalls her early years living out on an isolated summer cottage lake house with five children:

“Anyway, I started teaching kindergarten when my fifth child was born and the others were at school and that so I taught kindergarten as a singing teacher and I had about seven or eight classes that I visited and we did routines and stuff like that and we taught them how to start to learn to write and all read and things like that. It wasn’t very stressful on me, it was very good, and I could take Pauline, my then youngest child, but nine years later, I became pregnant again and my youngest daughter was born, she’s fifty this year in December and so I left school and when it was time, you know, once you were maybe a year and a half to two and I tried to join again, I had to go back to school to get a degree in music or a degree in psychology. Well that meant travelling every day to Montreal and back and I still had three children at home besides the new baby, so I decided to have a care center in my house for four or five children.”¹¹⁴

While June’s job opportunities fell within traditional prescribed ideals of the types of occupations women should hold, June recalls this passage in such a way as to illustrate that it was her independent idea to work and her idea to open up a day care center. Nowhere in this passage does June reference her husband in her decision-making process. Daphne (b. 1926) and Hilda (b. 1924) likewise express their financial independence and decision-making process. Daphne, who often felt isolated living in Wasaga Beach in her first few years in Canada, stated, “So after a while, the first year, somebody came to me and said do you think you could help me clean these summer homes? Because they rented them, so that’s what I did. I went to work,”¹¹⁵ while Hilda, whose husband worked at a case company for thirty-five years noted, “I babysat once in a while, and after a while, I saved the money up to go overseas and I always found enough to do.”¹¹⁶ Oral historians focusing on the lives and roles of women within their communities have

¹¹⁴ June, Interview Transcription, 7.

¹¹⁵ Daphne, Interview Transcription, 5.

¹¹⁶ Hilda, Interview Transcription, 4.

commented on the fact that oral history interviews provides a place for women to express their independence and their position as “partners”¹¹⁷ within a marital union.

This is especially telling in the work conducted by Laurie Mercier, which centered on women’s roles in the American west.¹¹⁸ For instance, as Nancy Grey Osterud and Lu Ann Jones note, “Mercier’s article is especially insightful in its analysis of women’s sense of themselves as farm partners, their willingness to forgo domestic conveniences in order to invest in the enterprise, and the importance of time management in the juggling of their myriad responsibilities.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, as we have seen, the war brides were very much aware of themselves as crucial components to their family units. This is precisely why feminist researchers and gender historians working within a feminist postmodern paradigm are encouraged to “toss out” their predetermined lens from which they examine women’s experiences in order to be less critical of the feminine or womanly duties in which these women completed and to rather celebrate and highlight their essential role in the workings of their families and broader societies. As Susan Geiger notes, “if we insist that the validity of women’s oral accounts must be - can only be - evaluated against existing knowledge or affirmed through the prism of the latest in fashionable social analysis, we are not following a feminist methodology in our oral history work with women.”¹²⁰

Then, researchers utilizing feminist oral history methods that seek moments of empowerment in their participants’ interviews that contrast broader theoretical concerns

¹¹⁷ Osterud and Jones, 18.

¹¹⁸ See Laurie Mercier, “Women’s Role in Montana Agriculture,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 38, no. 4 (1988): 50-61.

¹¹⁹ Osterud and Jones, 18.

¹²⁰ Susan Geiger, “What’s so Feminist About Women’s Oral History?” *Journal of Women’s History* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 174.

or the researcher's feminist agenda can uncover moments that were meaningful and empowering to the participant. For instance, Katherine Borland states that researchers "hold an explicitly political vision of the structural conditions that lead to particular social behaviors, a vision that our field collaborators many of whom do not consider themselves feminist, may not recognize as valid."¹²¹ An excellent example of this is even though her life, actions, and largely her identity, was centered around her husband, Kathy (b. 1923) expressed, "even though its hard to leave everybody and in those days you didn't think you'd ever seen anybody again, your family, you know I certainly wouldn't have been able to go home and I was never homesick and even when we lost the baby, it wasn't that I wanted to go home, all I wanted was my husband. He was a good man, we had a good life, we had over fifty years together so you know, we never had very much but we were happy."¹²² In this case, approaching Kathy's comments solely from a political or postmodern feminist lens would strip the participant of the obvious content she had with the life she lived and the strong connection she had with her husband.

Indeed, the theoretical lens from which feminist interviewers or gender historians approach their interviews can silence moments of female empowerment, agency, and authority within the interviews resulting in the emergence of the "collective" rather than the "personal." Adams conducted an interview with her elderly participant "Betty" in which she sought to document the experiences of Betty as a female athlete in the 1930s.¹²³ However, Adams notes how "by the time I had arrived on Betty's doorstep I had already assumed that the events that shaped her experiences as an athlete and

¹²¹ Borland, "That's Not What I Said: Interpretative Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," 523.

¹²² Kathy, Interview Transcription, 3.

¹²³ Adams, "(Writing Myself Into) Betty White's Stories."

Canadian representative...were historically significant – my own politics, biases, and (partial) historical understandings shaped the interview process and resulting texts and interpretations.”¹²⁴ In conclusion, Adams, whose participant was similar in age to that of the participants for this thesis, reminded the readers that in fact Betty “did not remember her athletic experiences as struggles situated within broader organizational challenges and social issues.”¹²⁵

This certainly seems to be the case for the war brides who did not situate their stories and experiences within the broader context of post-war Canadian nationalism or the large-scale domestication of Canadian families in postwar suburbia. And indeed why would they? The war brides’ own interpretations of their experiences, while they were certainly situated within “social experiences, dominant ideals of femininity,” and “existing power structures,”¹²⁶ still existed as an experience that gave meaning to their lives and provided them with strong feelings of pride and empowerment. Thus, the role of the oral historian who uses oral narratives is “not simply to sort out the truth from the falsehoods, but rather to consider the shape of the memory stories and to explore what the shape of those stories tells us about the storyteller and his or her world.”¹²⁷

While certain gender historians who question the validity of memory and deconstruct the evidence of women’s experiences may be correct, the incredibly subjective nature of oral history sources has allowed for women and gender historians to move beyond merely discourse and representation. As Paul Thompson notes, “every historical source derived from human perception is subjective, but only the oral source

¹²⁴ Adams, “(Writing Myself Into) Betty White’s Stories,” 412.

¹²⁵ Adams, “(Writing Myself Into) Betty White’s Stories,” 412.

¹²⁶ Sangster, “Telling Our Stories,” 318 as cited in Adams, 413.

¹²⁷ Walker, *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, 4.

allows us to challenge that subjectivity: to unpick the layers of memory, dig back into its darkness, hoping to reach the hidden truth.”¹²⁸ Through, “trying to go beneath the surface,”¹²⁹ feminist oral historians can reveal moments in which women take authority over their own experiences and retell them in such a way so that it validates their experiences and gives meaning to their lives. Thus, while gender historians are ever informed by postmodern and poststructural insights, gender history will almost always be “situated within a feminist materialist context,”¹³⁰ as it is the lives of women that will remain central to our examinations.

Admittedly, modern day gender historians, like myself, who have become informed by our current postmodern theoretical dominance and our desire to deconstruct the social categories that have come to limit us, can often overlook moments of resistance, subjective feelings of empowerment and independence, and experiences that contradict the status quo by women in oral history narratives. However, through peeling back the layers of women’s oral histories, the “evidence” of the war brides’ experiences can be uncovered. Whether these stories fit within the “collective” or the “personal,” it is not about the truthfulness or validity of the stories they told, but rather, it is about how the war brides remembered their stories and how the stories that give meaning to their lives that we, as historians, should continue to document and celebrate. Indeed, Adams notes that feminist methodology and feminist researchers should “recognize and advocate women’s own interpretations of their experiences and social worlds as containing,

¹²⁸ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*.

¹²⁹ Thomas, “Digging Beneath the Surface: Oral History Techniques,” 57.

¹³⁰ Sangster, “Telling our Stories,” 22.

reflecting, and constructing important understandings of the past.”¹³¹ Even though gender historians live and work within the postmodern present, “locating experience, however difficult that project, however many dangers it encompasses, should remain one of our utopian goals.”¹³²

Conclusion:

“Experience is a subject’s history. Language is the site of history’s enactment. Historical explanation cannot, therefore, separate the two.” Joan Scott, 1991.

While the notion of experience appears to be a “seemingly unsolvable problem,”¹³³ this chapter aimed to illustrate the co-constructed nature of the war brides’ experiences as women in our past. The war brides act both as subjects and as actors in the creation of their histories and in the retelling of their personal and collective memories. Poststructural concerns with the ability to uncover the validity of one’s “true” personal memories are certainly well founded as it questions our subjectivity and glorifies the role of language and discourse in the creation of knowledge. The constant representation of the war brides’ experiences seemingly masks the historian’s ability to uncover “experience” and indeed the “evidence of experience” is inherently questionable. However, as this chapter illuminated “the act and art of remembering is always deeply personal. Like language, memory is social, but it only materializes through the minds and mouths of individuals...”¹³⁴ Thus, through methods of feminist oral histories and acknowledging women’s experiences that may or may not align with the broader feminist agenda of our time, we can, as gender historians expose and produce the experiences of

¹³¹ Adams, “(Writing Myself Into) Betty White’s Stories,” 404.

¹³² Sangster, “Telling our Stories,” 22.

¹³³ Sangster, “Telling our Stories,” 15.

¹³⁴ Walker, “Bibliographic Essay,” in *Southern Farmers*.

war brides. Through the retelling of their experiences, elderly women, in this case war brides, can relive and illuminate moments of empowerment that have existed throughout their lives placing and validating women's histories as important within the broader discourse of historical knowledge that women have long been excluded. In our postmodern world then, women's experience, while they may exist within, and sometimes even reproduce broader discourses that gender historians seek to deconstruct, are not beyond recovery and uncovering women's experiences, regardless of what theoretical paradigm you may be working within, should remain one of our formative goals as gender and feminist historians.

Conclusion:

So who writes history then? The answer is fluid, messy, and complex. As this thesis has shown, there is not one answer to this question, but rather there are multiple and coexisting proponents to the making of historical knowledge. What was evident however was that this question will continue to exist within the discipline as the answer is forever changing and evolving with the progression of our discipline. Moreover, this examination has allowed me to come to terms with my multiple, and sometimes conflicting, identities as a gender historian. This thesis has illustrated the formative role that discourse and, by extension, collective memory has played in (re)creating and producing the histories of the Southern Alberta war brides. The rise of gender history has allowed for historians to “change our focus and philosophy of history.”¹ Rather than taking self-evident historical and social categories, such as the war brides, we are now able to challenge and contest the very categories that have come to define our gendered selves and our places within the world. Through exposing the complex discourses processes at play that have come to shape the images of the war brides, we can more fully understand the interconnectedness and socially and discursively created nature of post-war Canadianness and gendered ideals.

More broadly, these developments have encouraged historians to uncover how “categories of representation and analysis – such as, class, race, gender, relations of production, biology, identity, subjectivity, agency, experience, even culture have

¹ Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4(Summer 1991): 796.

achieved their foundational status.”² It has become evident that the discursive representations of the war brides has not only come to dominate our perceptions about their histories but they have also upheld “Canadian” ideals of citizenship, patriotism, femininity, and womanhood in the post-war era. Thus, it is through the acknowledgement of the role of discourse in the creation of historical knowledge that has allowed us to “refigure history and the role of the historian and open new ways for thinking about change.”³

This thesis has additionally shown that oral history interviews have come to be influenced by the discursive representations of women’s histories. It was evident in the interviews used in this examination that the war brides’ collective experiences, in many ways, silenced the more personal and unique accounts of their experiences. In this case, broader societal and institutional influences played a role in determining what stories the war brides chose to share and what stories they appeared to forget. Then, gender historians have come to acknowledge that, “experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political.”⁴ It is demonstrated in this examination that it is difficult to gather and record women’s subjective thoughts and feelings about their histories, supporting the assumption that language and discourse play a major role in the production of historical knowledge.

² Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 796.

³ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 797.

⁴ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 797.

This thesis has also problematized the postmodern assumption that women hold no authority and play no part in the active construction of their histories. In fact, what is apparent in examining the oral histories of the war brides is that women's stories, thoughts, and feelings about their histories, however "true" or "accurate" they may be, should remain on the agenda of the feminist historian. Feminist scholars completing historical analyzes can centre their examinations on the very origin of feminist studies; that of the lives and histories of women themselves. Recent developments in feminist oral history methodology can allow for a space for which women's stories and accounts of their histories can subjectively be told. Thus, while discourse and language produce historical knowledge, women too can play a central and active role in the creation of our histories. In the interviews completed for this thesis, the war brides illustrated moments where women could express personal feelings of empowerment and independence that contested the discursive representations of their experiences. While many answers exist to this perennial question of "who writes history," this examination illustrated that women can and do have agency and authority in the creation of their own historical experiences, as after all, "what could be truer...than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through?"⁵

This examination has also allowed me to come to terms with some of my more pressing concerns surrounding knowledge production and has fashioned my current identity as a gender historian. I have also come to acknowledge the importance of asking questions about the academic field we work within, and the vital role of questioning the modes and methods through which we write history. While this may come to produce

⁵ Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," 777.

more unanswered than answered questions, one fact will remain, that I will continue to ask new and challenging questions about who and what produces historical knowledge in regards lives of women in our past.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of Participants

<u>Name:</u>	<u>Born:</u>	<u>Currently Residing:</u>
Kay	1919	Calgary, Alberta
Nora	1919	Lethbridge, Alberta
Joan	1920	Lethbridge, Alberta
Betty	1921	Calgary, Alberta
Edith	1921	Lethbridge, Alberta
Hohn	1923	Lethbridge, Alberta
Kathy	1923	Calgary, Alberta
Ann	1923	Calgary, Alberta
Hilda	1924 (d. 2012)	Lethbridge, Alberta
June	1925	Calgary, Alberta
Sylvia	1925	Calgary, Alberta
Daphne	1926	Calgary, Alberta

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Note: Not all questions will be asked in the interviews to ensure the interviews keep within the allotted time. It is expected that many of the questions will be answered in previous questions and some of the questions may be omitted from the interview.

Personal History:

Can you tell me about your early life? Where and when were you born?
What was life like in Britain prior to the war? What sorts of things did you do on a daily basis? Did you go to school? Did you live at home with your parents?
What was life like in Britain during the war? How did your life change? Did women work?
How did you meet your husband?
Can you tell me about meeting and marrying your Canadian husband? What were your family's reactions?
Can you tell me about your trip to Canada and arriving in Canada? What were your initial thoughts about Canada? What were your initial thoughts about Southern Alberta?
What was the most difficult thing about moving to and living in Southern Alberta? What was difficult for you? What surprised you? Was it difficult for you to adapt?
In comparison to Britain, what was life like for you in Southern Alberta?
Did you feel accepted by members of your husband's family? Did you feel accepted by others in the community?

Publicity:

Did you notice any publicity surrounding your arrival and the arrival of the war brides into Canada?
Was the publicity generally positive or negative?
Why do you think there was so much publicity surrounding the arrival of the war brides?

Femininity/Gender Roles:

Did you feel pressure to adhere to a certain image? Did you feel pressure to live or look a particular way?
What sorts of things did you do?
What did a typical day look like?
Did you feel different from the women in Canada? How so?
Were the expectations and standards of women similar or different between Canada and Britain?
What social groups did you join? What meetings did you attend?
Did you feel like you could teach the women in your community anything?
Were there any social events that were provided to you?

What magazines did you read/were helpful to you?

Citizenship/Immigration:

Did you have any issues obtaining Canadian citizenship? Why do you think you did/didn't have any issues obtaining Canadian citizenship?

Nationalism:

Do you consider yourself to be Canadian or British?

What did you think about Canadians prior to meeting your husband?

What did you know about Canada and Southern Alberta?

What was the general attitude toward Canada?

What were you told about Canada and Southern Alberta from the Canadian soldiers?

Did you feel a connection to Canada prior to coming to Canada?

What was the attitude in your community toward Canadian servicemen in Britain?

Ending Statements:

1) How did you feel Canadian people on a whole reacted to the war brides coming to Canada?

2) Do you feel like the arrival of the war brides had an effect on Canadian society?

3) Do you feel like you changed anything in Canadian society?

4) Do you feel as if your experiences were accurately represented in the media? Or by the Canadian government?

Appendix C:

Dear, _____

I would like to interview you for my MA thesis, which is on the lived experiences of the War Brides in Southern Alberta. Essentially, this project will not only examine the day to day experiences held by the War Brides in Southern Alberta in the post war period, but will also examine how the War Brides remember their experiences and how they take part in the construction of their own historical images. This project will be interested in uncovering what memories and experiences the War Brides feel are important when they immigrated to Canada in the Second World War period.

I am attaching a list of questions that I would like to ask you. I expect the interview to take between one hour and two hours at a location of your choosing. If you prefer anonymity, I will use a pseudonym when I refer to you in my MA thesis. **Please keep in mind that the use of a pseudonym may not grant you much anonymity given the relatively small number of British War Brides in Southern Alberta.** It is expected that only one interview will be conducted in this process. In addition, I will need to tape the information to ensure that no information is lost and to have it transcribed.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the interview at any time. **No financial or other compensation will be given during the course of your involvement in this study.** If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you can choose not to answer. If at any point you need a break, we can take a break or continue the interview at another time if that is necessary. If for any reason you wish to withdraw from the interview, you can decide what you want done with the material that has been recorded up to that point. If you wish, contact information for counseling services will be made available. During the course of the interview, you could let me know immediately if there is anything you do not wish to be made public and I will make a note of what to remove from the transcription.

Once I have completed the interview, I will transcribe it and send it back to you to check for any errors or any information you wish to have removed. Once you have approved it, the information will be used in my project. If you are willing to give your permission, it will also be placed in the Alexander Galt Museum and Archives so that it may be available for use in the future. If you would like to place restrictions on its use, such as not making it available at the archives or not using your name that will be respected and accommodated. The transcripts will be placed in the Alexander Galt Museum and Archives upon consent, unless you choose to opt out entirely from having the interview archived. If you chose to not have your interviews archived, I will ask you what you would like done with the transcribed interview. If you have any questions, you can contact me directly at 587-998-9726 or lilli.young@uleth.ca. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research can be directed to the University of Lethbridge, Office of Research Services, 403-329-2747.

I look forward to meeting you and interviewing you.

Sincerely,

Lilli Young

I consent to be interviewed for the project as described in the above letter.

Printed Name and Signature

Date

Appendix D: Consent to use material from interview

I _____ (name of interviewee) give consent to Lilli Young to use material from my interview for her project on “(De)constructing Women’s History: The Social Construction of Historical Knowledge and the Normalization of Femininity in the Second”, and request **that she** identify me in the following way:

_____ By my real name

_____ By a pseudonym in order to protect my confidentiality

Name printed and Signed
Date

Appendix E: Letter to Accompany Transcribed Interview

Date:

Dear Participant:

Thank you for participating in my study titled “(De)constructing Women’s History” Southern Alberta War Brides and the Normalization of Femininity.” Please find enclosed a transcription of your interview. This is your opportunity to inform me if there was anything said during your interview that you do not wish to have made public. If there is anything, please let me know so I can edit it out from the interview. **There is also the option for the material to be made available without identifying information such as names.** Please respond with your comments no more than thirty days from (date on the letter).

My contact information is provided below. If you consent to having your interview made available to the public by placing it into the archives at the Alexander Galt Museum and Archives, please add your initials to the statements of your choice below.

Thank you very much for taking this time to participate and share your experience.

Sincerely,

Lilli Young
M.A Candidate
History Department
University of Lethbridge
Phone: 403-894-0724
Email: lilli.young@uleth.ca

Appendix F: Letter to Accompany Edited Transcribed Interview

Date:

Dear Participant:

Thank you for participating in my study titled “(De)constructing Women’s History” Southern Alberta War Brides and the Normalization of Femininity.” Please find enclosed a transcription of your edited interview. My contact information is provided below. If you consent to having your interview made available to the public by placing it into the archives at the Alexander Galt Museum and Archives, please add your initials to the statements of your choice below.

Thank you very much for taking this time to participate and share your experience.

Sincerely,

Lilli Young
M.A Candidate
History Department
University of Lethbridge
Phone: 403-894-0724
Email: lilli.young@uleth.ca

Appendix G: Consent to place interview in archives

I _____ (name of interviewee) request that the enclosed transcription of the interview for the project: (De)Constructing Women’s History: The Southern Alberta War Brides and the Normalization of Femininity in the Second World War Era” be placed at the Alexander Galt Museum and Archives under the following conditions.
:

_____ To be **accessible** to researchers immediately and according to any other conditions set out by the Galt Museum and Archives.

_____ To be **accessible** to researchers upon my death and according to any other conditions set by the Galt Museum and Archives.

Printed Name and Signed

Date