

After the Fur Trade: First Nations Women in Canadian History, 1850 - 1950

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dominant themes and trends in the historical literature on First Nations women in Canada between 1850 and 1950. Fifteen academic sources are examined in detail. Findings challenge the liberal progressive view of history and point to different historical benchmarks for assessing the record on Indian women.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore les thèmes dominants et les tendances dans la littérature historique sur les femmes de Premières nations au Canada entre 1850 et 1950. Quinze sources académiques sont étudiées en détail. Les constatations défient le point de vue libéral progressif et pointe vers les données repères historiques pour évaluer le dossier sur les femmes amérindiennes.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, our historical knowledge about the lives of First Nations women in Canada has grown, slowly but steadily. This expansion can be attributed in part to the recognition among feminist historians of the need to consider the diverse experiences of women, especially those living on the margins of society. It should be noted, however, that this recognition was not the natural outcome of enlightened views but emerged from the knowledge of women of color who challenged the concept of a universal "woman" that dominated the literature at the time. Despite the growing awareness of diversity among women, the paucity of research focusing on the experiences of First Nations women remains an issue that needs to be addressed if feminist historians are to present a more rounded picture of women's history in Canada (Brandt 1991, 468). The lack of information on this subject suggests that their experiences were not worth recording, or that they differed little from that of white women or First Nations men.

To date, there has not been a detailed analysis of journal articles or major academic publications on the history of First Nations women in Canada. Although such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible to gain an understanding of this discourse by examining a key

collection of sources. What follows, then, is an exploration of some of the dominant themes and trends in the historical literature on First Nations women in Canada between 1850 and 1950. Fifteen sources, drawn from academic journals, theses, and chapters in books are examined in detail. By calling attention to the distinct patterns in the literature, it is hoped that historians interested in researching and writing in this area will extend the boundaries of the discourse and offer new and exciting ways for gathering and interpreting information.

The timeframe selected for this paper is significant because of the massive changes that Indigenous peoples underwent between 1850 and 1950. These years are marked by the creation of the numbered treaties, the establishment of reserves and forced residential schooling which generally took place after Indigenous peoples were marginalized from the fur trade in 1850 and before the first major amendments to the *Indian Act* were ratified in 1951. It is also important to note that this study deals exclusively with sources on First Nations women - that is, women who are identified by the federal government as Status Indians. As such, the terms "First Nations" and "Indian" will be used interchangeably throughout the paper depending on the context in which it is used in the article under review.

DOMINANT THEMES

While it would be an exaggeration to say that there are established ways of thinking and writing about the history of First Nations women because, after all, the literature on this subject is still relatively new, significant patterns have emerged within this body of knowledge that point to three main themes, broadly characterized as 1) female sexuality, 2) the impact of colonization on First Nations women, and 3) residential school experiences. Each of these themes will be examined in turn.

Female Sexuality

Two broad trends stand out in the scholarship on this area. One line of enquiry focuses on the way Indian women have been systematically oppressed through the historical construction and manipulation of ideas about their sexuality. These studies critique Euro-Canadian views of Indian women and help to deconstruct the racist, classist, and gendered dimensions embedded in federal Indian policies and legislation. A second line of enquiry connects the past to the present to make strong political statements about the contemporary situation of First Nations women in Canada. These studies are overtly political and seek to dismantle patriarchal institutions that limit the way all women participate in society. What is interesting to note about the discourse on this subject is that these studies, by and large, challenge the liberal-progressive view of history that assumes that life generally gets better over time by invoking the historical dictum, the more things change, the more they stay the same - or they get worse over time.

The most prolific scholar in this area is Sarah Carter. In her introduction to *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*, she explores the dominant representations of Indian and white women circulating throughout western Canada in the late nineteenth century (Carter 1997). Drawing on a power relations theory, she argues that the people who constructed and circulated these images were those who wielded social and economic power and stood to benefit most from their usage. She shows how the images of Indian and white women were binaries, organically connected and dependent on

one another for their legitimation and survival. While the image of the vulnerable white woman was exploited to rally support for stern policies to subjugate the Indians, the image of the dirty and immoral "squaw" was frequently employed to instigate moral panic about the downfall of the white race and to justify strict measures that would keep Indian women on reserve and preferably in the home.

In "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion: Constructing the 'Indian Woman' in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada," Carter focuses specifically on the negative representations of Indian women between 1870 and 1900 (Carter 1998; 2002). She argues that government administrators, military officials, missionaries, and the national press depicted Indian women as "lewd and licentious" in order to justify the constraints that severely limited their movements off reserve and to deflect attention away from the Department of Indian Affairs, the North-West Mounted Police, and the people who ran them (178). Rather than deal with the extreme social conditions emerging on reserves, administrators utilized the negative images to explain Indian poverty and ill health, as well as the violence and sexual abuse many of these women suffered. It is significant that the federal government and the North-West Mounted Police tightened their controls on the whereabouts of Indian peoples following the Metis uprising in 1885 and the story of two white women who were taken as captives by Indian warriors that was also circulating at the time (Carter 1998, 185). These fears led to the establishment of the Pass System, which required all who wanted to leave the reserve to get approval from the local farm or Indian agent. Although it applied equally to men and women, a central rationale for this system was to prevent Indian women from entering into the towns and villages and disrupting the moral decency of white society by prostituting themselves (Carter 1998, 187). The portrait that emerges from this account reveals the powerful ways ideologies have shaped Indian and non-Indian relations in western Canada. As racial tensions mounted, government and administrative agents repeatedly drew on racist and gendered ideas about Indian women to protect their own reputation and authority.

A similar line of thought runs through Jean Barman's work, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality:

Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1950" (Barman 1998a). Here, she describes how Euro-Canadian men transplanted Victorian notions of "purity, prudery, and propriety" onto Indian women who held very different values and beliefs about what was appropriate feminine behavior (242). As a result, when Indian women did not conform to these ideals they were perceived as being naturally hedonistic and in desperate need of proper moral training. These powerful negative images provided both the Church and State with the opportunity to intrude on the personal affairs of Indian women and reorganize their lives along patriarchal lines. According to Barman, the key to the whole process lay in taming their sexual agency, not their sexuality *per se*. In order for the restructuring to be successful, missionaries, government officials, and Indian men had to convince Indian women of their evil nature and redirect their energies to the home. For Barman, the implications of these teachings manifest themselves in the violence that is perpetrated against Indian women today. She recalls a recent court case where a male Bishop pleaded innocent to charges of rape and indecent assault he committed on four young Indian women based on the argument that their natural sexuality overpowered his vow of celibacy and made him do it (1998a, 237). Although the Bishop was found guilty, the fact that he appeared before the court and made such a claim attests to the durability of this ideology. The consequence is clear - generations of Indian women have been held accountable for the violence done to them.

A somewhat different approach is taken by Joan Sangster. In "Native Women, Sexuality, and the Law" (2001), she shows how Indian female sexuality was linked to a much broader discourse on nation-building, arguing, "the creation of moral families, based on Western (largely Anglo) middle-class notions of sexual purity, marital monogamy, and distinct gender roles of the female homemaker and male breadwinner was an important means of creating moral and responsible citizens, the 'bedrock of the nation,' as legal authorities never tired of saying" (2001, 169). For Sangster, a central feature of the moral family was the legal marriage. She challenges historical evidence showing ecclesiastical support for customary unions by identifying a discernible pattern in the type of relationships the church was willing to uphold,

noting that customary unions were encouraged "if they looked exactly like Christian ones, if they were lifelong and monogamous, if husbands undertook their roles as providers, wives their roles as domestic caregivers" (2001, 179). For some time, Indian women (and men) found ways to circumvent this regulatory process by claiming their traditional marriages were invalid in the eyes of God and requesting a Christian ceremony to a new partner instead (2001, 181). As Sangster sees it, Indian women were participating in a system of highly unequal power relations that eventually led them to accept patriarchal values and ideals that were imposed on them.

The Impact of Colonization on the Lives of First Nations Women

Historians have also explored the transformation of Indian female lives through the process of colonization, exposing the various ways European men observed, judged, and exerted their influence over Indian women, and the way Indian women responded in return. Without a doubt, the process of colonization transformed the way Indian women operated within their homes and communities. However, there seems to be an ongoing struggle among historians about whether or not the process of colonization was a positive or negative influence on Indian female lives. The problem with these assessments is that they fail to resolve the dichotomy that led to the argument in the first place. A more nuanced approach that does not depict Indian women as either totally oppressed or completely free to create their own cultures, for they were both simultaneously, might lead to a more meaningful dialogue on this subject. Four areas of investigation have dominated this area of research: a) female agency, b) images of strength, c) diminishing traditional roles, and d) contributions to non-Indian society.

Female Agency

Up until recent years, one widely shared approach among historians was the perception that Indian women benefited from their transition to reserves. These historical records were clearly marked by an ethnocentric bias that situated white middle-class Euro-Canadian forms of social

organization as the yardstick by which all people would be measured. Perhaps, not surprisingly, these sources construct a primitive picture of Indian life and culture before the settlement era and portray Indian women as "victims" of a savage lifestyle who possess little or no power and authority within their own households or communities (Carter 1996, 51). Feminist historians researching and writing on Indian women have been quick to reject these findings and point out the extent to which Indian women rejected, resisted, and subverted the changes imposed on them by religious authorities, government agents, and people with a missionary zeal.

For instance, Katherine Weist disputes the images of helpless women in, "Beasts of Burden and Menial Slaves: Nineteenth Century Plains Observations on Northern Plains Indian Women" (1983). She analyses the observations of early male European travelers who wrote about Indian women as either drudges, slaves, or prostitutes and finds them wanting in three key ways: first, they represent a male Eurocentric bias; second, the early views are not supported in current ethnographic literature; and third, the negative interpretations can be seen as part of the "othering" process (1983, 40). She argues that the majority of early European travelers, from fur traders to missionaries, misunderstood or misinterpreted what they saw. Had they been familiar with local Indian customs, they would have developed much different interpretations based on what they saw. Assessing the lives of Indian women from their own cultural framework, most travelers tended to see what they wanted, which usually included the division of labor, the practice of polygamy, the buying and selling of women, and female control over their own sexuality (Weist 1983, 41). As Weist and numerous other scholars have pointed out, these early observations reveal more about the culture of the viewer than about the people being viewed.

Images of Strength

Closely connected with the work on female agency are investigations that explore the way First Nations women were sources of strength in their communities. Generally, studies of this sort emphasize how Indian women found ways to contribute economically to their families and

maintain their cultural traditions, even in the face of serious opposition from local authorities and government agents, while those of Indian men diminished. Though this outlook acknowledges Indian female agency, it tends to ignore the very real constraints limiting their choices for social, political, and economic action (Carter 1996, 52).

In "When You Don't Know the Language, Listen to the Silence: An Historical Overview of Native Indian Women in B.C." (1994), Marjorie Mitchell and Anna Franklin assess the historical literature on the role of Indian women in British Columbia and find Indian women to have been a constant source of economic support for their families and communities from the earliest recorded times to the early twentieth century (Mitchell and Franklin 1984). When labor was scarce they found work in the fish-canning industry, agricultural labor, and domestic service (1984, 25-26). During the Depression, the extra income women earned through wage labor provided the mainstay for their families (27). Despite their findings, Mitchell and Franklin refuse to draw conclusions, arguing that empirical evidence gathered through oral histories and interviews could well prove their research wrong, which points to the dilemma of academically generated knowledge. The "silence" in this paper, then, refers both to the lack of Indian female voices in the historical record as well the lack of detailed knowledge and understanding that comes from having such voices available.

Images of strength also emerge in "Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast: An Historical Perspective, 1830-1900" (1996). In this paper, Carol Cooper examines how Nishga and Tsimshian women were able to maintain their status and roles through the fur-trade and missions, which have typically been viewed by historians as having a negative impact on Indian female lives (1996). In the early days, Nishga and Tsimshian women held great power and authority within their societies because of their ability to maintain control over the production and distribution of food, their ongoing role in the fur trade, and because of the redistributive nature of their cultures. At important gatherings, such as the potlatch, the contributions of food and furs by the women were acknowledged before other lineages and visiting tribes, thus constituting a highly visible way for them to obtain power and prestige among kin folk and the

community (Cooper 1996, 92). Even as the context of their lives changed, Indian women adapted to their new roles by moving into the workforce as cannery workers, interpreters, freight packers, domestic service, and missionary personnel. As Cooper points out, legal prohibitions placed on the potlatch in 1884 did not diminish their roles and status in Nishga and Tsimshian society. Rather, they "used their earnings to increase their own prestige and that of their lineage by contributing jewelry, blankets, and sums of money to the missions," suggesting for some Indian women at least, they moved from one position of strength to another with colonization (112).

Diminishing Traditional Roles

In contrast to the previous strategy, a third approach taken by scholars has been to document how the traditional roles of Indian women were altered and diminished through a capitalist mode of production and the imposition of patriarchy. These descriptions generally show a more favorable view of Indian women before the contact era and serve as vivid examples of the tremendous negative effects that patriarchy has had on all women of the Western world (Carter 1996, 53). At the same time, these studies tend to overlook the subtle forms of resistance engaged by Indian women at the everyday level which helped to sustain some of their traditional ways, albeit in altered form.

Recent work by Winona Stevenson follows along this pattern. In "Colonialism and First Nations Women in Canada" (1999), Stevenson traces the process of colonization on First Nations women from the earliest days of contact history to 1951, when the first major changes were made to the *Indian Act*. She illustrates how federal authorities manipulated Indian female cultural imagery to justify their subjugation, and describes the process by which Victorian values and ideals were imposed on First Nations women through federal legislation (1999, 49). Within this story of deepening oppression, Stevenson locates numerous sources of strength. She writes how Indian women were not only proud and vital members of their communities at the time of contact, but as inter-cultural conflict intensified and Indian peoples were shuffled onto reserves it was Indian women who clung tenaciously to their traditional ways, primarily

because they had the most to lose from establishing patriarchy. Ultimately though, the divisions the *Indian Act* created within their societies eventually exhausted even the strongest women, like the Iroquois Clan Mothers whose "voice and authority," she claims, were silenced in the early twentieth century (Stevenson 1999, 73). There is very little room for agency here.

Somer Brodribb's study on "The Traditional Roles of Native Women in Canada and the Impact of Colonization" (1984) exhibits a more equivocal attitude on the subject of colonization. Part of her dilemma stems from the written sources. On the one hand, she finds the historical sources continue to depict Indian women as lustful and exotic creatures who were willing to trade sex for a few "baubles and gewgaws" and whose traditional role was to loan their bodies to "passing strangers" for comfort and warmth (1984, 92-93). On the other hand, she notes how much of what has been written by anthropologists suffers from an ahistorical and ethnocentric perspective that projects a public/private dichotomy onto Indian societies that would not normally conform to this split. Not surprisingly, within this framework, Indian women are typically seen as subordinate to men and without opportunities to accumulate wealth and status of their own. She attempts to balance the racist and androcentric views by incorporating voices of contemporary Indian women into the text but no effort is made to theorize oral histories - they are simply accepted at face value. Still, these voices, though few in number, attest to the different roles and status occupied by Indian women before the settlement era and address the impact of colonization on Indian female lives (1984, 91-92).

To date, the most comprehensive treatment of Indian women on reserve is Pamela White's PhD Dissertation, "Restructuring the Domestic Sphere - Prairie Indian Women on Reserve: Images, Ideology and State Policy, 1880-1930" (1987). She argues that Indian agents, missionaries, and newcomers to Canada inherited a long tradition of negative imagery of Indian women that provided them with the peace of mind they needed in order to employ extreme measures to subjugate and civilize the Indians. Central to this process was the restructuring of the domestic sphere. According to Indian agents, successful transformation of the Indian way of life occurred when women accepted

their responsibilities in the home as wives and mothers. They were taught new housekeeping and cooking skills as well as how to manage a "respectable" house on reserve. Deeming Indian women wholly incompetent for motherhood, the state later intervened, sending their children away to residential schools. By the late 1920s, the Department of Indian Affairs was involved in almost every aspect of their lives, to the point of regulating what type of bread they could make; bannock was banned in 1889 (White 1987, 134-38).

Contributions to Non-Indian Society

Lastly, some authors have attempted to weave the contributions of Indian women into the larger Canadian fabric, showing how Indian and non-Indian peoples mutually benefited from each other. As Carter points out, the paucity of research extending this analysis into the settlement era contributes to the myth that Indian peoples benefited culturally from European contact, while Europeans gained little in return (1996, 55). It also reinforces the widespread belief that Indian and non-Indian have little in common culturally, as well as the erroneous assumption that Canada was founded in part by a mythic pioneering white woman (Barman 1998b). Stories of shared histories can help break down barriers erected by racist and paternalistic attitudes that are constructed from a knowledge of the past that only tells of segregated opportunities and lives.

Veronica Strong-Boag is one scholar who has attempted to write about a shared Canadian past. In "'A Red Girl's Reasoning': E. Pauline Johnson Constructs the New Nation" (1998), Strong-Boag outlines the life of Pauline Johnson, the daughter of a Mohawk-English union and first known Indian woman to assume a major public role in Canada, and examines her efforts to challenge nationalist narratives that had reduced Indian peoples to subordination and anonymity through her poetry and story writing. Throughout her life, she appealed "to tolerance and fair-mindedness based on faith in a universal humanity" in which all could share, no matter what their color, culture, or gender (1998, 149). Her primary contribution was her attempt to construct a political vision in which Indian peoples and women could both claim an equal place and help eliminate the racist/sexist

paradigm that had become well-entrenched in Canadian thought and action by the late nineteenth century. The extent to which she was able to convince her audience of her views is difficult to assess, but if her success as an artist is any indication of the degree to which her views were accepted, she did not win a lot of converts to her side, as Johnson was never able to earn financial security through her own work and she was forced to rely on her father's established wealth for survival (Strong-Boag 1998, 136).

Residential School Experiences

In recent years, scholars have begun to document the histories of Indian residential schools in Canada (Miller 1996; Milloy 1999). Quite understandably, much of what has been written emphasizes the negative aspects of this era, a perspective that positions Indian peoples as victims of an unyielding and oppressive system. Scott Trevithick has examined the literature on this subject and found that criticisms of the government and its Indian education policy emerged after 1990, when Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine, spoke openly and publicly about the abuse he suffered as a residential school student (Trevithick 1998). Prior to 1990, the history of residential schools in Canada completely neglected the issues of violence and abuse, demonstrating how the publicity Indian peoples received when looking to the courts for justice and retribution has influenced the scholarship in this area (Trevithick 1998, 60-61). Yet, to describe the body of literature after 1990 as a purely critical account would be misleading. There are scattered pieces of evidence suggesting that life at boarding schools was far more complex than historians have imagined. Some sources, for example, reveal moments of laughter, camaraderie, and fun - a positive side to boarding school life. These depictions are, however, quite rare and focus almost exclusively on male experiences (Bloom 2000).

Within the growing body of knowledge about residential schools is an awareness of the differential treatment boys and girls received at these institutions. Some scholars have begun to document these differences using gender and race as primary categories of analysis. In *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*

(1996), J. R. Miller describes the system of classroom-based education, work, and play that characterized most schools between the years 1880 and 1960 (217-50). He calls attention to the unique efforts to "make due" - those times when students were permitted to take on roles and responsibilities that were typically reserved for the opposite sex. He tells how one boy at a Presbyterian school is recorded to have knit himself two pairs of mittens for the winter, and how boys at a Roman Catholic and an Anglican school in Alberta worked in the bakeshop, dressed in chef's hats and aprons (221). Miller similarly reports how girls at a boarding school in Spanish, Ontario were assigned to regular barn work (222). Yet, with so few examples cited in the literature and officially sanctioned documents, it appears that these instances are more the exception than the rule. Far more common was the gendered division of labor with boys working in the field and girls managing all of the chores within the school. In addition, Miller also shows how boys generally were provided with more and varied opportunities in the areas of vocational training, recreation, and leisure (224-27). Official descriptions of the vocational skills taught to boys contrast sharply with the vague and generalized statements about the "duties of the home" reserved for girls, further indicating the insignificant value attached to women's work in Euro-Canadian society. According to Miller, the area where differences were least noticeable was in the classroom, where official documents indicate both girls and boys received the same lessons (220). The general impression one is left with from Miller's account is that boys were uniquely advantaged over girls in almost all areas of boarding school life and, by extension, were able to parlay those advantages into real, if only meager, economic rewards while women were destined for the home.

Other researchers have painted a very different picture from Miller. In her study, "Gender and the Paradox of Residential Education in Carrier Society" (1996), Jo-Anne Fiske analyses the opportunities provided to Carrier women who attended Lejac Residential School in British Columbia between 1922 and 1972 (1981). Examining the life course of twelve former students, Fiske argues that, contrary to the expectations of Catholic Missionaries at Lejac, female Carrier students were provided with a better

education and more practical training than male students resulting in their move away from the home and into the workforce. She outlines how Carrier women spent more time in the classroom than boys, stayed longer in school, and were rewarded more often than boys for good behavior, which encouraged them to learn their lessons and get better marks. She also outlines how shrinking economic opportunities for men combined with racism severely limited the types of employment available for male Carrier students; while female Carrier students were able to take advantage of their domestic skills to gain employment in private homes, public hospitals, restaurants, and hotels, with some women earning positions as office workers, band council managers, and Chiefs (Fiske 1996, 176-77). Thus, female Carrier students benefited more from their education and training than their male counterparts.

Some historians have also thought to explore how issues of race and gender impacted on Indian females experiences at residential school. In "Separate and Unequal: Indian and White Girls at All Hallows School, 1884-1920" (1986), Jean Barman examines the 1910 shift in educational policy away from Indian assimilation to informal segregation that prepared Indians for life on reserve. She argues that federal officials changed the focus of their programs to appease a racist white society that wanted the Indians isolated on their own lands. Thus, Barman argues that federal officials never really gave the policy of Indian assimilation a chance. Drawing on the example of All Hallows, an all-female school in British Columbia that was attended by both Indian and white female students, Barman notes how prior to the shift Indian students had the option "to choose their destiny" because they received the same education and training as white students (124). However, after the change in policy, their options were considerably narrowed. Indian female students received far less instruction in the classroom and more domestic training and chores to prepare them "to obtain the bottom rung of the White socioeconomic order" if they were lucky, and necessitating them to live on reserve if not (123).

CONCLUSIONS

Over the past thirty years, historians have paid increasing attention to the lives of First Nations women in Canada. Some of this scholarship has focused on the era between 1850 and 1950, a time of tremendous change for Indian peoples throughout the country. Few historians would disagree that the historical convergence of ideas on race, class, and gender has had a profound impact on the lives of Indian women. Nowhere is this more evident than in the research on Indian female sexuality. In the popular imagination, First Nations women were dirty, easy, and lazy. Their lack of moral character constituted a serious threat to Canadian society and justified the tight controls on their behavior, inside and outside their homes and communities. The persistence of these negative images and ideologies suggests that dominant ways of thinking have not changed all that much over the past one hundred and fifty years.

It is clear from the available sources that historians have been influenced by post-structuralist feminist studies that take as their premise the social construction of identities. They show how the experiences of First Nations women were not like the experiences of First Nations men, or those of white colonizing women, for their identities were simultaneously gendered and racialized. Perhaps not surprisingly, histories of First Nations women demonstrate how their lives were influenced by very different benchmarks in time from those of white Canadian women. Neither the First or Second World War, nor the female franchise, are mentioned in the literature. Instead, the years 1885 (the Pass System), 1876 (the *Indian Act*), 1920 (forced residential schooling), and the decade of the 1920s (tightened government control), emerge as key markers in First Nations women's history.

It is equally clear that the experiences of First Nations women were rich and varied. As women having to make critical decisions about their lives, and the health and welfare of their families, they responded differently to the changes taking place around them. Some women were better positioned than others for dealing with these changes, easing their relationship with the mainstream, their time in residential school, and their move onto reserves. Some Indian women, perceiving no benefits at all from their Indian

heritage, let go of their cultural ties and did their best to assimilate into white society.

Despite this diversity, our knowledge of First Nations women is really non-Native knowledge of First Nations women in western Canada. We know little of First Nations women outside of the Prairies and British Columbia. Additionally, we have little understanding of how First Nations women view their own histories. *Their* experiences are not recorded in these historical texts, resulting in an epistemic dilemma that calls into question the meaning of "experience" historians are trying to illuminate (Pierson 1991). Instead, what we are referring to are a set of images and ideologies supported by legislation and laws that often pass for "experience." If feminist scholars are willing to challenge the boundaries of traditional historical discourse, they must also challenge their own understanding of evidence, and of course, begin collecting oral histories themselves.

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