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Oral History, Activism, and Remembrance: The Rhetorical Agency of Georgia's Women  
Activists in and Beyond the Equal Rights Amendment

by

Jessica Edens McCrary

Under the Direction of Ashley J. Holmes, PhD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2023

## ABSTRACT

Adopting the methodology of feminist rhetorical microhistory, this work recovers an oral history collection remembering the women's movement in Georgia, and specifically efforts to build a coalition of activists to mount pressure on state legislators to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. Feminist rhetorical microhistory draws on and advances scholarship in three disciplines, overlapping in productive ways that renegotiate the scholar-subject relationship. FRM is comprised from three areas, which enable its potential for interruption and renegotiation: feminist rhetorical theory (drawing on invitational rhetoric, strategic contemplation, rhetorical listening, and rhetorical empathy); microhistory; and critical and feminist archival methods (which acknowledges the mediated nature of archivists' role in the non-neutral arrangement of records). In three chapters, I apply FRM to understand 1) how events of the Equal Rights Amendment battle and other women's and family rights issues played out in Georgia, 2) how women in the Georgia Women's Movement Project archival collection enacted remembrance via oral history when viewing themselves as actors in history, and 3) how several key founders interpreted their larger role in "feminist work" during and after the peak of second wave women's movement activity. In order that we might understand lived experience against the backdrop of significant (or not) events, microhistory, feminist rhetorical theory, and critical and feminist archival studies provide symbiotic overlap. I suggest that the agency afforded to individuals across these three disparate sets of disciplinary frameworks is a *renegotiation* between the rhetor and the audience.

Additionally, I posit oral history as rhetorical act, and take the position that oral history is both form and method for enacting oneself in history. This co-narrated history operates as *interruption*, with an intentional view to the individual's normal and exceptional lived

experience, further advancing feminist rhetorical recovery scholarship. I discuss affordances and limitations of FRM methodology, especially its uses for others studying histories of and individuals involved in social movements as well as for future legal, feminist, and material acts. FRM enables us to uncover knowledge of movements past and present that has remained occluded in the tendency to narrate simpler, grander stories of success and failure in social movements.

**INDEX WORDS:** Feminist rhetoric, Microhistory, Oral history, Feminism in Georgia, Second wave feminism, Archives, Activism, Feminist rhetorical microhistory

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Oral History, Activism, and Remembrance: The Rhetorical Agency of Georgia's Women  
Activists in and Beyond the Equal Rights Amendment

by

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August 2023

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to Clifford M. Kuhn (1952-2015), “Atlanta’s Greatest Listener,” who showed me with unwavering heart the validity—and urgency—of oral history to understand our past, our present, and where we perchance take our future. You never doubted, but always challenged. You understood that in personal life there is profound meaning. A generation of scholars carry your torch; I am lucky to be among them.

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During my undergraduate journey in history, where I was also learning what the heck it meant to be a grown person, three professors said honest and important things to me (in addition to being fabulous teachers). They made sure I felt supported every step. Often, they shared key details about the occluded language and ecosystem of higher education and academia that were crucial in my evolution. Thank you, Drs. Tom Keene, David Parker, and Jennifer Dickey.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 January 1982 to today

On the afternoon of January 20, 1982, Linda Hallenborg Kurtz sat in the gallery of the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta, watching as state legislators voted on whether to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This constitutional amendment would guarantee women protection from discrimination on the basis of sex, and the activism that had become part of Kurtz daily life was at unprecedented levels in the state—with women on both sides of the debate. The proposed amendment was set to expire that year, and only three more states were needed to achieve ratification from the required two-thirds for all amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Georgia could be one of those three remaining states, with the deadline looming. Kurtz had spent nearly five years mobilizing women in Georgia towards this achievement, along with other community organization leaders in the state, and now she sat waiting for the results. She turned to her colleague Sharon Hannon and said, "Sharon, we will always remember that on this day, at this time, for this event, we will sit next to each other."

The anticipatory energy was perhaps reminiscent of the eve of 2016's presidential election when Hillary Clinton was poised to be elected president of the United States. In U.S. law, to add an amendment to the Constitution, it must pass both houses of Congress and then be voted upon and ratified by two-thirds of the states. On that day in 1982, with Kurtz and thousands of others watching, Georgia legislators voted 116-57 against ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment. The amendment then failed to meet the required 38 states' ratification by its congressionally set deadline. Later that year, on June 30, 1982, the ERA expired and was not added to the Constitution.



In subsequent decades, many state laws have changed, enabling liberties for women that were not accessible when the ERA was introduced in 1923, revised in 1943, and passed by the U.S. Congress in 1972 (Suk). However, the national debate over equal rights for women as part of the U.S. Constitution from 1972 to 1982 was a galvanizing event in the lives of many women, mobilizing them to activism both for and against the ERA.<sup>1</sup>

Years later, in 1998, Linda Kurtz recalled the day the ERA failed to be ratified in Georgia. “It was devastating to see...how easily it was defeated—how no one stood up—how all of our work seemingly—and I underline seemingly—had no effect...Everybody was disoriented and upset. I just knew that I had to be really clearheaded, and I had to present an approach to the defeat that would be giving a hopeful message” (Kurtz). In that moment of defeat, but especially two decades later, Kurtz refused to see the end of the ERA as a loss. Amid camera crews and reporters that afternoon, she envisioned a larger goal, one that was still ahead for the women who were politically organized, towards “equality and justice” (Kurtz). It is this rhetorical awareness, writ across the recorded oral histories of women who fought for the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia, that this project investigates.

For each of the women involved in ERA work in 1982, what came next would vary. The ERA as a constitutional amendment has a long and storied past, but after its expiration shortly after its defeat in Georgia, it faded from national consciousness. However, by the early 1990s, a few key second-wave feminist leaders in the state realized their efforts to bring constitutional equality for women would be lost to history without taking intentional steps to preserve their documents and narratives. Lucy H. Draper “believed that someday the ERA will be revived,” and, motivated by the dual conviction that “future feminists might learn from [their] experience”

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the results of the 2016 presidential election mobilized millions of American women in what has been characterized as a fourth wave of feminist movement.

and “that women will continue to be ignored in historical records unless feminists [intervene],” she approached numerous universities to determine where they might establish an archives (Curtis 101). In her suggestion, Draper was referring to the revival of the ERA as a constitutional amendment as well as a renewed feminist movement. (In fact, since 2017, three more states ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, achieving the required 38, and its future remains a prescient question today.) The archives would serve as a permanent collection preserving what the leaders of this charge saw as the “unsung heroines of the women’s movement in Georgia from 1967-1997” and is today the Donna Novak Coles Georgia Women’s Movement Archives: Georgia Women’s Movement Project (GWMP).

This research explores the rhetorical means of the women of the Georgia Women’s Movement Oral History Project, especially their motivations behind forming archives, collecting oral histories, and enacting specific forms of remembrance. I engage with archival material using methodologies from history, rhetoric, and archival studies to understand the motivations driving these women to Equal Rights Amendment activism as well as their efforts to preserve that activity in a formal archive with an oral history collection. By seeking these answers, I address questions concerning larger acts of rhetorical activity: What rhetorical moves occur in the remembrance, decades later, of one’s lifetime and body of work related to the civic and political issues of their place in history? What compels the woman activist and, more to the goals of this research, what compels her to recount her story retrospectively? This scholarship enacts rhetorical empathy (Blankenship), rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe), and strategic contemplation (Royster and Kirsch), all grounded in feminist rhetorical theory, to deeply contemplate the motives and moves at work when, starting in 1995, dozens of women sat down to record an oral document of their personal and activist lives. With feminist rhetorical underpinning, I use

microhistory (McComiskey) as an approach to historical analysis in this research, the concepts within lending themselves to important new means for understanding the rhetorical and historical agency of individuals.

My work engages three intertwined historical and rhetorical contexts: 1) Georgia during the height of Equal Rights Amendment activism (1972-1982); 2) Georgia during the culture wars and a crest of oral history as public history heuristic (1990s); and 3) Georgia in the wake of 2020, whose Black population and present-day activism rendered it a “swing state” for the Democratic candidate in the 2020 election. Across fifty years, women in Atlanta, Georgia have lived, worked, voted, and served in activist and philanthropic roles, forming a unique position for the city within the South. The Georgia Women’s Movement Project (GWMP) in the Georgia State University Archives, and the GWMP Oral History Project are historical records of the large-scale social movements powered by women during the era of second-wave feminism. Just as significant to our understanding of Georgia’s political and women’s activism history, however, are the eras in which the women involved *remembered* and recollected their experiences for historic posterity.

I recognize the reflexive relationships within this project: I am conducting historiographical work on women who were very conscious of their performance as historical figures. Cifor and Wood have theorized the ways in which archives “can be understood as critical tools and modes of self-representation and self-historicization” (3) and both these aspects are relevant in this project. With this research I have two interrelated goals: to explore the rhetorical act of creating an archives to remember the Georgia Women’s Rights Movement and to specifically examine the rhetorical means enacted by the subjects and interviewers in the recorded oral histories themselves.

It is also important to note this is one snapshot of one movement well into its second century of activism in the United States, and the women's movement is not and has never been neutral. As I emphasize throughout this account and analysis, my methods and source material allow for a more complex and nuanced understanding of the women's movement in a key southern state during a time of tumultuous change in this country; but this study does not cover the Civil Rights and LGBTQ rights movements that were happening in the same decades, and which had many overlapping goals and coalitions. Indeed, while the women in this study address some of those partnerships and tensions, my goal in this work is to suspend judgment of the limits of women activists at the time in order to *hear* them, and then to critically reflect on the structural limitations and biases that stymied some aspects of feminist work in Georgia. This work does not engage contemporary critiques of second-wave feminism that the women themselves do not engage, based on the renegotiation that feminist rhetorical microhistory invites between scholar and research subject(s). I explain this methodological approach in detail in a later section of this project.

## **1.2 Historical Context**

To properly contextualize this project and the women included, I provide brief historical detail of the Equal Rights Amendment in the State of Georgia as well as the Georgia Women's Movement Collection at Georgia State University.

The Equal Rights Amendment, a proposed constitutional amendment guaranteeing women protection from discrimination due to sex, became a controversial and divisive piece of legislation in the 1970s and early 1980s. Decades after it was first written, having been stuck in limbo with the House Judiciary Committee, the Equal Rights Amendment passed the House and Senate of the United States Congress in 1972 (Suk 58; 82). The constitutional amendment

needed to be ratified by 38 states, and senators had added an unusual eight-year expiration date. Within a year of congressional adoption, thirty states ratified the ERA; achieving the approval of eight more states seemed inevitable. However, national mobilization by several anti-ERA movements, including Phyllis Schlafly's Stop Taking Our Privileges (STOP-ERA), would mount such a compelling grassroots opposition as to moor the remaining states in nearly ten years of organized political action—both for and against the ERA, with men and women on both sides. In the 1970s, opponents of the ERA—a constitutional amendment which had long been controversial for different reasons throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—argued that it would endanger women's position in society and the institution of the American family. For many against the ERA, equal rights before the law meant a threat to traditional gender roles as well as practical threat to daily life: women could be subject to conscription to the armed forces and could become legally responsible for fifty percent of family financial responsibilities despite having less access to jobs and income (Morris 167-8). While many of these legal threats were unlikely to occur, they illustrate even today the strong rhetorical savvy of these national organizers, whose messages were carried into key battleground states like Georgia.

Both national leaders like Phyllis Schlafly and grassroots organizers like those included in the Georgia Women's Movement collection were mobilized in the state. The ERA "mobilized women to political activism at levels not seen since suffrage six decades earlier" (Morris 163). When Georgia failed to ratify the amendment in 1982, the ERA expired and was not added to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>2</sup> This decision marked a stopping point in a long and energized battle in Georgia of women activists both for and against the ERA (Graves; Curtis). Decades later, how we remember both sides of that embittered battle is still a matter of public memory and political

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<sup>2</sup> The ERA was ratified by Virginia in January 2020, the requisite 38th state, however legal experts remain uncertain what that means for the amendment's constitutional and legislative legs so far outside its imposed deadline (Suk).

debate. GSU's Georgia Women's Movement Project houses a large amount of the historical material we have on those who were pro-ERA in Metro Atlanta and the state. Alongside that collection, GSU also houses the Activist Women's Collection, a second collection that includes additional voices—like those whose activism was in opposition to the ERA—and other activist movements post-ERA (Gerrard; "About"). Because of Georgia's key placement in the battle over adding women as a protected class to the U.S. Constitution, the women who organized—for and against—within the state are a critical source for us to understand their motivations, decisions, and agency in historical and rhetorical contexts.

Georgia's failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, and the amendment's resultant expiration, was a stunning moment for feminists in Georgia; it was "a watershed moment," however, in the lives of four women: Margie Pitts Hames<sup>3</sup>, Martha Wren Gaines, Lucy Hargrett Draper, and Margaret Miller Curtis ("Georgia Women's Movement Project" np). Draper conceived of a Georgia Women's Museum and Archives to house and share the decades' worth of artifacts they and others had amassed related to feminist and civic activism in Georgia, but quickly realized constraints on time and finances would make that impossible. After the unexpected deaths of Hames and Gaines, Draper and Curtis resolved to form their archives no matter what it took ("Georgia Women's Movement Project"). While Hames's and Gaines's papers were both willed to Special Collections at Emory University, Draper and Curtis worked for nearly a decade to see the archival collection, the Georgia Women's Movement Project (GWMP), established in 1995 at Georgia State University. From there, the "Founding Mothers"

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<sup>3</sup> Margie Pitts Hames practiced law in Atlanta from 1962 until her death in 1994; she argued *Doe v. Bolton*, often considered the sister case to *Roe v. Wade*, before the Supreme Court; while *Roe* is better remembered to history, both cases were important in the legalization of abortion in the United States. Hames took cases on important social justice issues including employment discrimination, school desegregation, education rights for gifted and disabled children, women's rights, abortion rights, and domestic relations.

Advisory Board worked over seven subsequent years to carry out the eight proposals included in the GWMP, one of which was establishing and collecting material for the GWMP Oral History Project. As part of the terms of the GWMP, only pro-ERA activists and materials can be included, so GSU archivists also formed the accompanying Women Activist Oral History Project, which includes voices beyond a pro-ERA stance and includes other activist movements in Georgia (Gerrard; Georgia State University Special Collections, “About”). These oral history collections formed the corpus I initially explored for this research; based on my research questions and to maintain feasible scope, in this project I focused on the GWMP oral history collection.

Draper and Curtis (as well as Hames and Gaines) were working to preserve their activist lives as feminists in Georgia during the fight over the Equal Rights Amendment; they also did this during a fruitful era for community archives formation and on the crest of oral history as a popular means for collecting the memories and history of everyday lives to counterbalance the tendency toward larger, singular narratives of history (Sheffield). Regardless of the type of repository for community archives, Sheffield suggests “the very act of taking control over the documentation and storytelling about one’s own community calls attention to issues of power” in how archives are created and maintained (352). The women who created the GWMP used the specific language of “‘unsung heroines’ who participated in the second U.S. women’s movement, 1964-1982” in their proposal and argument for the formation of this archives (“Georgia Women’s Movement Project”). I posit the establishment of these archives was an extension of their activist work, a means to position themselves within the scope of a long battle for women’s equality, rights, and liberation. Calls to collect women’s history began and

continued throughout the twentieth century (Moseley) and this project examines the exigencies—real or perceived—by the women who created these collections at GSU.

The Georgia Women's Movement and Activist Women Collections have contributed to several previous studies by GSU graduate students and scholars, advancing our understanding of historical roots of the movement in Georgia specifically, as well as women's personal motivations for participating. Kristina Marie Graves's 2006 history thesis at Georgia State University examines the anti-ERA campaign in Georgia as one lens to larger, national implications of ERA opposition to American conservatism. Robin Morris's scholarship on Kathryn Dunaway's political organizing in Georgia links women's grassroots efforts for and against the ERA to national leadership and illustrates the nuanced evolution of twentieth century conservative politics rooted in southern politics (2010). Further, Haley Aaron's master's thesis studying the Women's Movement Collection at GSU lays critical groundwork for the historical context and activities of Georgia women in the historical activism surrounding women's rights in the state and their implications on society and family. Aaron's reticent research illustrates the nuances of the rhetorical activity happening locally and nationally on both sides of the debate (2012). As historical examination of the activism of the ERA era continues, the rhetorical sophistication of women both for and against the Equal Rights Amendment is well-established and merits continued analysis.

My research approaches this collection as a valuable source for feminist rhetorical analysis that has not yet been conducted with the oral histories it contains. Indeed, very little of the rhetorical meaning and agency of ERA activists has been considered at all, let alone using the methods—microhistory paired with feminist rhetorical theories of listening—as a framework for such consideration. “The point of microhistory is not to narrate the normal or describe the



exceptional but to interrupt their relationship” (McComiskey 19). Rather than simply narrate historical events, I explore the intersection of “normal” and “exceptional” events in the lives of the women telling their stories. This analysis of history as *interruption*, with an intentional view to the individual’s normal and exceptional lived experience, has begun (Gaillet and Bailey; Sohan; Takayoshi, “Finding”; Takayoshi, “Through”; Wilde) but has not yet been done using the histories of the women of the Georgia Women’s Movement. This work contributes a rhetorical historical analysis of the women involved in political activism surrounding the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia.

### **1.3 Goals of this study**

Across this research, I have several interrelated goals. First, I introduce and summarize the theories I have relied upon to arrive at my own methodological approach: feminist rhetorical microhistory (FRM); I situate the theories and methodologies contributing to FRM and discuss limitations of the approach. Second, I let the women’s rhetorical intention guide a narrative historical telling of the events surrounding the Equal Rights Amendment battle in Georgia between 1975-1982. Third, I position oral history as both a form and method steeped in rhetorical tradition. Fourth, I establish how the women creating the GWMP oral histories consciously established themselves as actors in history through the formal act of sitting to record remembrances of their work and lives. For the women included in this archival collection, oral history is a specific device toward their rhetorical agency and a way they saw to position themselves in history on their own terms. I argue that for the women who created the Georgia Women’s Movement Oral History Project, their *recognition* of the importance of archiving their own history *is a form of resistance* to history as a discipline and to archival practice as they

observed it. The subsequent four chapters follow my goals in the order I outlined, however as they are interrelated, some themes and considerations will appear across all chapters.

In the first chapter, I provide the scholarship and theoretical underpinnings that have organized my thinking and led to my use of the methodology I have termed feminist rhetorical microhistory. I establish the many scholars whose work has contributed to my theorizing in this project, through their creative and thoughtful extensions of scholarship in rhetoric and history. As much of this is possible via rhetorical feminism (Glenn) and feminist theory, I start with those key concepts. Then, I tease out the pieces of microhistory as they best relate to work in rhetoric and composition, including some current microhistory scholars, as well as those in rhetoric and composition who have used it. I then outline shifts in archival studies, especially critical and feminist archival studies, and the ways in which those shifts impact the larger framework I am using. Finally, I synthesize these into my methodological framework, feminist rhetorical microhistory, and discuss possible applications for other scholars as well as limitations of the approach to feminist rhetorical and historical work using archival sources.

In chapter two, “The Equal Rights Amendment battle in Georgia and the narrative of activist women’s experience (1972-82),” I use the framework I’ve introduced to present a historical narration of the events of that time in Georgia, leaning heavily on the rhetorical intention of twelve women’s oral histories. I initially read the oral histories of Sue A. Millen, Janet T. Paulk, and Linda Hallenborg Kurtz as my introduction to the collection’s formation and goals because these three women served as the chairs of Phase I of the oral history project. I then expanded my corpus to include nine additional women based on their involvement in the archival collection’s formation or their positionality to the ERA narrative in Georgia (with the guidance of Special Collections archivist Morna Gerrard). As we will see, not only do their narratives

provide a cross-section of the larger collection, each remained highly aware of their voice within the work they hoped this archives might perform (in history, in ongoing feminist efforts). By engaging feminist rhetorical microhistory, I provide some analysis alongside a narrative intentionally removed of my own voice, in order to *listen* instead. Through FRM, I heard recurring themes that arose across the oral history interviews that illustrate what it was like to be part of the women's movement in Georgia. I detail those themes, narrated through the voices of the GWMP: the context of the American South, the learning, coalition building, and challenges they faced organizing for a shared goal, and finally, the public image that emerged of this battle.

In chapter three, "How we speak when we are actors in history," I use feminist rhetorical microhistory to examine the ways in which these women chose to narrate and contextualize their activism in their oral histories of the women's movement. Frequently, this includes their work before and after the "main event" of fighting for the ERA in Georgia, which culminated in 1982. In this chapter, I argue oral history is both form and method, illustrated in the examples of women intentionally archiving their own history, and that this rhetorical agency is a form of resistance to history (as they understood it) and the archives that form the basis of so much "history." As I illustrate in this chapter, the women who formed the Georgia Women's Movement archival collection and the oral history project within it were not practicing archivists by intention when they began recording oral histories. They had a sense of the power of the form, based on the educational, professional, and activist savvy of the various "Founding Mothers" central to its formation. This sense, coupled with the popularity of oral history as form for community-centered history in the 1990s, led to rhetorical agency via collecting and recording oral histories. I interrogate *how* women have been recovered and remembered—in these cases by their own remembrance. In this process, I heard five key themes that I illustrate in

detail: 1) reaction to 1990s feminism; 2) disruption of the narrative future generations would learn; 3) deep contextualization of failure; 4) the reality of regular people taking on important social justice challenges and how this is often mischaracterized in history; and 5) the reflective nature of the genre of oral history, and what takes on meaning in the act of remembrance.

In the fourth chapter, after having explored the rhetorical agency within the oral histories themselves, I explore and contextualize the formation of the Georgia Women's Movement Project (GWMP) and specifically the GWMP Oral History Project. How an archives is formed, including the goals and experiences of its founders, is important in understanding the collection's meaning, intended audience, and impact. The urgency behind the women who formed the Georgia Women's Movement Project archival collection at Georgia State University fomented in failure, the failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The pro-ERA activists whose oral histories are preserved in this collection are, in the historical narrative, the "losers" of a galvanizing political battle. The "Founding Mothers" of the archival collection explicitly use the phrase "unsung heroines," and in establishing an archival collection in the 1990s, saw themselves as defending the work and history of the (mostly white) feminists of the women's movement in Georgia who, without conscious effort, might not be accurately represented in grander historical narratives.

Creating a community archives is an extension of the women's rhetorical agency and says something important about the time and place of such action—in this case, about the 1990s and these women's responses to the issues they saw continuing and evolving despite a very different looking "feminism." This project engages the 1970s and early '80s era of concentrated activist activity as well as the 1990s, when these oral histories were collected. Grobman and Greer acknowledge "interpretive flux" in public memorials (136), and oral history is affected by

this same phenomenon. Oral history captures the subject's perspective from a particular moment in history often removed by years or decades from the events they are recounting and is thus susceptible to such interpretive flux, intentionally or not. Oral history sometimes provides us conflicting accounts of events, further engaging and embracing the unstable nature of memory and historical record. As we will see in chapter four, the GWMP women narrators enacted their voice in oral histories that aimed to say something in the 1990s about how they defined feminism and the women's movement, and where there was still work to be done. The women who formed the GWMP and its oral history collection were responding to the ongoing, coupled exigencies of an unfinished feminist movement alongside historical narratives that rarely frames "failure" like that of ERA ratification in Georgia accurately or completely. Lest their hard work, galvanized in those critical years in Georgia, be forgotten, the formation of an archives was a final extension of the work, this time *remembering* the ERA battle and imagining what it might mean for those of us in the future. That so few people know or understand its complex history is testament to their urgency.

Finally, I conclude with implications of my findings for further research, for myself and other scholars in rhetorical and historical work. I highlight the potential for using feminist rhetorical microhistory in so many other archival collections, as well as spaces beyond formal archives. The scholars whose important work is included in *Remembering Women Differently: Refiguring Rhetorical Work* "call on feminist and rhetorical scholars to continue reimagining the ways in which our own scholarly and activist practices may contribute to the further silencing and misremembering of women's voices" (15). Moreover, their work implores other scholars to consider not only "the deliberate and consequential ways in which women have been obscured

from and remembered differently within public memory” but also the evolving cultural and social norms “that often constrain and shape women’s reputations and memories” (15).

Community archives can “play a vital role in healthy communities and in shared cultural heritage that impacts more than their constituent communities” (Sheffield 372). This study investigates the goals and thus rhetorical agency that went into the formation of the GWMP as a location for documenting women in history. The larger considerations for scholars will necessarily continue far past the extent of the current study; scholars must consider the meaning and impact of archival collections as political activity, and as part of/space for continued learning about social movements for contemporary activists. We must interrogate archival collections and oral history as specific, performative rhetorical positioning in history. The groundwork established and exercised in this study offers potential for me and other researchers to apply this methodology to so many other community and social-movement archival collections.

## 2 FEMINIST RHETORICAL MICROHISTORY

The narratives contained in the Georgia Women's Movement Project (GWMP) oral history collection tell quite a few stories, to those willing to listen. Sharing with future, imagined feminists is a primary motivation for why the records exist at all. The group at the center of its formation dedicated time and energy to building the collection. To engage with them from my location, I needed to situate my questions and ear somewhere that seemed to exist at an intersection of several methodologies, drawing from my scholarly background in both history and rhetoric and composition. In this chapter, I tease out key characteristics of microhistory, feminist rhetorical theory, and archival studies that inform my approach to this project and the methodology I formed, feminist rhetorical microhistory (FRM), to engage the archival collection at the project's center. FRM allows me to deeply listen to the oral histories I've introduced, those of activists whose narratives are included in the GWMP archival collection, so that I may discover their means of remembrance, especially related to their *retrospective* view of political activist work and legacy of success and failure. My approach to analyzing the rhetorical activity of the women included in the GWMP Oral History Project requires advancing the methodologies I introduce in this chapter into a productive space beyond the bounds of any one of them independently. As FRM has affordances that will be useful to others conducting historical and rhetorical work in the archives, there are also limits to this methodology, which I will also discuss in this chapter.

Feminist theorists and scholars within history and rhetoric have worked over the last half-century to reimagine the rhetorical transaction, decentering male-centric definitions and challenging the assumed desired outcome as merely to persuade. Pioneering rhetorical feminist Sally Miller Gearhart calls us to "reimagin[e] the conventional contract between the rhetor and

the audience, for thinking of rhetorical practices—transactions—as collaborative, negotiable, cooperative, and based on a willingness” to yield and to listen (quoted in Glenn, *Rhetorical Feminism* 71). Oral history as rhetorical act—one of the key ideas I theorize in this research—is a premise that resides at the intersection of feminist rhetorical thought and microhistory, carving a space for us to listen with radical suspension of expectation to the voices who challenge the premise of a neat, uncomplicated narrative of historical events.

This work employs the feminist method of engaging with our object/subject of research, as opposed to taking a stance of detachment from the people or events we study. In this study, I am concerned with the relationship between the *creators* of the oral history collection to the *material* (the subjects) they are collecting. Throughout, I was reminded of the reflexive nature of the formation of this archives for the women who were quite often literally collecting their own memories and documentation of what they lived through—embodying both creator and subject of the archives. Accordingly, this study draws on scholarship beyond rhetoric and composition, especially the work of Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor as they challenge those of us in humanities to rethink the long-assumed positionality of archival collections and locations. VanHaitsma and Book argue feminist rhetorical scholarship “is marked by particular strengths in historiographic work and archival methods” (506). I visited archives, digitally and in person, to interrogate their power and “to apply and resist long-established research methods and methodologies” (Glenn 208). I do this alongside others whose scholarship illuminated the limitations of rhetorical theory (Bizzell; Mattingly; Wu; Johnson; Goggin; Royster; Foss and Griffin). This study is rooted in methods and methodologies used in other recent work examining women in archival collections and memory (Leuschen; Hallenbeck; Wilde). Specifically, I engage methodologies of microhistory (McComiskey; Magnússon and Szijártó; Levi), strategic



contemplation (Royster and Kirsch), rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe), and rhetorical empathy (Blankenship), all of which I will extrapolate in the following pages. Feminist methods, when paired with microhistory and feminist archival practice, allow us to ask previously unasked questions and receive/observe unanticipated responses from the archival material and the stories shared by women.

In this chapter, I outline the rich overlap of **feminist rhetorical practice** and **microhistory**, aligned with **feminist practice in archival studies**, to introduce a new methodology: feminist rhetorical microhistory (FRM). I illustrate FRM as providing a precise framework that engages theories from three scholarly locations, for myself and other scholars studying rhetorical acts and situations across human record; I contextualize my ideas within the work of scholars who are pursuing the closely related tracks of historical recovery and restored logos but stop short at the productive intersection I introduce. I illustrate how the three pillars comprising feminist rhetorical microhistory allow for a *renegotiation* between the scholar-narrator of history, the subjects appearing therein, and the (many forms of) audience. I will discuss the methodologies that informed my thinking and invited the meeting point where I arrived at feminist rhetorical microhistory. The potential for renegotiation may generate new questions and responses, from what is knowable in human record, about rhetorical and social movements past and present. There are also limits to FRM, and I discuss who this methodology might work for, and with which type of studies and research questions it is best suited to.

## 2.1 Methods

In this research, I used a qualitative approach, engaging the methodologies I outline in the next section. I used archival collections contained in Georgia State University's Special Collections and Archives in Atlanta, Georgia. Throughout, I have relied on the research guides,

historical timelines, and context provided on the Special Collections and Archives' website<sup>4</sup> as well as crucial guidance from Women's Collections archivist Morna Gerrard. Gerrard has been an archivist at GSU since the late 1990s and is responsible for much of the growth and evolution of the collection. Her decades of work with members of the communities at the center of the Women's Collection means she has keen insight into specific parts of the collection that were relevant to my research questions. My decision to include some of the oral histories included in this study came at her guidance. She has also been instrumental in providing background and context for the formation of the collection, pointing me to previous work using the collections, and sharing information that can only come from being involved in the collection over decades. Through Gerrard, I also had the honor of meeting Margaret Curtis in January 2023; though her health has deteriorated in the present, her work and memories are documented—including hundreds of letters to the editor she wrote during the peak years of the ERA battle in Georgia, as well as the typewriter where she did all that writing.

To properly contextualize the lives of the women in the oral history collections as connected to the larger historical trajectory of the 1970s through 1990s, I relied on secondary source material related to the Equal Rights Amendment and the Women's Movement both nationally and in the state of Georgia. In addition, other primary source material collected as part of the Georgia Women's Movement Project archival collection has been crucial; for example, Margaret Miller Curtis's self-published memoir "My Life as a Feminist in Georgia," housed in the collection and providing key narrative and historical insight to the formation of the collections, and donated papers from the women at the center of this study. I have also relied on additional context via Janet T. Paulk's papers, also housed in the women's collection.

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<sup>4</sup> GSU Special Collections and Archives website: <https://research.library.gsu.edu/archives>

The oral histories I studied contain chapters of the women's lives before the 1970s, and that context has been important to understanding their political, civic, and family lives and experiences. However, the scope of this project is aimed primarily towards two specific eras in U.S. and Georgia history: the heightened activism related to the Equal Rights Amendment between 1972-1982, and the generative early years of the formation of the Georgia Women's Movement Project archives collection from roughly 1994-2002. I am interested in the rhetorical agency within these two eras of the archives founders' activism, as even my first cursory analysis—looking at who was included in the oral history collection via a website index—seemed to indicate that the creators saw the latter work as an extension of the former. Lucy H. Draper, one of the most central organizers of the archives, said as much in a virtual event hosted by GSU Archives and Special Collections in March 2021. During her “feminist work” more than fifty years ago, she noticed “that the unsung heroines in the movement were not documenting the prices that they were paying and the work that they were doing. And I felt that the important role that I played...was to encourage women to save their work product and their collections and that their collections were of value” (“The Importance”). This study invites a complex overlap between events as they happened and reflective contemplation of their meaning as part of that process of retelling/remembering.

As the above framing suggests, I centered this research on the “Founding Mothers” involved in the formation of the archives, via their oral histories collected in the GWMP Oral History Project. They gave themselves this collective title, and during the late 1990s, the “GWMP advisory group was expanded and formalized as the Georgia Women's Movement Project Advisory Board that included two task forces and the GWM Oral History Project” (“Georgia Women's Movement Project Historical Timeline”). From 1995 to 2001, this group

worked across the task forces and oral history project to see the collection take shape, meeting more than 300 times in that period (ibid). Because I was especially interested in the rhetorical nature of the formation of the archival collection, I first engaged just three oral histories of the women who served as co-chairs of the Oral History Project: Phase I. Some of the women who served as leaders in the formation of the oral history project served as interviewers *and* recorded their own oral history. I was interested in the reflexive nature of having been both interviewer and interview subject, related to their overall agency in the project's formation. Feeling there was more to learn by including more voices, I expanded my corpus to the oral histories of the Founding Mothers, which comprised nine of the original Founding Mothers and included the initial three (records show this initial group to be about eighteen). Then, in conversation with Morna Gerrard and based on her immense knowledge of the collection, I included three more women whose narratives she felt would add important context to the story of the ERA in Georgia and the eventual formation of the collection. This brought the full corpus up to twelve oral histories; chapter two provides a table for reference. Throughout the early research of this study, I faced the challenge of determining what "counted" in my overall corpus, and as is the nature of qualitative work, I have drawn some logical and some pragmatic limits to best share the narratives included herein. I supplemented my research with primary materials in the GWMP collected by and about the same women.

### ***2.1.1 Ethical Considerations***

In their reflective piece on the nature of ethics in archival research, McKee and Porter suggest the key to ethical research in the archives is in how we see the materials and documents that we study. Documents created by persons who inhabit archival spaces collapse the "person-text binary" in ways that complicate our sense of *who* and *what* are the subject of our study (78).

Whether presently living or dead, all the subjects contained in the GWMP archival collections I study have rhetorical agency. Therefore, as the researcher, I maintain a position of self-conscious engagement with these subjects, rather than authorial superiority. Such a self-conscious method “places microhistorians in dialogue with the historical sources they interpret, not in a position of power over them, and it places the audience of the historical text in dialogue with the past” (McComiskey 24). Throughout, I document my methods, showing what I count as evidence as well as where my biases and limitations set boundaries on what is knowable. Any historical research is performed in the context of the destabilized nature of all historical narratives and thus, “showing our hand,” in our methods is key to meaningful work (L’Eplattenier 178). Included therein are my positionality and relationship to this project and the research questions guiding this work. As a white, able-bodied, cisgender, college-educated woman living and working in the United States South, each of those identities and contexts informs my research.

In their edited collection dedicated to “unsettling” archival research, Kirsch et al. note “What and how society chooses to remember history is significant” (8). Additionally, archives are in a “constant state of flux,” meaning what is preserved, how, who has access to it, reorganization, and technological shifts all have an impact on what is knowable (Grobman and Greer 19). Even as archives have become more democratic and inclusive in recent decades, the very nature of history is based on interpretation from limited source material and location—much of which is housed in spaces of institutional (read: colonial, white) power. As Jacqueline Jones Royster eloquently illustrates, history as a form of knowledge creation is “less truth for all time, space, and conditions than it is interpretation” (“Disciplinary” 149). That is, from where each of us stands within the context of identities, locations, and place in time, what we have access to regarding the past shifts. Paired with the interpretive flux of cultural understanding and

the records available to us in archival records, the idea of any sort of neutral view of history is neither possible nor valuable. Such limitations set the parameters for what is knowable now, but render the work no less important or meaningful for what we can find out; in fact, those discoveries not only shape knowledge about our past but also advance how we continue to collect and interpret archives still in formation. There is significant urgency in this work now, as we complicate the who and what of history through the slow work of dismantling structures of power that long maintained even the historical record. “This is a crucial time in our history to ask what the future will look like, how we want to remember this period, and how we can unsettle history and memory” (García et al. 8). In other words, despite the challenges of the work taking place with archival practice and in history-driven rhetoric and composition, the work is worth doing because the stakes are high.

Key to the above considerations, subjectivity and positionality are recognized and embraced in feminist rhetorical frameworks. Enoch and Jack acknowledge, “who we are shapes what we say and how we interpret” as researchers and people (9). Feminist scholars embody and embrace engagement with, rather than detachment from, the object of research, a process that was always happening but is now acknowledged and appreciated (Sutherland). The idea has become so embedded in humanities work that newer scholars take it for granted. Starting in the 1960s, progressive historians sought to complicate singular, narrative views of history during the same tumultuous era that archivists were called to recognize the role they played in the collection and that interpretation of the past was not neutral (Caswell et al. “Critical”; Hughes-Watkins; McComiskey; Zinn). In addition to its subjectivity, feminist inquiry is unapologetically political, as politics and subjectivity are inescapable to women’s daily lives and inform their scholarly inquiry. In fact, our choices as researchers cannot be value-free, because as Wu notes,

methodology requires judgement: “Is the subject worth writing about?” (132). In feminist rhetorical practice, we recognize the humanity of the researcher, our lived experience, and how that perspective informs the research subjects we pursue and the questions we ask. There are many ways in which archival and feminist work overlap, and this approach to the lived research process is a critical one. When Kathleen Wider reflects on her process with archival research, she observes, “I had to go far beyond an abstract and logical analysis of the questions and their possible answers. I had to go out into the world and deep into myself” (69). This unabashedly subjective, personal, and communal statement embodies the subjectivity and positionality in feminist rhetorical practice.

Part of subjectivity, emotion has long been gendered female and contrasted against masculine-gendered reason. Feminist rhetorical theory embraces emotion in the scholarly process, as neither inferior to reason nor unworthy of study. Bizzell argues for emotion in feminist methodologies, which she sees as “the acknowledgement of the multiple functions of emotions and experiences in defining one’s relationship to one’s research, a departure from traditional methods that Royster calls ‘practices of disregard’” (13). In Bizzell’s conceptualization, feminist rhetorical research methods are especially helpful in the study of rhetorical history because of the added depth emotion elicits in understanding events and experiences. Glenn reminds us that “emotion and reason are not mutually exclusive,” but instead “mutually supportive cognitive abilities that shape us as we actively and productively engage in our personal, social, and political lives” (*Rhetorical* 91). Our subjectivity and the contingent nature of our experiences and those of whom we study, when embraced, improve our scholarship.

As this entire project lies at the intersection of feminist rhetorical practice, microhistory, and critical archival studies, I cite scholars working in those areas whose ethical considerations reflect mine. In the next sections that outline the theoretical basis for feminist rhetorical microhistory, I will elaborate on some of the key ethical considerations those scholars use that inform my approach and the results of this study.

### ***2.1.2 Unsettling archives and archival voices***

This research is centered on the idea that community archives counter traditional archival structures and that, when archives are formed by the people included therein, communities are “empowered to craft their own arguments about the past and the future” (Prince 63). As I discuss across the chapters, both forming an archives and recording oral histories are intentional acts by the Founding Mothers and others who contributed to the Georgia Women’s Movement Project (GWMP) archival collection at Georgia State University, acts to document history on their terms, in response to the misrepresentation they saw from both historical record and media representation. I suggest that the formation of an archives was an extension of the activist work and was revolutionary--to a degree--based on the 1990s context and efforts in the second half of the twentieth century to center and recover women’s voices for historical record. However, there are real limits to the revolutionary impact of the GWMP based on its collecting limits as well. Who was included in the collection, which narratives of the women’s movement in Georgia were centered, and who was not included (or even consciously excluded) are important considerations that feminist rhetorical practice and critical archival practice implore us to engage as part of an “unsettling” of archives traditionally centering individuals with privileged race, socioeconomic, and gender positions (Kirsch et al., Caswell et al., “Critical”).



What makes the GWMP archives a rich location for engaging FRM and advancing feminist recovery work is twofold: first, the narratives included provide a counter to the larger narrative of Georgia politics and the women's movement via microhistory; in other words, they were writing a counternarrative to the history of the Equal Rights Amendment battle that occurred during the second wave women's movement, which concluded with the amendment failing to be ratified and added to the U.S. Constitution. The women of the GWMP, while holding some identities (primarily white, middle-class, college-educated, urban dwelling) that place them firmly in the dominant narrative, felt marginalized in history. Certainly, they had been marginalized in the historical record as women. But there were women on the side of "victory" who had stood for the traditional roles of women in the South, who did not align with their understanding of that era of history and were left holding the winner's title. They knew enough about how history gets written to understand the urgency of interrupting the dominant narrative--that the South was not amenable to women's equality.

Second, and related to the important work scholars are doing to unsettle archives and archival practice, the GWMP is a rich location for FRM because the collection exists in a distinct location in the development of recovery work in feminist rhetoric *and* in archival studies. By the 1990s, when they built the GWMP collection, many archivists' practice was highly mediated by efforts to center and intentionally collect the voices of marginalized groups, and much of the GWMP is informed by that intention. This was the same decade that brought so much formative recovery work in feminist rhetoric through works like *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* (Royster) and *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Glenn). Several decades removed from those important interruptions, we are faced with the questions of what comes next in recovery work?

How do we continue to engage historical record of women's experiences in ways that unsettle what we know, while also decentering dominant voices? Lest the women of the GWMP be lumped in with many problematic archival collections, recognizing their kairotic moment in both archival and feminist rhetorical practice becomes a significant factor in my consideration of them, in this study. The GWMP archival collection, as the Founding Mothers saw it, was unsettling the dominant narrative and claiming space within archives for women's experiences of building movements for social justice causes (beyond the ERA, which is also discussed in the chapters two and three), including successes and failures, major challenges and limits observed at the time and in retrospect. We can also fairly criticize the limits of their archival collection and its goals, based in the realities of institutional power (with colonizer and white Eurocentric roots) and the relative power these women had based on race and socioeconomic privileges in the 1990s that made their goal of creating an archives a reality.

While FRM leaves room for suspended judgment about individuals so that we might sit with their perspectives and how they saw the world from their point in history, it does not suggest that we suspend critical engagement with the limits and biases that hampered social progress. FRM allows us to deeply listen to what it was like to rhetorically situate women's rights as a worthy issue in the Georgia legislature while sidestepping the question of whether this included advocating for lesbians and Black women in the state because those prejudices in their audience left them no choice. This practice of white feminism, that asks for equality for a group of women while leaving others behind, is a well-established critique of the second wave movement. FRM does not excuse those tactics, but allows them to exist in their fullness, allows women (with all their flaws) to exist fully in historical record.

And so, as this research suggests, the women who founded the GWMP were in some ways the ones unsettling the archival and historical record to recovery their experiences of an important moment in U.S. history they felt had not evolved accurately. But, as Prince suggests in her work on critical nostalgia in the archives, dynamics of power and access still inform “who gets to tell the stories within the archives and what stories are omitted to maintain cohesive argument” (59). The GWMP holds a specific positionality in the larger narrative of women’s movements in U.S. history, and while this projects illustrates the very many important things we can learn from their experience of forming a movement, building coalitions, and failing and succeeding, there is still much left to recover to fully understand this era for so many women in the U.S. South. Feminist rhetorical microhistory is one methodology that may be used to that end, to continue the *recovery* work that adds layers to historical understanding, that complicates our understanding of the past, by utilizing microhistory concurrently with feminist rhetorical and critical archival practice. The rest of this chapter organizes the theoretical concepts I used to arrive at this approach.

## **2.2 Microhistory**

While I risk oversimplifying the emergence of microhistory—a concept with the goal of avoiding such reduction—I will briefly outline its origins. Microhistory grew out of 1970s Italy, where dissatisfied Marxist historians viewed an abstract, decontextualized historical narrative as not only overly simplistic but inaccurate. Early microhistorians sought “to negotiate a methodological middle ground,” emphasizing “contextualized lived experience over lifeless abstractions and isolated events” and frequently beginning their work in the archives (McComiskey 15). In an effort to professionalize and validate historical study, Western scholars have long touted the scientific nature of history, the pursuit of objective knowledge of the past, a

pursuit we know to be folly and a goal we know to be impossible. Microhistorians, and social historians alongside them, would challenge this hegemonic, “objective” view to history, and their (and other historians’) work in the latter half of the twentieth century would come to be known as ‘revisionist’ history for its aim to expand the grand narrative. Oral history arose as one strong method to reject historians’ “aim to convey a completeness in the data presented, or at least of an authoritative, coherent, and all-inclusive authorial point of view” (Levi 129). The efforts of historians towards linearity, abstraction, and quantification were damaging and misleading, glossing over the “social forces determining individual actions” as well as the personal stakes and motivations of regular people in larger historical events (McComiskey 15). For example, many of the women included in the oral history collection on which this study centers were driven to activism in response to intensifying women’s issues, such as access to safe and legal abortions and birth control—in some cases, they played crucial roles in their communities and this activity led to further advocacy in other professional, social, and political contexts throughout their lives. Social forces played a role in the larger wave of foundational changes that were happening in U.S. society—opening opportunities for women, people of color, and other marginalized groups—and informing the individual action possible as an outcome. Importantly, proper contextualization assures that their actions were not fated, and often came with risks, even if the stakes are sometimes diminished in personal and cultural memory over time.

Microhistory, instead, allows us to adjust our scopic levels, suggesting that individuals act and make decisions on multiple levels. The scales on which any one person acts are deeply embedded into social and cultural context, and “if we perceive only one [of these] scale[s], we perceive only a small portion of any total phenomenon” (McComiskey 18). To narrate events of our past as if individuals were not operating in such complex spaces, then, would be to

mischaracterize all human history and agency. These are the stakes to which recognizing oral history as rhetorical act can subvert our understanding of action, agency, and the course of events in our larger historical narratives. Such stakes also highlight the value in using feminist rhetorical scholarship to engage microhistory in our methodological approach.



*Figure 1: Cathey Steinberg in the Georgia General Assembly on January 21, 1982, watching voting results on the Equal Rights Amendment*

For this project’s narrators, who will join me in subsequent chapters, these complexities meant finding themselves facing lawmakers and public figures and holding their own. Microhistory looks like Linda Hallenborg Kurtz organizing a very diverse group of ERA supporters over a lunch break during the White House Conference on Families in Athens, GA, to coordinate their votes for who would represent the state at the same conference at the national level. The religious right was very well organized, Margaret Curtis, another narrator, remembered: “Bus load after bus load of people came in from little churches all around Georgia, and Linda said, ‘These people are

going to bloc-vote to get their people to that conference in Washington, [D.C.]” Despite the variety of interest groups there, the pro-ERA bloc outvoted the anti-ERA bloc. The quick thinking and persuasive organizing Curtis observed in the face of a strong political adversary illustrated Kurtz’s role as a “tireless, devoted worker for the ERA.” This specific memory of a victory in the work of the women’s movement counters the historical narrative recorded in headlines of newspapers, like *The Atlanta Constitution* headline on Thursday, January 21, 1982,

that declared “House Crushes ERA 116-57” with a despondent Representative Cathey Steinberg below the text (see figure 1; we will also meet Steinberg in the next chapters).

Microhistory looks like Carrie Nell Moyer, who was defeated in a contentious battle for the presidency of ERA Georgia, Inc. (also discussed in the next chapter), going head-to-head in a debate with Phyllis Schlafly in Cartersville, Georgia, and quoting her own words back to her in a “mic-drop” moment. “I knew Phyllis always dressed in red, so I wore the green dress with the turtleneck on it. Green for ‘Let’s Go!’ you know?” Moyer recalled. She continued:

I can’t remember the exact quote, but there was some quote in the book about, ‘—and if we do this and do this and treat our men right, we can use that and have power over them.’ And I got that quote, and I looked directly into the camera, and I said, ‘And in closing, I would like to quote something from Phyllis Schlafly’s book.’ Of course, Phyllis Schlafly was sitting right there, and I read this and said, ‘—and we shall have power over them.’ And I looked at the camera and I said — I gave the page it was on...I said, ‘We in the women’s movement do not wish to have power over our men. We do not look for that at all. We seek legal equality with our men. Neither should exercise power over the other.’ Well, Phyllis Schlafly was really flabbergasted, and she says, ‘Bu-bub-bu...I am so glad that you have chosen to quote from my book — that you have read my book, but I don’t really mean power as having real power over them.’ She really couldn’t have a come-back because I was quoting directly from her book, that I had there for all — for the television audience to see.

Even if Schlafly is today considered in her full complexity as an organizer and rhetor, the work she led to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment was successful, and the work of ERA organizers in Georgia was not—in that specific battle. Moyer’s experience illustrates the many smaller

moments that comprised a contentious time in feminist history that today claims clear “winners” and “losers.”

The scopic levels unlocked in microhistory necessitate a back-and-forth within study. Contrary to its name, microhistory does not engage close-up historical study at the expense of larger context. Rather, practitioners recognize the role social, political, and economic factors can have on individual decisions and experiences, and that studying one without the other provides a stunted, simplistic interpretation of complex conditions. Magnússon and Szi­jártó, in outlining microhistory as theory and practice, explain that “picking a certain level of analysis influences knowledge” (43). In short, microhistory offers a new way of looking at personal stories connected to larger historical events (McComiskey 18). It allows us to ask different questions and arrive at knowledge not previously available to us, even of historical moments that have been well documented in history and popular memory. This new knowledge—available via shifting scopic levels—includes both what we are able to ask of archival records and the unexpected/unsettled responses from the voices those records contain. This is not unlike Cheryl Glenn’s call, in the “remapping” metaphor she uses to complicate our view of rhetorical history, to “look crookedly” to see what is “less inevitable, less familiar” in standard locations of historical documentation (Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold* 7). Microhistory invites a slanted, crooked, unsettled perspective on things we think we knew, or assumptions we make, about actors and events in the past.

The use of microhistory in my study provides three critical affordances: **focus** (on a small group of women active in the Women’s Movement and especially in the battle to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia), **space** to understand what actions mean for the actors themselves, and **language** to define that work and their actions within larger events. As a

methodological tool, “the purpose of microhistory is to elucidate historical causation at the level of small groups where most of life takes place and to open history up to peoples who would be left out by other models” (Magnússon and Szijártó 26, quoting Muir 1991a *xxi*). Focus on a small group of actors allows me to make meaningful knowledge of the past. Moreover, despite microhistorians’ early focus on social circuits and networks, they found valuable understanding when they explored “action and its meaning, and how these actions form the whole system” (27). Understanding the agency of regular people in history is a marked shift in our understanding of how history unfolds. But within analysis of action and meaning, “the most important thing is to understand what action means for the actors themselves” (27). This is exactly where my keenest interest lies within the present research: my whole intent for discovery is in understanding the rhetorical act of remembrance, the compulsion by GWMP organizers to collect documents and oral histories to preserve their experiences of a social movement on their own terms, and to discover what that action (and their previous and subsequent actions related to women’s and civil rights) meant to them. Finally, microhistory necessitates connecting that discovery back to the larger historical narrative of the women’s movement and the ongoing conceptualization of women’s rights in the U.S. Microhistory — in contrast to the anthropological approach of “thick description” — takes as its starting point social differentiation, and, finally, does not sacrifice the individual to generalization” (29). It is not my job, nor would it be epistemologically useful, to define the women’s movement on a large scale. Rather, it is my goal to find the meaning of that time to individuals, as their individual understanding helps bring meaning to the specific time.

The events that took place in one region, involving several “small” actors, have a more nuanced picture when we step back. The fact that each woman’s oral history is specific to her experiences of organizing for the ERA, the organizational shifts within that movement, and their



perceived outcomes afterward—and that some of those accounts conflict with one another—does not mean they are not valuable to understanding historical events; instead, such discrepancies make clear that past events are highly mediated and situated *at the time* and malleable in our memories *afterward*. We tend to simplify things in a retelling, glossing over disagreements among groups when we characterize them in historical accounts. We can use microhistory to resist that historiographical urge.

In fact, to my eye, microhistory allows us to understand and interpret oral history more deeply, as the methodology provides a way around the challenge of mediated knowledge impacted by both (the fallibility of) memory and (the passing of) time. What oral history “has to teach and [how], as a particular form of history, it can be read or misread” is an important consideration, as Michael Frisch points out (6). First, there is the complicated process of “historical memory and generational transfer” that is occurring, meaning interviewed subjects are both speaking “movingly” about the past while “also trying to live in and understand” their current contemporary time (7). The degree to which the present informs past events in an oral history cannot be overstated but does not make it less valuable. Understanding this mediation—this act of rhetorical remembrance—instead speaks to the “variable relation” people might experience to their own past, and how they interpret and understand the events of their lives alongside larger cultural and historical contexts.

Frisch notes that we must resist the two “casual assumptions” often made about oral history: that it is providing either “more history” (functioning as a source of historical information) or “no history” (as a bypassing of historical interpretation altogether) (9). If these are the two ends of a binary in which we observe the value of oral history sources, we can instead direct our attention somewhere in between. He illustrates this point through an analysis

of Studs Terkel's *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, noting that the strength of the book is Terkel's unapologetic engagement with "the truths" expressed in memories that then force us to look more closely at what the narratives represent. Frisch effectively describes how this plays out in the form of oral history:

In these terms, the question of memory—personal and historical, individual, and generational—moves to center stage as the object, not merely the method, of oral history. The questions that emerge can be thought of in the following general forms, focused on process and change: What happens to experience on the way to becoming memory? What happens to experience on the way to becoming history? As an era of intense collective experience recedes into the past, what is the relationship of memory to historical generalization? These questions, so basic to thinking about how culture and individuality interact over time, are the sort of questions that oral history is peculiarly, perhaps uniquely, able to penetrate. (9-10)

Oral history allows us, in other words, to observe how "experience, memory, and history act on our lives over time" (10). Feminist rhetorical microhistory is a useful methodology for engaging these questions, which occupied my mind throughout listening to the oral histories that comprise this study. The question of how experience forms into history is highly relevant to the collection at hand, and to the sense of being an "actor in history" maintained by some (though likely not all) of the narrators in the GWMP oral history collection. The complex, mediated nature of oral history as a primary source of historical information is an underlying strength and important consideration impacting my findings.

In my analysis of the rhetorical moves of individuals or groups based primarily in Metro Atlanta (with efforts and some individuals in other pockets of the state), during the political

action of the Equal Rights Amendment era, I connect these findings back to larger historical narratives. My investigation yields a more complete picture than taking either only a small-scale or only a large-scale perspective. As discussed, oral history as method for collecting and understanding embraces the complexities and subjectivity of the individual within history (Terkel). An oral history is demonstrably subjective, often containing conflicting accounts that rely on memory, which we know to be fallible. But in conversation with other oral histories, and using theories like microhistory, we begin to see larger patterns, draw new knowledge, and importantly, gain perspective on individuals who might seem “exceptional” by their deeds or inclusion in historical narrative, but who with closer inspection are revealed to be regular people who did hard things despite the odds against them. This interruption of the exceptional-due-to-some-intrinsic-character-trait trope becomes a key theme in subsequent chapters as we hear from these narrators and is possible due to the methodologies I engage.

When using microhistory to study the field of composition, Bruce McComiskey described what he saw as the “exceptional normal,” the small moments that might *seem* exceptional or pattern-breaking in history, but with further study contain logic and order. In fact, this phenomenon may only be possible to see when comparing many individuals’ experiences in retrospect to an event they all experienced. McComiskey outlines the “exceptional normal” concept as it relates to specific cases that seem to break with the normative narrative of how events took place. “The exceptional normal is a particular case in history that is exceptional from the perspective of social history but may reveal a hidden normal from the perspective of cultural history” (19). For example, he quotes from Muir:

‘If documents generated by the forces of authority systematically distort the social reality of the subaltern classes, then the exceptional document, especially one that records the

exact words of a lower-class witness or defendant, could be much more revealing than a multitude of stereotypical sources' (Muir 1991, xvi).

In other words, it would fit with the larger narrative of U.S. and Southern politics to write off women in the South, in Georgia, when it comes to the failure narrative of the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA, with all the "family values" backlash that would build throughout the 1970s and lead to it not being ratified and thus not added to the Constitution, never stood a chance in the South, critics argued. It failed in the House 116-57, after all. The subjects of this study faced the same kind of silencing by the record they observed to be forming about a very important moment in their history. Like McComiskey, they had a moment of looking around and realizing that the conventional narrative was not leaving space for the way *they* had experienced events. Continuing their activism work, they then used the rhetorical agency they had to interrupt the narrative. Using microhistory, we can listen for the "exceptions."

The above discussion is concerned with the exceptional normal regarding specific moments or events in history. But we can also apply the exceptional normal concept when studying a person. When the subject you are studying is a *person*, the following are true:

- This person is understood to have agency.
- Their agency is contextual and can be contextualized.
- The subject can act according to exigencies of personal desires (McComiskey 20)
- We can understand complex dynamics of social and cultural history by studying the decisions of individuals, their actions and motives, as these individual decisions collect and form social structures.

- Those who resist social structures are valuable to examine in historical and rhetorical context, and reveal “complex dynamics that neither abstract social history nor descriptive cultural history can reveal” (20).

In doing the above actions—seeking the exceptional normal, using a multiscopic lens—those employing microhistory maintain a nuanced approach to the types of records we engage, and what kind of evidence they reveal. “For microhistorians, sources are not objective or biased, salient or manipulative; all sources are rhetorical, and source plurality is the goal” (21). Since the rise in popularity of oral history, it has sometimes been heralded as more useful in adding “texture [to] a moment whose formal history is known,” Michael Frisch warns in *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Instead, and as this project centers, oral history can be a source documenting “an inner reality very much at odds with the public image of historical events” (163). As all of the sources I have used in this study are subjective, indicative of several disparate moments in historical time, my task is to view these many interpretations of the women’s movement in Georgia—daily roles, organizing, successes and failures, impact and perceived legacy—in order to gain a deeper understanding of both second-wave feminism in Georgia *and* the rhetorical context of the 1990s when those same players sought to capture what such an enormous movement looked like from their perspective.

The historical rhetorical analysis I have attempted shares the urgency of others in rhetorical studies to “confront, reveal, and amend the epistemic privileges of a proper Memory and History that remains responsible for the marginalization of other histories and memories” (García et al. 14, capitalization in original). Archival collections hold both the hegemonic legacy of power and singular voice *alongside* a potential to disrupt that dominance. McComiskey adapted historians’ methodology of microhistory to generate deeper knowledge of the history of

the field of composition than was previously possible. In the collection he edited, *Microhistories of Composition*, contributors apply the methods and theories of microhistory to the field of composition studies, to examine a field's history that "has never been unified or predictable" (23) precisely because the wide-angle, linear narrative and its converse—the highly individualized experience—are both limited in what they can tell us about the past. This set of boundary-pushing chapters demonstrates that it is possible to establish more complicated historical pictures when we use methods that consciously engage sources as *biased* and *rhetorical* rather than aim for an impossible—and uselessly bland—objective. Such methodology also validates the use of sources that lie on the margins of our normative approach to evidence. As he explains: "The value of microhistory as an extension of revisionary histories of composition is that it brings together a full collection of related methodologies, all of which together reduce the scale of historical analysis and increase the complexity of our current historical knowledge" (14).

By engaging with archival material on the women's movement in Georgia through a collection of related methodologies, used in both rhetoric and history, I can *reduce the scale* frequently used to study that era of U.S. history in order to *increase the complexity* of what we know about it. Further, this approach is less concerned with singular, linear narratives and more concerned with the moves, experiences, and remembrances of individuals, for what those actions add to our understanding of the larger picture. McComiskey calls it a negotiation between cultural history—that which we see and experience as individuals—and social history—that which we understand in large, sweeping moments—and characterizes the resulting methodology as "multiscopic" (17). This approach is especially important in the study of individuals because of the sets of relationships that determine a person's reactions and choices to any given rhetorical

environment. In other words, though acting within a significant national historical moment in time, the women whose stories are held in the archives at the center of this study made decisions of action and word based on the rhetorical environments and sets of relationships in which they found themselves.

The concepts contained in microhistory help us to complicate conventional historical narrative, thus leading to its productive overlap with feminist rhetorical theory, and thus to the new framework of feminist rhetorical microhistory.

### **2.3 Feminist Rhetoric beyond recovery work**

Rhetorical theory has expanded productively in the last several decades, embracing expanded concepts while answering Jacqueline Jones Royster's call for rhetoric "to turn away from a totalizing Western European, white, elite conception of what accounts for rhetoric and who has the cultural capital to participate" (cited by Ramírez 608; Royster, "Disciplinary"). The theories grounding this work, that of invitational rhetoric (Foss and Griffin) and its extensions, rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe) and rhetorical empathy (Blankenship), and the practice of sitting in strategic contemplation of my research subjects (Royster and Kirsch), arrived as a response to this expansion, this turning away from narrow definitions of who is performing rhetorically. These theories advance decolonization of education, engage non-Western theories of rhetoric, and acknowledge subjectivity and Other-ness. This scholarship not only acknowledges but requires that positionality is central to our approach to understanding one another—towards meaningful engagement.

The present research advances a strong body of feminist rhetorical work that goes beyond recovering women in historical record, beyond even enacting or restoring their rhetorical agency. As I suggest, the women forming the archival collection at GSU, gathering materials and

recording oral histories to preserve the record of their political actions, were well aware of their agency and of their need to defend it in history, for those to come after. Rather, I am looking for pockets of unexplored rhetorical savvy that arise from women recording their stories in a post-feminist movement, a generation who had already studied the voices before them. Akin to the way a feminist rhetor understands the relationship of researcher to subject, there is a sense of reflexivity in this study, “necessarily turning analysis back on ourselves” (Cifor and Wood 3). When Cifor and Wood use this phrase, they specifically refer to my positionality as a researcher in relation to these women, who are my research subjects. I am taking its use one step further to suggest my subjects also held this reflexive position, hyperaware of the intention and meaning of their oral history, as they recorded it, and its potential for usage and analysis in future research. This awareness is amplified in the women who served as interviewers who were themselves recorded and included as subjects, enacting the sort of “turning back on ourselves” action involved in collecting histories of this kind.

The research for this study contributes to a body of scholarship across disciplines that examines the nature of women’s agency in historical record (as well as its absence and its [mis]understanding), including scholars in archival studies (Caswell and Cifor; Cifor and Wood; Eichhorn; Hughes-Watkins; Kumbier; Moseley; Voss-Hubbard), history (Faderman; Hartman; Hirsch; Terkel), and feminist rhetoric (Glenn; Royster; Enoch; Ramírez; Goggin; Wu; Gaillet and Bailey; Keohane; Hallenbeck; Enoch and Jack; Gold and Enoch; Takayoshi). In this study, I consider the rhetorical moves made in the collection as they relate to rhetoric as social action and public action. If rhetorical action is social in addition to public, it follows that no matter what spaces women have inhabited in history, they have been rhetorical. Using forms of communication previously not considered rhetorical, recent feminist rhetorical scholarship has



recovered and redefined those methods. Evidence of rhetorical agency and intention has been widely expanded to include letters, diaries, meeting notes (Mattingly), textiles (Maureen Daly Goggin), women-published Spanish-language journalism (Cristina Ramírez), and memoir in conversation with bureaucratic records (Pamela Takayoshi).

In addition, groundbreaking methods of feminist historians like Saidiya Hartman use archival collections to look for those lives which only brushed up against the edges of archival materials deemed “important.” Hartman’s work using historical fabulation imagines and inhabits the lives of those whose agency was not previously documented, or was documented only to illustrate a lack of “normal” or lived agency. Collectively, the work of scholars in archival studies, history, and rhetoric—and often overlapping the three—represents a generative space for further study on the rhetorical act of remembrance. The tools and decisions employed by women continue to evolve and expand, despite the delay it took for those scholarly fields to acknowledge any of those as rhetorical.

Scholarship engaging feminist methodology has advanced *who and what* are rhetorical and informs my present scholarship. This includes considering the spaces in which women’s rhetorical means and agency are enacted—like locations of *work*, which informed my initial questions for these archival records. Gold and Enoch’s 2018 edited collection *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor* examines the agency women had, gained, or accessed in their relationship to “work” across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Emotional and affective labor, issues of classed and raced categories, the limits of work spaces, and the embodied nature of being female across professions contribute to our understanding of women’s relationship to gendered space and the rhetorical actions they frequently engaged to survive or succeed. The collection builds on critical work by Enoch on the spatial rhetorics of work space, both domestic

and public, and the legacy of women's relationships to those spaces over time (2018). With the explicit purpose of expanding "notions of what constitutes rhetorical action and venue," Gaillet and Bailey's 2019 edited collection *Remembering Women Differently* supports a more broadly defined rhetoric, expanding *who and what*, and illustrating why rhetoric matters to our understanding of past and present.

Numerous generative studies have used the frameworks Royster and Kirsch formalized in their 2012 *Feminist Rhetorical Practice* to advance rhetorical historical scholarship beyond recovering female voices from the past. In her recent work on three case studies of everyday rhetorics of resistance, change, and difference, Vanessa Kraemer Sohan (2020) further breaks "the false binary between public and private that feminist rhetorical practice has long sought to disrupt" (5). Works like hers not only answer the call to "look back, to recover and reclaim the (extra)ordinary ways rhetors throughout history have employed everyday rhetorics of resistance towards disruptive ends" (34), such work also advances a more complicated understanding of rhetoric as a social phenomenon, something more than the "public" definition traditionally given it. In the case of the Townsend Clubs and its leader Pearl S. Burkhalter, Sohan argues that social movements that fail carry major implications for our interpretations of history and present movements. Even in their failure, social movements "contribute to ongoing sedimented change, enabling composers to redefine how they identify and position themselves in relation to dominant structures" (34). Sarah Hallenbeck also validates the rhetorical power of failure ("Inventing"; "Resituating") and its impact on gendered views towards business and success. Her work suggests that for so long in our scholarship, acknowledging a woman's failure to achieve made for a less victorious remembrance of lived experience that was perhaps shameful or not worthy of remembering; more nuanced recovery work pushes past this urge, opening up new

potential for our interpretation and understanding for the often-valuable outcomes of failure. Recent works like these, using the methodologies established by Royster and Kirsch, continue the recovery work of women's rhetorical action with acknowledgment of the meaning and impact of failure.

Because the activism surrounding the women's movement in Georgia faced opposition from powerful factions, including women, and ultimately the Equal Rights Amendment was not ratified, the rhetorical agency in the act of creating an archives and recording oral histories to document their experiences takes on added rhetorical appeal. The act of consciously collecting materials to remember this movement, and to remember it within and beyond concepts of "failure," gave these women rhetorical agency to control how their stories were told in historical record. As with any social movement, large and small actions taken by many of the women were not viewed as failures to them, at the time or in retrospect. Therefore, a key theme of my feminist rhetorical approach to this collection, and my questions, revolve around the remembrance and recovery of "failures" and rhetorical agency therein.

Cristina Ramirez's "Forging a Mestiza Rhetoric: Mexican Women Journalists' Role in the Construction of a National Identity" highlights the (historically overlooked) agency of women journalists and educators who wanted to be part of an emerging feminist movement, but with their own identity as Mexican women. In the late nineteenth century, women's increasing role as educators during Mexico's national push for universal primary education contributed to a consciousness-raising of sorts. Women journalists took advantage of the void created in their nation's patriarchal perspective to carve their own *mestiza* rhetoric. They used the moment in national history "as an opportunity to speak up, claim a place in history, and secure a voice in the public discourse on modernity" (609). Ramirez's work advances a feminist rhetorical view firstly

by focusing on the “divergent, subversive texts” (607) created with exacting intention by the women at the center of her study; secondly, she argues we have thus far lacked the language “to imagine respectful and reciprocal relationships” in the historical figures we study, and the degree to which feminist practice is survival, together (625).

What it means to have agency within structural systems built to ignore or suppress such agency are central considerations in Pamela Takayoshi’s work on women’s recorded and lived experience in U.S. mental health facilities in the nineteenth century (“Finding”; “Through”). Her work sets stark, “objective”, bureaucratic written documentation against the idea that there was another side to the story, engaging (as I see it) a shift in scopic level to better understand women interacting with “officials” of madness. Additionally, contributors to Gold and Enoch’s collection *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor* consider the rhetorically constructed concept of work in order to “examine how questions of class, race, sexuality, domesticity, embodiment, and religion have inflected working women’s lives” (5). Across the case studies, which span nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States working women, not only engage those listed elements of feminist rhetorical scholarship, they do so with an eye to larger labor regional and/or temporal contexts of the times. These are the examples that reaffirm to me the value and necessity of combining feminist rhetorical theories of listening with microhistory and feminist archival practice.

Some recent scholarship has begun the work of unpacking how we remember, an act long tied to rhetorical practice, specifically to how we remember *women* in public memory. Across Gaillet and Bailey’s 2019 edited collection, contributing authors challenge accepted narratives of known women and “re-collect” many other women previously not properly historicized. Letizia Guglielmo’s brilliant introduction frames the entire collection by sitting with Plato’s concept of

misremembering, itself on a continuum somewhere between remembering and forgetting; this placement of the concept perhaps helps us to better understand “the plurality of the term ‘remembering’ and its role in feminist historiography” (2). She draws on this discussion of the term to signify its distinction from the term “recollection,” the latter being an active process that takes place across the entire volume. While the discussion (and Plato’s view of memory) deserves its own separate discussion, I point to the tangled relationship of memory within rhetorical principles and theory—as well as its siblings, misremembering and erasure—as it relates to the theories that comprise my evolving feminist rhetorical microhistory. Within all three, feminist rhetorical practice, microhistory, and feminist archival practice, memory and remembrance are not discounted, and individuals’ memories are part of the complexity we seek to collect, listen to, interpret, and contextualize. This acknowledgment of the variability of the past and a willingness to listen guides that collection and thus forms a significant example and show of potential for more of this kind of work. Likewise, Patricia Wilde’s “(Re)telling the Times: The Tangled Memories of Confederate Spies Rose O’Neal Greenhow and Belle Boyd,” focuses on how specific women—O’Neal Greenhow and Boyd—chose to reframe their roles in the Confederacy in the wake of the U.S. Civil War and the dangerous implications of contemporary uncritical retellings of their experiences. Via the published narratives of both women (published in England during the war), we understand the nuance of women’s roles in social upheaval and war and, in the case of Greenhow and Boyd, their rhetorical appeals to British monarchy and public to garner Confederate support. However, their paternalistic view to slavery (and their pro-slavery positions) have been consistently omitted in our present-day desire to surprise and subvert an audience instead create overly simplistic, incomplete historical representations of women “who boldly defied rigid gender conventions” of their era (303). Wilde

presents this evidence in narratives published on several reputable websites in honor of the U.S. Civil War's sesquicentennial anniversary, recounting Greenhow and Boyd's outrageous antics, without discussion of the full, complex positionality as Southern (Confederate) women. By zooming in on the experience of women who intentionally crafted their experience afterward with an eye to historical record, we see the value of considering scopic levels—microhistorical methods—in feminist rhetorical work. We also see the continued danger of preferencing tidy historical narratives over the more realistic, messier ones. What's more, Wilde's work presents an excellent example of the dangers of continuing to favor "exceptional" women as the predominant characters in rhetorical historiography.

Emerging scholarship continues to push what's possible in feminist rhetorical practice, and though they employ different specific tools, calls on those of us in both rhetoric and feminist fields to innovate by crossing previous boundaries and making connections. In their innovative collection *Exposing Feminist Connections: Rhetoric and Activism Across Time, Space, and Place*, Fredlund, Hauman, and Ouellette arrange the collective work of feminist historical rhetorics as consciously recognizing "that the feminist movement encompasses a number of sometimes conflicting social movements" (10). Importantly, they note that holding too closely to discrete ideas of feminist movements as somehow not influenced by or related to one another is both inaccurate and ineffectual for historical understanding. Such limits, they argue, "ignor[e] the complexity of the feminist movement in order to focus on a discrete moment that is easier to study" (9-10). Rather, their collection embraces social movements and our rhetorical understanding of the actors within them as fallible and dynamic. Similarly, microhistory holds that sweeping narratives of historical record can and often have been at the expense of

complexity — or worse, tend to erase or dull the portions of the larger, messy human drama that don't fit neatly into a singular narrative.

The scholarly work I have outlined goes beyond recovery and re-collection, complicating our view of a woman's agency as well as her outlet for communicating such, and indeed pushes at the limits of feminist historical rhetorics and feminist rhetorical practice. The connections I have drawn in this chapter and apply in subsequent chapters respond to their call to push past disciplinary boundaries we have perhaps previously resisted. I do this with an explicit microhistorical lens. Further, as Fredlund et al. suggest, we are overdue in our work to recognize “how the past, present, and future of rhetoric are always already bound to one another—and how rhetorical practices can never be truly understood in isolation from their predecessors or their progenies” (8). Historians grappling with twentieth-century social movements and their connections to present-day movements are facing the same urgency. The more expansive and versatile our tools, the more likely the new knowledge to arrive from this and other studies can be relevant to our readers and productively impact our scholar-activist priorities.

### ***2.3.1 Rhetorical Listening***

Several theorists based in the feminist definition of rhetoric as engaging *with* another rather than persuasion *over* utilize listening as a means for deeper understanding—of rhetorical moves and space, of people and their action, of events past and present (Foss and Griffin; Blankenship; Ratcliffe). Krista Ratcliffe, via her concept of rhetorical listening, advocates neither “textual realism” in which text is perceived as holding “the truth”, nor “readerly idealism” wherein the context of listeners is erased. Rather, the third option is where rhetorical listening can occur: “to collapse the real/ideal dichotomy into a strategic third ground where rhetorical negotiation is exposed...where rhetorical listening is posited as one means of that negotiation”

(27). In other words, we must not simplify the context of the writer or speaker whom we are studying (listening to), nor do we suppose their text provides a literal, neutral, or complete account of *the* truth. Ratcliffe suggests this liminal space as a “strategic idealism” where we listen with the intent to understand with “subjective receptivity” (28). Within this third ground, we can both appreciate the rhetorical voice of the speaker for their experience as they recount it while situating it within historical events that may or may not corroborate that experience. In this way, the scopic levels of microhistory operate symbiotically with rhetorical listening’s neither-realism-nor-idealism approach; the former invites tension across historical interpretation, the latter allows grace for both the subject of historical study and the researcher (the listener). And neither suggests a value or imposes a hierarchy of what is “most” or “least” true regarding historical events and experience.

Feminist rhetoric does not stop there; feminist rhetorical theory opens countless avenues for richer, nuanced interpretations of the lives and decisions of others. Invitational rhetoric, Foss and Griffin propose, is relationship-driven, characterized by openness, and that once again does not position one voice over another or suggest a superior or “right” position. Invitational rhetoric “is an invitation to understanding as a means to create relationships rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (Foss and Griffin 212). Applied to historical and rhetorical analysis, invitational rhetoric ensures voices now contained in archives and historical record maintain agency, in the form of each of those exigencies: *equality; immanent value; self-determination*. There is a tendency when we study the past to value present-day perspective and interpret using hindsight, often at the expense of the experience and perspectives of those we are studying. Invitational rhetoric as heuristic urges scholars or any interpreters of people and events to suspend that urge, favoring a sitting-with, to contemplate one (or a few) of the innumerably



possible versions of history. In this, there is the potential for new knowledge, for the listener to generate valuable ideas—to take away something previously unrecoverable from historical study.

There is also the risk of confirmation bias, or looking to the past to find what we already assume or hope to be true. Confirmation bias has been a risk in social history work from its origins, thanks in no small part to the role of the researcher collecting evidence. The motives of and questions asked in qualitative studies across social science disciplines invite those they ask to consider what they imagine the researcher's agenda to be, and to align their responses to that end, as Abrams noted in her work recording the life stories of women aligned to varying degrees with a "feminist" identity (Abrams). In Abrams's case, this tendency to "focus on activities and experiences that could count as feminist" ended up greatly impacting the outcomes of the interviews she recorded and the resultant findings (89).

If equality, immanent value, and self-determination are afforded to archival figures and voices, we are engaging feminist-informed study of history. If we are concerning ourselves with what is knowable about historical events and people, looking for the individual's activity in both large and small contexts, we are engaging microhistory applied to rhetorical means and motivation in those contexts. Together, these intentions form the crux of the framework for this work.

The act of listening forms the critical binding agent between the theories woven into my analysis. This may seem only too obvious when applied to oral history, but for much of our historical interpretation, such oral accounts were not valued with the same trust—perceived neutrality and truthfulness—of written records. In fact, the discerning reader will understand, both forms are fallible, created from the fractured source of human memory. And yet, to *listen*

*well* to the past, feminist theorists argue, the kind of tools we need to do this work remain occluded when we define every rhetorical act as one aimed to persuade.

Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening offers "a restored logos [that] may help us to imagine critique [of another's ideas] as incomplete without listening" (Stenberg 255), opening more space for engaging in ideas without the immediate need to agree/disagree within our interpretations of historical events. Lisa Blankenship builds on this, further rejecting rhetoric-as-persuasion and proposing it as a method to apply in many contexts we may study (including historical and present-day activists' actions, virtual spaces, and composition classrooms). In her theory of rhetorical empathy, organized around Classical Chinese and Arab-Islamic traditions, rhetoric is instead a method for "peace-making," and embracing "relational engagements across difference" and destabilizing "power-over" rhetoric in favor of "being-with" (29; 36). In other words, rhetorical empathy holds space for non-competitive communication, thus contending there is no objective truth, and nothing to "win" in many rhetorical contexts. Instead, we may approach accounts of historical events and individual experiences as not "right" or "wrong"—we can instead value their accounts for the ways in which their lived experience enhances or complicates our understanding of often linear, grand historical narratives.

Another key element of this project's framework is contextualization outside Western-based concepts of feminist scholarship and rhetoric. To further challenge Western constructs of both rhetorical agency and feminist theory, Maria Martin's use of "nego-feminism" (Nnaemeka)—alluding to both a negotiation and a stance of 'no-ego'—applied to her oral history and historiography work on Nigerian women's activism and autonomous organizations, and shows how women's activism in an African context is expressed "in language of compromise instead of Western feminist language of agitate, challenge, and disrupt" (Martin 59). Martin's

work informs my approach in its critical reminder that Western concepts of feminism are as limited as those of rhetoric, as well as to show the many ways in which activism looks different across women's myriad and complex motivations and goals. To that end, where transnational studies has been carefully applied to rhetoric and composition, we can begin to consider "how globalized power operates through a variety of linked scales" and how such power impacts rhetorical situation (Dingo et al. 518). In fact, Dingo et al. argue that transnational layers are nearly impossible to ignore in our present hyperconnected state or geopolitical and economic forces, as nearly every rhetorical situation is influenced in visible and invisible ways. Such as "uneven structures and sites of power" are, it is not enough to consider systems of power and how they impact an individual's relative agency; instead, "differentiated levels and sites of social experience are opportunities for rhetoricians to explore" better, deeper questions about rhetorical agency, with direct consideration of "how the ideas of the nation and practices of national sovereignty are circulated and how they achieve rhetorical force" (Dingo et al. 519; 524; Olson). In other words, the everyday actions of regular people are deeply impacted by neoliberal power structures which are especially relevant (even if not always apparent) in battles over political decisions. In many ways, the women who organized in support of the ERA in Georgia were already up against a heavily stacked political and social structure in the U.S. South that cast women in "traditional" family roles and was still very much entrenched in a "good ol' boys" system of government. These structures heavily conditioned the starting point for even incremental change in the social and political mindsets of both elected leaders and citizens. While I am not using transnational theories overtly in this analysis, my approach is informed by the essential understanding that forms of power operate within and underneath the daily lives of

regular people, and substantially mediate rhetorical agency and both the potential and limits of that agency.

In a larger historical context, it can be shockingly easy to lose sight of the smaller battles, negotiations, and successes enacted throughout a large movement like the U.S. women's movement from roughly 1962-1982. Defining success, likewise, becomes a moving target informed by political landscape, local context, religion, race, class, and many other factors. Rhetorical empathy as a "being-with" process and "nego-feminism" as an approach based in negotiation with ego removed both inform my nuanced interpretation of the historical material of oral histories recollecting the U.S. women's movement. In other words, while the major objective of passing the Equal Rights Amendment was not successful, the nature of the movement as a "failure" or "success" depends as much on the local contexts, livelihoods, and other outcomes of the movement and its people. How we come to understand these murkier, but perhaps more historically important, parts of the story may be the victory of applying such feminist theories of rhetoric to this and other historical research.

Blankenship warns that practicing rhetorical empathy often means confronting our own biases, reserving judgment especially of our contemporary mores, and frequently listening deeply to someone whose worldview or decisions may be at great odds with our own. In fact, she posits rhetorical empathy as one method for engaging the heavily polarized political climate that works its way into our classrooms as well as in professional, personal, and social spaces. I am using it here, instead, more like Jacqueline Royster (*Traces of a Stream*), Liz Rohan ("Stitching and Writing a Life"; "The Personal as Method and Place as Archives"), or Pamela Takayoshi ("Through the Agency of Words"), where the distance of time and space, but also class, race, socioeconomics, and political context render my reality impossibly different from those to whom

I am listening. Some of these differences may be hard to overcome. For example, though we share being white cisgender women living in the South, I do not hold the same understanding of racism's impact on the progress and setbacks of the U.S. women's movement from roughly 1962-1982. While I do not aim to excuse or ignore the racist beliefs and terminology I encounter, it is not productive to disregard an oral history wholecloth; instead, this may be where some of the deepest knowledge-building occurs.

Relatedly, strategic contemplation as a term for scholarly engagement asks the researcher to “withhold judgment for a time and resist coming to closure too soon in order to make the time to invite creativity, wonder, and inspiration into the research process” (Royster and Kirsch 85). The term is used to intentionally acknowledge and value the outward and inward journey of a researcher; given our frequent limitations of time and space, allowing room for introspection and reflection—the inward journey—is neglected at best and more often disregarded. As feminist practice, strategic contemplation offers a “slowing down, noticing, and observing before being asked to analyze, dissect, and argue” which are much more familiar practices to us in academia (95). The practice engages the scholar's lived experience and her relationship to her research subject(s) or archival material (in my case, both). And in this study, I am also using it to suspend my analysis and avoid coming to quick, tidy closure about the actions, decisions, memories, and meaning-making arising in the oral histories that comprise this study.

In fact, where I see strategic contemplation serving most useful as a practice for this study is in its embrace of the rise and settle of what we find in research—and within oral histories, a slow listening to the spaces in between the question-answer format of the genre. As a method and means for historical record, oral history practitioners value silence, pauses, the space in between (Perks and Thomson; Farmer and Strain). Several works of feminist rhetorical

analysis give credence to silence and listening (see Glenn; and Farmer and Strain). Pulling these final few threads together, perhaps my many-plied set of methodologies combine to form something more than the sum of their parts, something that has yet to be defined but which is rooted in microhistory and feminist rhetorical practice.

#### **2.4 Feminist practice in the archives**

Archival studies is the third critical overlay of the structure and theoretical influences informing this new framework I am attempting to organize. Archival collections policies underwent a major shift in the 1970s into present-day, answering the calls to action of the era of social movements and an acknowledgment that archivists could no longer labor under the illusion that their role in collecting, selecting, describing, and providing access to historical material was neutral (Hughes-Watkins; Sheffield; Zinn). Collections policies changed based on the confluence of politics of representation and identity politics, especially alongside the concurrent feminist and queer social movements (Cifor and Wood 3). The last fifty years have seen the establishment of many community archives as well as institutional collections expanding to document these movements. This expansion is due in no insignificant measure to the shift in what is considered historical, which I argue is a parallel evolution in what is considered rhetorical. The Georgia State University Archives and Special Collections was formed in 1971,<sup>5</sup> and its emphasis since then is collecting and documenting Southern labor, women, and LGBTQ history in Atlanta and its communities.

Scholars on the boundaries of archival practice and rhetorical study have complicated our view of the voices in archival collections, and especially in how we remember social movements (Kumbier; Eichhorn). I continue key work by Kumbier and Eichhorn on the nature of archives

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<sup>5</sup> Incidentally GSU's Special Collections celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2021.

and remembrance of activism. Making historical and narrative sense of movements of resistance has “always been a complex and contradictory endeavor,” Eichhorn notes, making it even more important to do, and to do with awareness of rhetorical moves (157). The complexity of interpersonal relationships as well as institutional power engages enduring questions on the nature of the relationship of archives to groups seeking to resist (see Kirsch et al.). But “how [the archives] is deployed in the present” is one of the key sources of power that may be wielded by the group seeking to document its actions (Eichhorn 160). Archival sources establish [one part of] the memory of a movement towards a rich, unabashedly subjective documentation of events and experiences, intentionally collected by those same activists in subsequent years.

Advances in archival studies established the collaborative nature of memory and remembrance, especially the relationship among archivists, those included in the archives (“subjects”), and researchers using the archives (Cifor et al.; McKee and Porter; Hughes-Watkins). In opposition to decades of a predominantly “rights-based” framework for archival practice, Caswell and Cifor suggest an approach “centered on radical empathy and obligations of care” informed by feminist ethics (24). Such feminist ethics challenge previously held (possibly still-held) notions of the archivist as guardian and authority, instead casting them as “centerpieces in an ever-changing web of responsibility through which they are connected to the records’ creators, the records’ subjects, the records’ users, and larger communities” (Caswell and Cifor 25). Those of us frequently engaging archival sources may see such an understanding as not only realistic but obvious; however, the practice of keeping, processing, and creating finding aid material for archival sources is steeped in practices of authority and tradition, and have taken conscious work by those inside and outside archival facilities to bring gradual change to the field’s practice. A feminist ethic applied to archival practice has shifted both the understanding

of power and subjectivity as well as what items and materials are “worth” keeping in archival collections for historical value, though those working in the field recognize the distance still to go in adjusting these values and fully embracing feminist praxis in the archives (Caswell and Cifor; Cifor and Wood).

Scholars using feminist theories to approach the study of rhetorical history have developed a similar collaborative, sitting-with conceptualization of their research and discovery process (Ramsey, et al.; Kirsch and Rohan). The ethics of care Caswell and Cifor propose for archival practice emphasizes people as linked through communities, and observes individuals’ experiences as tied deeply to their context and local connections. Taking this approach within archival practice removes the abstract moral principles guiding that work for most of the field’s formal existence. Instead of citing a generic ethical code, or even the long-standing assumption that archival collections were not interpreted by archivists, only maintained by them, an ethic of care requires a fundamentally different approach to the care and keeping of archives. Instead of the “liberal moral assumption about individual choice and free will—which it posits is how most women have experienced the world,” Caswell and Cifor argue, radical empathy in the archives favors “empathy in the face of situational demands, [drawing] to the fore women’s lived experiences as caregivers” (28). What feminist historians of rhetoric and feminist archivists are saying, resoundingly, is that a feminist ethic changes our relationship to the past, to our subjects, and to the value we place on archival records (and those materials erased or missing). Further, feminist archival practice assumes a collaborative approach among parties, shifting power and authority away from a singular keeper of history (archivist) and interpreter (scholar) and towards a shared “ownership” that foremost includes the subjects and creators of the records. Collective authority also inherently includes notions of positionality and interpretation; that even a “neutral”



archivist deciding how a collection is organized, described, and shared has a hand in shaping that historical source material. While power is not entirely balanced, such recognition is an important advancement in practice.

Caswell and Cifor's suggestion, in no uncertain terms, is for the field to recognize situational demands on women in the historical record and their influence on lived experience. Such an approach acknowledges the profound and simple idea that women's lives were not collective, the same, or easy to lump into a historical narrative. One of the reasons women's movements are so hard to fit cleanly into historical narratives is due to their numerous, overlapping, sometimes opposing forms. From the nineteenth-century women's movement for suffrage and then labor rights (often called the "first-wave women's movement") to today's "fourth wave" engaged in reproductive and intersectional rights, trying to parse out, limit, or define the movements as discrete is a mischaracterization of generations of women and their complex interests, motivations, and battles (Haywood and Drake; Cobble; Cobble, et al.). As I have outlined, microhistory offers a productive counter to the uncomplicated, monolithic view of women's history by listening to the smaller, daily movements of people—who become, by nature of what those activities include, the actors in history. Throughout the chapters that follow, engaging feminist practice in archival spaces *alongside* feminist rhetorical and microhistory tools is generative for what we can understand about the women who formed the archival collection at the center of this study. The shared authority, creation, and interpretation of archival collections, especially those centered on marginalized groups in history, are central considerations in this study, and the context for shifts in archival practice provide context for their agency and actions.

### 2.4.1 *Community archives*

That women have always enacted rhetorical agency in history has been well-established by the work of feminist scholars of history; that they have also been present in (sometimes on the edges of) archival record has also been more recently established, in groundbreaking works like Arlette Farge's on women whose labor and/or infractions overlapped with official records of the French revolution, or Saidiya Hartman's "historical fabulation" of the queer and women of color who inadvertently overlap with "official record" in New York and Philadelphia in the early twentieth century. But women enacting themselves consciously into the historical record began in earnest alongside other movements for civil rights and freedoms, in the middle of the twentieth century. Social history and "revisionist" history<sup>6</sup> inevitably pushed the limits of white, Western narratives of history as determined, as advancing in one direction, and as guided by powerful men of European descent. Such work included the popular practice of oral history as valid historical method, and a robust community archives movement.

Lucy H. Draper, Margaret Miller Curtis, and the "Founding Mothers" who established the Georgia Women's Movement Project, and specifically the Georgia Women's Movement Oral History Project, were working to preserve their feminist and activist experiences during a fruitful era for community archives formation and on the crest of oral history as a popular means for collecting the memories and history of everyday lives compared to a larger view of narrative history (Sheffield). Regardless of the type of or repository for community archives, Sheffield suggests "the very act of taking control over the documentation and storytelling about one's own community calls attention to issues of power" is how archives are created and maintained (352). The women who created the GWMP used the specific language of "unsung heroines' who

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<sup>6</sup> This term carries a lot of contemporary connotations in an era of culture wars, but the push to expand what and who is included in the historical record suggests "revisionist history" as a positive advancement in the field.

participated in the second U.S. women's movement, 1964-1982" in their proposal and argument for the formation of this archives ("Georgia Women's Movement Project"). Initially, the women leading the concept of an archives dedicated to remembering the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia considered a standalone community archives, but feasibility issues quickly became apparent, and Draper and Curtis began shopping their concept with both university and established private archives. While some community archives have been able to sustain themselves within the communities that created them (notably LGBTQ+ collections) many other community archives were formed or became part of larger institutions, with universities being a common location.

Curtis and Draper and others in their community of women who had fought for and lost the battle to ratify the ERA in Georgia felt an urgency in the 1990s to stake their place in state and larger women's history. This aligns with what we know about marginalized communities' formation of archives that represent them intentionally, giving those within that community a place for their memories and experiences free of outside interpretation or misrepresentation. The drive to form community archives is based on the founders' "real or perceived failure on the part of mainstream heritage institutions to collect, preserve, and make available collections that accurately represent the experiences" (Sheffield 366). In the case of the women who formed the Georgia Women's Movement Project within the Georgia State University archives, they were consciously staking a claim as women but also as the losing side of a very difficult and time-consuming state political battle. They had good reason to suspect that if they didn't take an active role in how their experiences were collected and interpreted, they might be lost to history or worse, misinterpreted in history.

Many of the women interviewed in the GWMP Oral History Project had not observed a lot of previous women's activism in their own education, and it took consciousness-raising groups and other intentional interventions to correct their view to history. Sheffield affirms that idea, suggesting the value and work of community archives is "not just about collecting the records of a community but also a political project to legitimize the experiences of this group as a creative endeavor that reflects the values of this group" (358). What's more, community archives tend to share origins with public history's commitment "to putting history to work in service of communities and urgent social and political concerns" (Cifor et al. 92). I posit the establishment of these archives was an extension of the "Founding Mother's" activist work, a means to position themselves within the scope of a long battle for women's equality, rights, and liberation. They were answering calls to collect women's history with an ear to women's own perspective and agency that began in earnest in the twentieth century (Moseley; Gluck and Patai). Draper, Curtis, and their peers did this via two main forms: 1) documents and print materials collected and organized based on leaders and projects within the battle for the ERA in Georgia, and 2) the GWMP Oral History Project for the recorded, auditory memory collection. The focal points of their collection, in material documentation and narrated memory, responded to feminist and social history calls of the late twentieth century to validate "the material of the everyday as a prime source of knowledge" (Yancey 175). Their tireless work to establish and then expand this archives throughout the 1990s was likely a response to what they felt was the lackluster feminism of that decade (or of feminism post ERA in general) as well as to Lucy Draper's sentiment that the cause of women's equality and the ERA would one day be taken up again, and those women would need to be ready ("The Importance" n.p.; Curtis 101).

The trend of community archives as a response to the lack of marginalized voices in historical record was indicative of more than a corrective to history. Community archives are productive sites for social movements, wherein those involved—especially those whose records are included—are self-aware, constantly enacting autonomy especially in decisions of what and whom to include. As Paul Ortiz suggests in *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century*, feminist practice in oral history is not new, and has always been a method to speak truth to power, to document and “uncover forgotten histories” (221). Such work, including the scholarship in *Beyond Women's Words*, “demonstrate[s] that the best oral history scholarship is grounded in popular struggles, social movements, and efforts to break down barriers between academics and the communities that sustain them” (221). While class and race were not factors for many of the women in the GWMP, these additional intersectional barriers make feminist oral history practice especially valuable for continued scholarship toward restorative justice. Scholarship from practitioners in the field demonstrate how “feminist oral history positions itself in opposition to global capitalism’s destruction of the commons, and how narrative storytelling can challenge the frightening intensification of misogyny, racism, and economic inequality” in our present lives (Ortiz 219). These goals reflect the continued importance of community-based oral history and archival work, as it challenges institutions like universities and museums to break down power structures and decenter academic perspectives in favor of community-driven and community-centered work. Community-based archives and oral history work also enable the kind of rhetorical empathy and listening I detailed earlier, as storytelling methodologies allow us to challenge stereotypes and humanize an “Other” for academic and public audiences.

As I show in later chapters, the GWMP archives remains a place for both historical interpretation and engaging archival collections documenting activist movements in the decades after the key years of the ERA political battle. Such work is possible thanks to a robust continued partnership between GSU's special collections archivists and the women who continue to expand these historical community archives. The feminist shifts happening in archival practice, as well as the historical growth in community archives formation, are important overlays for fully understanding the rhetorical agency of the women who formed the GWMP.

## **2.5 Feminist Rhetorical Microhistory**

In order to effectively listen to, understand, and contextualize the women included in the GWMP Oral History Project, I advance the methodologies I've introduced into productive space beyond the limits of any one of them on its own and propose feminist rhetorical microhistory. As Tarez Samra Graban recognizes in the foreword to the recent and groundbreaking collection *Feminist Connections: Rhetoric and Activism Across Time, Space, and Place*, the most urgent work in our field today not only calls into question our available means of feminist rhetorical tradition, but it also causes us "to question our available *tools* as feminist historiographers, how those tools influence what counts as knowledge, whether and how that knowledge is transferred, and what reactionary logics might disrupt that transferal" ("Foreword" *xiii*). Thus, my proposed feminist rhetorical microhistory is a *tool* for feminist historiography and feminist rhetorical practice, to uncover knowledge of feminist movements past and present that has remained occluded in the tendency to narrate simpler, grander stories of success and failure in social movements.

McComiskey's microhistory, applied to the field of composition, leaves us right at the edge of something profound. The negotiation between "scopic levels" allows the practitioner to

at once “reduce the scale of historical analysis and increase the complexity of our current historical knowledge” (14). In many ways, as McComiskey’s edited collection on microhistories in composition studies illustrates, this methodology can be highly effective when transferred to other disciplines. We can ask different questions, pursue nuanced source material, and create new knowledge using microhistory. The pioneers of microhistory emphasized the value of evidence to be found in the archives, often starting there for this new kind of historiography. This brings me to the limitation I observe in McComiskey’s microhistory, which dances right up to feminist rhetorical practice without acknowledging its essential influence and overlap.

Microhistory, in concerning itself with various levels of activity and what is knowable at those various scopic levels, in looking for the individual’s activity in both large and small contexts, tramples quickly into the space of feminist rhetorical theory. If we are to genuinely understand historical actors in their often-unknowable complexity, we must move “dialectically among all levels of experience”

(McComiskey 18). In what could stand in as a description of many individuals recovered via feminist rhetorical practice, McComiskey describes the historical figures we study as often “performing highly personal and individual acts and other times participating in highly overdetermined and institutionalized acts” (18). In order that we might understand any one lived

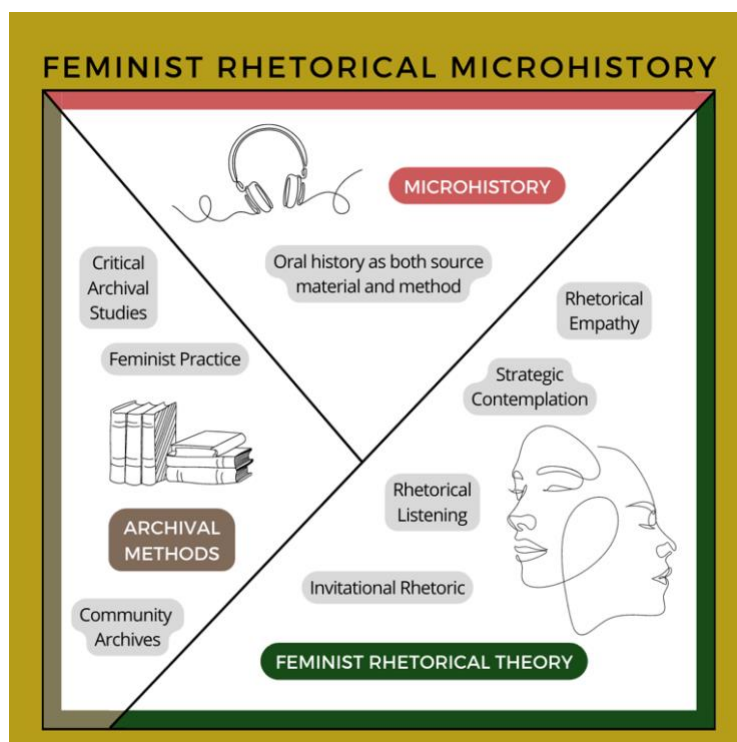


Figure 2: Visual demonstrating Feminist Rhetorical Microhistory

experience against the backdrop of significant (or not) events, microhistory and feminist rhetorical theory approach the challenge with symbiotic overlap.

What I am attempting to thread — what I see in the agency afforded to individuals in microhistory, oral history, and across feminist rhetorical theories like rhetorical listening, invitational rhetoric, rhetorical listening, and strategic contemplation — is a *renegotiation* between the rhetor and the audience. This analysis of history as *interruption*, with an intentional view to the individual’s normal and exceptional lived experience, has begun in the works of scholars of feminist rhetorics. Jacqueline Jones Royster articulates what many scholars of women’s rhetorical acts found themselves up against: the material conditions of those left out of the rhetorical record require us to “[employ] a broader, sometimes different range of techniques in garnering evidence and in analyzing and interpreting that evidence” (“Traces,” 251). Royster’s Afrafeminist restoration of Black women’s voices in literary practice is an early example of such interruption, providing the counterargument to the resistance she often heard from other scholars: “How could the lives of *these* women possibly suggest anything important enough to notice that has not already been noticed by looking at others?” (253). Her work, along with other groundbreaking feminist rhetorical advances of the 1990s (Glenn; Wu; Lunsford) concerned themselves with recovery as an interruption to the prevailing narrative of women’s rhetorical agency through time and set the stage for the watershed of subsequent historical and theoretical work to follow.

Feminist rhetorical microhistory draws on and advances the work in all three disciplines I have covered in this chapter, joining and overlapping in productive ways that renegotiate the scholar-subject relationship (illustrated in Figure 2). Comprising the whole of FRM, we have three segments: feminist rhetorical theory is the largest contributing set of practices, given the



scope of this work and my scholarly exposure and experience and the crucial influence of invitational rhetoric, strategic contemplation, rhetorical listening, and rhetorical empathy on my approach to this study; next is microhistory and within that, for this project, oral history is both form and method; finally, archival methods inform the interruption and renegotiation affordances possible via FRM, as critical and feminist archival practice invites acknowledgement of the mediated nature of archivists' role in the non-neutral arrangement of records.

### ***2.5.1 Applying this methodology for historical and rhetorical study and limits to FRM***

The feminist rhetorical microhistory I have tried to articulate here demands a restored *logos*, with listening equal to rhetorical voice, and relies on collaborative and community wisdom I alone cannot manifest. The women who are the subject of my study emerge, as Royster acknowledged, “not just as subjects of research but as potential listeners, observers, even co-researchers, whether silent or voiced, in the knowledge-making processes themselves” (*Traces* 274). When oral history was first used as a tool for recovery work in history, the potential empowerment of “telling one’s own story” was assumed to be feminist, and so transformative a method as to be uncritically embraced (Gluck and Patai; Srigley et al.). The underlying power dynamics still present in the method would be recognized by practitioners recording and interpreting oral history in and beyond the immediate discipline, but this would take decades. Our understanding now of the complexities of the form allows us to engage more fully with what is being said (and what is left unsaid), to whom, and why. My goal in this work has been to locate the confluence of the theories I have discussed here inside of feminist rhetorical microhistory and apply FRM to an oral history collection.

Feminist rhetorical microhistory is expressly concerned with *audience*—real and imagined, present and future. Krista Ratcliffe suggests that rhetorical listening, when performed

thoughtfully and in full awareness of the risks and challenges, “has the potential to effect more productive discourses about, and across, commonalities and differences” leading to broader cultural literacy (30). Put another way, rhetorical listening allows us to “mak[e] meaning via language via others” (31). In a sense, this is a definition of rhetoric as human performance—are we not always seeking to make meaning via language via others, in practically every endeavor? Isn’t this exactly what the women sitting down to be interviewed by a friend, volunteer, or archivist in the 1990s were attempting when recounting their oral history? They sought to remember, to be listened to, to stake their claim in larger historical forces, and to make meaning of that claim. Such listening, I argue, may help people invent, interrupt, and ultimately judge actors in history differently. This work has complex layers of listeners (including me) and subjects. With attention to Ratcliffe’s warning of the real/ideal dichotomy, my task is to avoid simplifying the context of the subject-speaker, not to suppose their oral history as literal, neutral, or an entire account of *truth*. Ratcliffe instead supposes a “strategic third ground” beyond real/ideal, where I may contemplate (27). As Heather Brook Adams (“Institutional ‘Protections’”) and Cynthia Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher (“Exceeding”) have documented of their own oral history experiences, power relations between researchers and researched subjects are at play in every part of the knowledge-making process.

Royster’s Afrafeminist approach affirms that the location of rich opportunity “emerges at points where the subject of analysis exhibits characteristics that are likely to be specific rather than general, local rather than global, or outside the assumed and the valued.” She continues:

The imperative is *both to use the framework and to interpret it*. The act of both using and critically questioning the analytical framework makes it possible to notice both the predictable and the unpredictable, and of taking note, thereby, of discrepancies and

distortions between the expected and whatever might be unseen. By this process, I am suggesting that discrepancies and distortions can be perceived as normal rather than abnormal, and that the degree and extent of discrepancy and distortion often depend on the point of view (*Traces*, 280; emphasis added).

This is the electrifying experience McComiskey had when he rediscovered his own writings from his college composition course and found the textbook, assignments, and materials at odds with what two subsequent decades of learning and teaching in rhetoric and composition history had informed him about that era of writing practices and pedagogy in higher education. The dissonance of his discovery led him to develop his theory of microhistory as applied to the histories of composition as a discipline and thus to the many case studies comprising *Microhistories of Composition*.

Vanessa Kraemer Sohan's scholarship on the everyday rhetorics of resistance, including what those means entail and impact in case of both success and failure, suggests that we can make meaningful new knowledge if we "recover and reclaim the (extra)ordinary ways rhetors throughout history have employed everyday rhetorics of resistance toward disruptive ends" (34). Her allusion to ordinary means of resistance being a large part of—perhaps even the root of—extraordinary outcomes or impacts aligns with the "ordinary extraordinary" implicit in microhistory. Feminist rhetorical microhistory implores scholars to pair a reflexive scholarly eye with focus on ordinary actions in a larger historical context, to both use and interpret the FRM framework. One critical feminist response to staid, overly simplistic, deterministic historiography is looking for knowledge in the space "in which ordinary people are active, not puppets but decision-makers" (Magnússon and Szijártó 24). I have outlined the rich overlap of feminist rhetorical practice and microhistory, aligned with feminist practice in archival methods,

as a potential space for myself and other scholars studying rhetorical acts and locations across human record. As I apply these ideas in subsequent chapters, I engage the relationship of memory and meaning in how we—all people—interpret events of the past, make sense of our own experiences, and understand our present circumstances.

Imbued with the central consideration of rhetorical listening, FRM is especially useful for us to go beyond efforts to “recover” rhetorical activities by women living through “historical events” because of its attention to the ordinariness of human activities. The humanity and normalcy of characters in history is discussed in more detail in chapter three, but the fullness and complexity of lived experience is an important component that FRM enables us to see. As I have suggested, FRM is informed by the research practices of both Royster and Kirsch’s suspension of judgment via strategic contemplation as well as Blankenship’s sitting with an Other via rhetorical empathy. While feminist rhetorical scholarship has driven the recovery of women in rhetorical and historical contexts, microhistory provides the additional piece I sought for this research, to move beyond recovery work by adding complexity, layers, to the existing narrative. In other words, second wave feminism has been well-documented and well-critiqued and some of the counternarratives have even been collected and recovered (many by or in partnership with the very people who participated based on when it occurred, and the movement’s occurrence at a time when marginalized voices demanded to narrate some of the second half of the twentieth century). FRM, by combining feminist rhetorical practice, concepts in critical archival practice, and microhistory, provides the tools of inquiry for us to continue strong recover work and to go beyond that work by adding layers of complexity to the sources we study and to the discoveries and knowledge those sources might elicit.

While I am able to suspend judgment using rhetorical empathy and strategic contemplation practices, and I do so throughout the study chapters, FRM does not suggest that we should not or cannot critique the subjects' approaches, perspectives, or limitations given their social, cultural, and political contexts. As I co-narrate the women's movement in Georgia alongside the twelve women representing the Georgia Women's Movement Project archival collection, there is room for both suspension of my assessment and inclusion of my critique. The inclusion of both critique and full appreciation for a person and their lived realities and limits is an especially challenging but important element of any study of social movements; many who choose to document social movements expressly note a key exigency for their work is for future activists to know and understand how to build strong coalition, how to raise money, how to advocate for marginalized voices, as well as what *didn't* work and challenges, limitations, and failures they faced (see this study as well as Fredlund et al.; Schulman).

Some of my critique in this study is via individual stories but represents larger cultural and societal failures the individuals in their moments in history faced. One primary example advanced throughout the chapters of this project is the challenge of advocating for equal rights for women in a state and region of the United States that, despite federal legislation, was still reeling from and resisting desegregation. Southern legislators not only held racist ideals, but they were also highly resistant to any degree of federal involvement in their state's operation and laws. Add to this, the conservative social norms of Southern Baptist and other conservative Christian denominations that informed the social status of women of any race or ethnicity, let alone women of color or queer women. FRM invites and acknowledges "the possibility of further discussion and other possible interpretations" (Levi 129) and resists reductive assessments of *individuals'* actions, even if our present reality brings their context into new

relief. Instead, the tension of critique and understanding must exist together, widening our comprehension of reality, just as microhistory as practice implores. Many of the women included in this study understood the necessity of getting any gains for women's equality as a bargain, understanding there were certain other aligned goals that would not be possible. This kind of white feminism, or the advancement of some women at the expense of others, would plague the second wave women's movement. Some of the women in this study understood those limits at the time, and the challenges they presented, and reflected on those limits in their oral history narratives in the 1990s. Others believed at the time of their activity and in the period of their reflection that it was the only possible way to get any traction for any policies that might eventually impact more women. I illustrate this complexity here as it is one of the affordances of FRM that engages both the recovery work of feminist rhetoric and microhistory practice as I've theorized.

Using FRM, we can both see women challenging gender expectations in the U.S. South without flattening or removing the more complicating elements of their personhood. Importantly, public memory's tendency to omit or simplify troublesome details that complicate a person's experience leaves us with glossy renditions of individuals that do not help us move toward accurate, messy histories that push us closer to a present and future we aspire to. Rather than narrate a history of the U.S. women's movement in the South that glosses over racism and homophobia, both as it existed culturally and as it arose in the voices of the GWMP, I embrace (and FRM allows) what Patricia Wilde calls "troubling entanglements" (306) that continue to complicate the recovery work that is evolving within rhetorical, historical, and archival scholarship.

As with any methodology and especially with nascent ones, feminist rhetorical microhistory presents limitations. If feminist activist rhetorics hold activism central to their scholarly work, FRM is not as equipped for that end. On the one hand, there is incredible affirming power and agentive permission in allowing people who have been excluded from archival collections or historical narratives to share their story in their words, and to co-narrate a scholarly study based on those words. On the other hand, the problematic limits of centering any specific group (especially one with relative means and privilege as in this study) means that still others are excluded. Using feminist activist rhetorics without the addition of microhistory and critical archival studies, the framing and outcomes of this study might have done more to resist the continued centering of whiteness and the white and heteronormative experience of the Equal Rights Amendment battle in Georgia. What victories and failures did the women's movement achieve according to the lived experiences of Georgia's queer women, or of Georgia's Black and women of color? This could be a limitation to just this project; perhaps if others take up the mantle of FRM toward archival collections or oral histories (or both) that are even more revolutionary and destabilizing of the traditional narratives of the women's or other social justice movements, we could see how far FRM proves useful for historical and rhetorical renegotiation for the scholar-subject, subject-audience relationship.

Another limitation FRM poses is the evergreen concern theorized by oral history practitioners about the relationship that can form between the interviewer and the subject (Yow, "Do I like them too much?"). With the deep and extended relationship the scholar builds with her subjects while engaging FRM, the researcher's bias, their conscious or unconscious tendency to defend or protect her coauthors, is worth major consideration for others considering using this methodology. Some of this threat is also present in Lisa Blankenship's theory of rhetorical

empathy, as empathy itself has natural and sometimes problematic results that risk simplifying or flattening complicated individuals in the past (and present). For example, and as I have discussed, empathetic relationships with the subjects of this study can run into risky limits when it comes to discussing racism and homophobia, both of which were major factors impacting how effective the women's movement was or could ever be during the 1970s and 1980s in Georgia. Beliefs and perspectives held by the women in this study were--at the time of their activism and of recording their oral history—critical to how they saw the world and were not simple on either subject (though for many, were evolving).

I am interested to see where and how FRM might be applied in other archival-based studies; but does it have legs for other material locations? This is another possible limitation to FRM as a methodological approach as I have theorized it. For example, this work was based in primary material that was oral in nature, on a collection whose remembrance was already part and parcel of their material existence. Does that mean that some of my findings using FRM are limited to oral history source material? I imagine using this for other written-source collections, but it has not been tested there yet.

These limitations are some of the things that intentionally resist the proclivity for historical and rhetorical studies that were for too long privileging “neutral” narratives of the people and decisions that comprise history. To do this work, I combined methodologies and theories from three disciplines that I saw overlapping in productive ways, seeming to say a lot of the same things about subject and audience but that had not yet been put in conversation with one another in quite the way I saw. Thus, FRM is evolving, and there are limitations (and perhaps affordances) I cannot yet imagine. Combining methods are a significant “disruption, integrating the tensions of different disciplinary methods rather than resolving them” (Hayden



39). This work seeks to do “the kind of disrupting or unsettling of the transmission of knowledge assumptions scholars in the critical archival studies show the archives can offer” (Hayden 39, citing Caswell et al., “Critical,” 4). I look forward to the discussion that arises from both what I have presented as theory, applied in the chapters of this study, and in the works of my colleagues in these three disciplines that might engage FRM for questions and with collections that will continue to recover women’s rhetorics and complicate how and what we know about the past.

### **3 THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT BATTLE IN GEORGIA AND THE NARRATIVE OF ACTIVIST WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE (1972-82)**

*“We were not just stick figures, we were women with all our foibles and difficulties and all.”*

– Janet Paulk

#### **3.1 Looking for meaning in the women’s movement in Georgia**

By the late 1970s, when the Equal Rights Amendment had stalled nationally due to public backlash from groups who opposed naming women as an equal class in the Constitution, leaders within ERAmerica and other groups met in Washington, D.C. to strategize. Georgia was not on the national agenda for these leaders, in terms of investing money or time to try to ratify in the state, but some representatives for the Georgia cause attended the national meeting to try to convince them otherwise. This meeting would be remembered in several of the oral histories at the center of this study, and captures both the import and tension that would characterize this era for Georgia women organizing to see their state support women’s equality. Sherry Sutton and Cathey Steinberg both attended from Georgia; Sutton representing ERA Georgia, and Steinberg in her role as State Representative in the Georgia State legislature.

For reasons they speculated on even two decades later, Steinberg was asked to leave the meeting, ostensibly because their strategizing was intended to focus on grassroots leadership rather than the perceived influence a state representative might have with her elected role. But Sutton was paralyzed with uncertainty in the moment—Steinberg passed her a note in the meeting saying she’d been asked to leave. As Sutton recounts: “[Now] my fanny is really in a crack because the chief sponsor of the ERA in Georgia is now pissed off at me because I didn’t walk out in solidarity with her. It didn’t occur to me to do that because... what do you do when your legislative leader is asked to leave a meeting? Do you stay and see what you can get for

your state so you can try to accomplish your goal, or do you just say, 'You've been rude to the sponsor of the amendment in Georgia so, therefore, I'm not going to stay here and talk to you?'"

By this point, Sutton had a few years of experience working in the space of women's rights and would go on to become one of only two presidents of ERA Georgia during the group's existence, but in that moment, the relationship-building and organizing savvy—and the sheer number of interests involved in a movement this large—got the best of her. The learning curve for the women whose voices guide this chapter, as well as the fissures, disagreements, and different approaches to affecting change, are key themes across their work and on full display in this brief snapshot of a decade of ERA-related work. Steinberg would return to Georgia and double down on her stance that the national ERA machine should *not* get involved in Georgia. From her perspective, it was yet another concern for her fellow legislators, who historically did not want federal involvement in state issues; she was concerned any type of national effort would be perceived in the same light. The meeting and its potential outcome were not neutral, as Steinberg and Sutton exemplify. Both wanted to see the ERA passed but disagreed about how to make that happen.

Sutton reflects on this in her oral history, nearly two decades after ERA Georgia dissolved, and acknowledges that Cathey had to consider the wider effect such organizing might have politically—as the legislature was the body that would ultimately vote on whether to ratify the ERA. Both women felt the gravity of being in leadership roles where they had the potential to affect great change for the lives of all women in the state, and reflect meaningfully on what it felt like to be in that moment, not sure of the right call and sometimes feeling underprepared for the responsibility they found in their laps. To exemplify this, Steinberg was a social worker by training who decided to run for the DeKalb County seat because the role would be a fun “hobby”

and bring in a decent chunk of extra family income annually. Within a few years, sort of by accident as she describes it, she was recognized in the press and went about her life in Atlanta as “the ERA lady,” based on her work to see the law ratified as well as her focus on other family-protection and women-focused legislation. Despite her initial motivations, Steinberg’s trajectory illustrates something important about the women you will meet in this and subsequent chapters: they were regular women who found themselves doing difficult and important work during a pivotal time in American history. What made them exceptional was not special talent or brilliance, but a dedication to an idea and a willingness to do hard things to see women’s lives improve.

The battle to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia was a watershed moment in the lives of many women, and thus this specific objective lies at the center of the stories included in the Georgia Women’s Movement Project (GWMP) Oral History Project. But, to define this collection, and the life experiences and work therein, as only focused on the ERA is to mischaracterize the nature of the collection—not only that, but such a singular focus also suggests lives that began and ended with their activism surrounding the ERA, when this is not the case. In the pages that follow, the twelve women (see Table 1) whose oral histories comprise the evidence for this research will illuminate this critical but understudied era of Georgia political and civic life, homing in on challenges, victories, and the context of the state. Such contours of the 1970s and early 1980s in Georgia show a generation of women learning how to organize, lobby, and run for office as well as demonstrate the many fronts on which the fight for access and rights was fought. This was a movement driven by coalition, which presented sometimes devastating limits to what could be done via social and legal structures to improve the lives of women. While some of this history aligns with national narratives about the women’s

movement in the United States at large, nearly every woman whose narrative I engaged with reported that the context in which their work took place—Georgia and the American South—factored heavily into what was possible and *how* they brought their fight. This chapter is (necessarily) anecdotal, summative, and expository. This chapter tells that story in their words, rather than mine, via feminist rhetorical microhistory.

Throughout, I make a conscious effort to present the pieces of that time in their own words, without my interpretation, in a practice of rhetorical listening. Engaging microhistory, however, I will shift between scopic levels when it is necessary to best understand their experiences (and the subjective nature of their differing memories of events) in the context of larger events in the state and nation at that time. These methods are thus naturally subjective and incomplete, no different than any other historical work. Acknowledging this from the jump, I hope, brings us to more vulnerable and generative spaces within these narratives, coming away with new knowledge of what it was like to live in Georgia and fight for women's equality in this narrow span of time. The women fighting for the Equal Rights Amendment faced momentous odds in a conservative southern state, one still grappling with desegregation of schools and public spaces. Even so, they saw a kairotic moment for change and the potential to achieve something important together; that experience shaped the rest of their lives.

The Georgia Women's Movement Project archival collection, and the GWMP Oral History Project as a major component of it, were formed with the central goal of remembering the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia, a political battle that felt more urgent and prescient than any other thus far in many of the women's lives, especially within the context of the South. As I show, the whole premise of this archival collection was centered on this galvanizing set of years in which their work was directly focused on getting the Equal Rights

Amendment ratified. However, even then, they knew the odds of their success in a conservative southern state. While that goal was the central unifying cause that brought many of them together, their activism and work toward women's rights spanned decades before and after. It is that more complete picture—their activities during roughly 1975-1982 but also *after*—as well as what the women's movement meant to them later in their lives, that appears to be key to the intended legacy of this archival collection of written and oral documentation.

Thus, while the timeframe of the ERA battle is at the center of the oral history project, the project necessarily included questions about the before and after of the subjects' lives as well. Oral history as a method for procuring primary-source historical record is naturally subjective and many practitioners see this as a strength of the form (Turkel). It follows that the questions the researcher prepares, and the rapport she has established (or lacks), are key to the direction, outcome, and usefulness of the narrative (Yow). As initially, the women interviewing the oral history subjects were also members of this same group, seeking to collect important memories and documentation of the women's movement, their relationship to the oral history subject is a crucial factor in this set of interviews.

In this chapter, I highlight the recurring themes that arose from the oral history interviews, that illustrate what it was like to be part of the Women's Movement in Georgia. All the women whose stories and materials were included in this collection supported the Equal Rights Amendment—a stipulation of the collection policy for the Georgia Women's Movement Oral History Project. This is an intentional distinction on their part, informed by the Founding Mothers' eye to how their uphill battle for feminism and women's rights in Georgia was being remembered in history, and their intent to document their "pro" side of that experience. To make this analysis manageable, I limited the voices included to those who were Founding Mothers of

the larger Women's Movement archival collection and those who were integral in the creation of the GWMP Oral History Project (many of these individuals overlap). From the fifty-six women included in the GWMP Oral History Project as of May 2022, I read and listened to twelve of their oral histories, each multiple times. I included every oral history recorded by a Founding Mother who also opted to be interviewed; this comprised eight individuals. Then, I added four more individuals to my study corpus based on their role or identity to compare their responses to the same or similar questions asked of the others. Collectively, these twelve women (see Table 1) narrate the events of the Equal Rights Amendment battle in Georgia as the pinnacle experience of their activism and activity in pursuit of greater rights for women.

Using feminist rhetorical microhistory as outlined in the previous chapter, I listen deeply and suspend my natural desire as a scholar to talk back; instead, I am using the affordances of microhistory to analyze their rhetorical agency via oral history. What *were* the biggest obstacles to the movement, at the time and in retrospect? Are there circumstances in which the narrators are looking back with an overly simplified view of these events? How did the lessons and mobilized energy of this era of their lives inform what they did after the ERA faded into oblivion? These questions informed my slow absorption of their stories. Of microhistory, Giovanni Levi notes: "It is not a question of rejecting grand narratives, but of examining them closely with a view to correcting their simplifications and modifying their perspectives and assumptions" (129). Upon analyzing the oral histories included in this corpus, I first closely examine the activities occurring in Georgia during a complicated period of political and social history. From there, I have the localized perspective to identify themes that collectively show us more than a narrowly focused historical account could illustrate on its own and allows us to gain far more new knowledge than yet another grand narrative summarizing many experiences.

There are two key affordances of microhistory relevant to this study that bear repeating: 1) a narrow focus on a small group of women in one urban area of one state during a larger moment in U.S. history, 2) space to parse out what these actions mean to the actors themselves. Together, their narrative of events paired with my analysis brings a “recovery of complexity” (Levi) to the events of the women’s rights movement in Georgia, and especially illustrates how performative rhetorical agency allowed the women to define their own roles in history.

Feminist rhetorical microhistory allows me to narrate three major themes recurring across the oral history narratives of the women’s movement in Georgia via those voices; then, it allows me to connect and frame those themes against the historical knowledge we have access to. Those themes are:

1. the context of the American South, including the legislators’ “good ol’ boy” establishment, sexism, and cultural limitations of “women’s place” based on race and class;
2. the nature of the work they were doing, including disparate organizations building coalition and working across causes, the challenges to organizing, learning how to lobby and run for office, and maneuver in a legislative structure built without their presence in mind; and
3. the public image that emerged of feminists, the feminist movement, and “women’s libbers” in media and history versus how these women saw themselves.

I posit this last point is an especially important one they wanted to make, in the 1990s, to put on record clearly and with an eye to history how they characterized the women’s movement, as opposed to how it and they were portrayed both at the time and in subsequent decades.

Collectively, these three themes provide insight about what it means to organize for a cause and how that organizing becomes stored in public and academic memory. The narratives that follow help us better understand a political and social movement in U.S. history *and* provide



insight into the individual activities and machinations that made up the larger, collective work. Sarah K. Loose and Amy Starecheski note, “oral histories can demystify the process of organizing. What worked and did not work in the past? Why?” (241). Those working in social movements have long observed the “radical potential” of documenting their work toward future social change (Loose and Starecheski 241; Couchie and Miguel). In her writing on the history of AIDS activism in the United States, Sarah Schulman warns against the danger of historical records that mischaracterize effective social activism: accurately portraying “how change is made and who makes it” is essential to these records having relevance to our highly complex present lives and challenges (*xxiii*). Looking at the past as if the same complexities were not present then is not only unfair to those actors, it also presents a false picture of how change is made. Instead, she argues, the future is made possible by individuals, “with flaws and significant limits,” (*xxvi*) acting in coalition with the tools available to them at the time. Therefore, these touchpoints—regional context, collaborative organizing, learning from others and coalition building, and how the women’s movement was portrayed in media and in historical record—provide useful focal points within personal narratives that interrupt the relationship between *normal* and *exceptional* events within larger historic moments.

Collectively, the oral histories of the GWMP are working to validate the experiences of the narrators. Many of them echo one another, recalling slightly different perspectives on events and experiences shared by several narrators. This adds depth to what we know and understand of the Equal Rights Amendment era of their lives and long after. “Feminism ... provides the validating or framing device for decisions made and paths taken,” Abrams notes about such life stories (84). “Moreover, these narratives were shaped by memories, networks, and friendships that originated in the 1970s and 80s and continue to sustain a shared culture” (84). Such strong

impetus toward shared practice and understanding can also have an exclusive effect, Abrams warns, limiting who gets to share in the narrative community that defines a term as encumbered as feminism. Rather than shirk that limitation, I acknowledge that limit and suggest it renders the GWMP oral histories even more valuable as a location for deep consideration of what it means to be *in* or *out of* feminism during the ERA battle in Georgia and in the years after.

### ***3.1.1 Larger political context***

The stories to follow, and what they suggest about the women’s movement in Georgia during the height of second-wave feminism, must be understood within the context of what they were fighting for and how women’s rights came to be so fiercely debated in this moment in time. In the early 1970s, both the Republican and Democratic parties supported women’s rights, and a cresting wave of Civil Rights activism saw advancement for personal liberties and protections for women—everything from the right to open a line of credit without a male cosigner, to the establishment of battered women’s shelters and access to safe, legal abortions. This level of support had been a long time coming, representing decades of work by women’s rights activists dating back to the initial drafting of the Equal Rights Amendment by Alice Paul in 1923.

While many historical accounts separate feminist movements using the metaphor of “waves,” historians have more recently corrected this to account for peak movements and decades within one larger movement, spanning work across three different centuries in the U.S. (Cobble, et al.). This more nuanced understanding of movements in feminism and women’s rights restores the histories of those working tirelessly (often overlapping with labor rights and racial justice) in between what are seen as peak stages of the movement. Such nuance also allows more space in our historical memory for causes and activity outside what was typically seen as “women’s lib” in the public eye—which, at the time and subsequently, carried a connotation for

many women who might otherwise have been considered feminists. What's more, broadening our understanding of the movement(s) by or about women creates important space for reckoning the anti-ERA movement and women who, for various reasons throughout the past one hundred years, did not want to see the Equal Rights Amendment added to the U.S. Constitution.

Using rhetorical savvy and fear tactics to argue that the Equal Rights Amendment would spell the end of "American family values" and eliminate women's "privileged place" in society, the anti-ERA campaign mounted incredible resistance to what looked to be a seemingly unstoppable constitutional amendment in the mid '70s. Despite spending nearly fifty years stuck in committee within Congress, by 1971 it had finally gained strong bipartisan support and passed easily in both the House of Representatives and the Senate months apart. As with any constitutional amendment, after that process, it must be ratified by the legislatures of two-thirds of the states, or thirty-eight states. Here, too, the ERA seemed unstoppable, as it was ratified by thirty states by the end of 1973—within just two legislative cycles. But the rise of a conservative opposition in this moment of momentum for women's rights was so strong some states later rescinded their ratification and the Republican party officially dropped ERA support from its ticket by the 1976 election cycle.

One unusual condition was added to the technical language included with the version of the ERA that passed in the Senate: the amendment would need to be ratified by the requisite number of states within seven years of congressional approval. This rider was added by several longtime incumbent congressmen who were anti-ERA. At the time, there was so much momentum and support from both major parties that proponents were happy to agree—there was no way this amendment wouldn't gain support from the states in time. So, when Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina proposed a seven-year time limit for ratification by the required number

of states, ERA supporters confidently agreed. As historian Marjorie J. Spruill notes, they were apparently “oblivious to something Ervin understood well from decades of fighting [racial] integration, the ability of state legislators to stall progressive measures” imposed by the federal government (32). This avoidance tactic turned out to be effective, especially paired with an unprecedented grassroots movement by women (and men) *against* explicitly granting equality to women in the eyes of federal law. The deadline was extended, giving states a total of ten years to consider and vote on the ERA.

So, by the late 1970s, women were organizing—for and against the ERA—in states that had yet to ratify. This is how Georgia wound up being a key state for national women’s rights groups to support, and there was hope from pro-ERA organizers that this could be one of the three states still needed to vote in favor of the amendment. But to see that goal to fruition would not be an easy task, as it remained a southern state with a collective cultural attitude regarding women’s roles in society and family, governed by a strong—if beginning to fracture—good ol’ boys legislative tradition.

This was the political context the women of the Georgia Women’s Movement Project archival collection found themselves in during the late ‘70s until the final vote by the Georgia legislature in 1981. The rest of this chapter tells the story of those years via the three key themes I identified above: the cultural and political context of the American South and its impact on their intended outcomes; the challenges and victories in coalition-building towards common goals, and the learning process therein; and finally, the intentional rhetorical appeals made several decades later to ensure the historical record did not forget their actions, nor misinterpret the role and meaning of their feminism.

*Table 1: Narrators included in this study*

"Founding Mother"	Organizations involved in during peak women's movement action	Transplant to South
Jeanne Cahill	1972 Georgia Commission on the Status of Women; White House Conference on Families 1979; board of ERA Georgia; member of the coordinating committee for the observance of international women's year; campaigned for a seat in the state House, did not win	No - Raised in South Georgia
Margaret Curtis	People of Faith for the ERA; Speaker's Bureau for ERA Georgia; board of directors Council on Battered Women; wrote 500+ letters to the editor	Born & raised in the South but lived various places due to Air Force (husband)
Dorothy Gibson-Ferry	Elected first chair of the Georgia Commission on the Status of Women; Fulton County Dept. of Children and Youth; GA Committee on Crime and Delinquency; Mayor Andrew Young's Civilian Review Board; board Council on Battered Women	Yes

Linda Hallenborg Kurtz	Founder and chair, Georgia Women's Political Caucus; ERA Georgia, National Women's Political Caucus	Yes
Mary N. Long	Women's Political Caucus; YMCA of Greater Atlanta; Equal Rights campaign, GA Nurses' Assn; Commission on Children and Youth; Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies Coalition	No - Raised in Kentucky
Susan A. Millen	Georgia chapter of National Women's Party; Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW); Georgia Women's Political Caucus; ERA Georgia; National Women's Political Caucus	Yes
Janet Paulk	ERA Georgia; Georgia Women's Political Caucus; Status of Women and employment/workplace equity for women at Emory University	Yes
Beth Schapiro	Feminist Action Alliance; ERA Georgia, Women's Political Caucus; Women Business Owners; founding mother of Atlanta Women's Foundation	No - Raised in Virginia
Other oral histories	Organizations involved in during peak women's movement action	Transplant to South
Carrie Nell Moye	League of Women Voters, UNICEF, various publications	No - raised in Barnsville, GA

Eva Parker	Civil Rights Movement; United Methodist Women's Organization; ERA via local churches	No - Raised in South Georgia
Cathey Steinberg	Georgia House of Representatives, Georgia Senate, public persona as the “ERA lady”	Yes
Sherry Sutton	ERA Georgia, DeKalb County Democratic Party, District 2 Commissioner of DeKalb County (1985-1992)	No - raised in Atlanta, GA

### 3.2 Advocating for women’s rights in the American South

In one of the earliest oral histories in the collection, recorded in October 1995, interviewer Dana Von Tillborg asks Beth Schapiro a question that seemed to fall off the list of questions for later interviews. “One thing we’re trying to do,” Dana says, “is to place the Women’s Movement in a particular context, in a particular time, and I’d just like to ask the question, what was it like at that time in the United States to be involved in a movement like this?” While related to other questions about what the subject sees as successes and barriers to the movement, this question suggests that there was something worth noting about the context of the time—politically and socially as well as within the South. Beth replies that it was both exciting and frustrating, “particularly here in Georgia, being here in the Enlightened South in which we live.” She continues to recount that while it was very important to her (in fact shaping her whole career in political campaigns and spurring her to get advanced degrees in political science), those mobilized to the cause remained a minority in the state overall.

As historian Marjorie Spruill has documented in her work on the women's rights issues that polarized the country, after the 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas, conservative women mounted a strong force against advancing the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion rights, and gay rights. Most of their lasting victories have been in stalling federal protections based on gender. As several women recounted, many national leaders for the ERA had already dismissed Georgia as a lost cause, based primarily on its position in the Deep South, meaning a collective resistance of white, male legislators combined with strong religious resistance; these same subjects suggested in their oral histories that in retrospect, the national strategists who did not see Georgia as a viable state to ratify the amendment were in fact right.

All of those working to see the ERA ratified in Georgia experienced the complication of convincing residents of a conservative southern state that "a woman's place" was anywhere she wanted. The women who were not from Georgia but arrived here across the 1970s—including Linda Kurtz—were caught surprised by the dissonance of life for women in the South and thus shed important context for the movement in the state. Arriving to Atlanta, Georgia in the late 1970s, after working as a young activist for Vietnam War moratoria, women's reproductive rights, and the health rights of college students in Pittsburgh, Linda Kurtz described her new home with a trifecta of analogies: "a different planet," "a different consciousness," and "a different century." After the difficult decision to abandon a dissertation (and the doctoral degree therein), she found herself desperate for meaningful activity in her new home. "I needed to be connecting to people to see what was happening in Atlanta" towards the women's movement, she recalled. Once she started asking, she was constantly discouraged from becoming involved. "Don't bother. There's nothing happening here. There's no possibility of passing the ERA," she heard over and over. She started canvassing in Cobb County anyway, an effort she characterized



as something “no sane person would do.” Cobb County lies just north of Atlanta’s city limits and is solidly inside its present-day metropolitan area; however, it was a mainstay of John Birch Society members in the 1970s and is known in state history as the location of the lynching of Jewish Atlantan Leo Frank in 1915 and the county of residence of those who perpetrated his murder. Through this work, she met some residents of the county who were also mobilized for women’s rights, including Joyce Parker, whose campaign for reelection as president of ERA Georgia, Inc. would later split the organization.

She became involved in ERA Georgia, where Kurtz observed patterns of activism women practiced in the South distinct from hers and which were intentional to survive in the context of the American South. As she said: “I had never met a group of women who were less demonstrative about what they believed in and who kind of backed away in everything they said about making any kind of positive assertion about anything they believed.” Southern women were operating under “the Southern way,” as she described it, in which “women had a whole different status” informing their understanding of the “different role models” of men and women. As an outsider, Kurtz was at first baffled but eventually came to see their ways of operating for women’s equality not as entirely nonexistent, but rather not as bold as her own methods. In fact, when the Georgia Women’s Political Caucus was formed in the wake of ERA Georgia, Kurtz used what she learned about the southern context in her role as its first president. In the role, “I spoke in a very non-threatening...I believe in a non-threatening, non-confrontational, non-judgmental way because I had seen what the reality of life was in the South. There was no way to present these ideas if you were going to be a flag-waving person. Your credibility would be shot before you would be started.”

For former state legislator Cathey Steinberg, who served as both a state representative and senator in Georgia, and who became known in the legislature as the “women’s issues” lawmaker, the battle was about far more than passing the ERA. During a 1977 vote on the Georgia rape codes, in order to potentially eliminate the requirement of a witness, she recalled, “They made jokes, they whistled, they hooted, they made comments like, ‘she deserves [what] she get[s],’ and they laughed and they chuckled. They hooted and *tabled* the bill.” She recalls this as a turning point for her, as a social worker by training who found herself in the legislature after a friend’s suggestion that she run for an open seat. At the time she thought, “I may never pass a bill on the floor of this House, but as long as I am here this will never happen again. I made it my cause. I didn’t care if we ever passed a bill... they would never treat women’s issues this way [again].” It brought Steinberg’s energy into focus, and she went from being a woman working in a self-described “hobby” role, to a serious lawmaker who saw those rape laws amended. The mockery of women she observed by southern lawmakers “is why I put a lot of work in the Equal Rights Amendment, knowing in my heart how difficult it would be to ever pass it. These guys would learn that when we speak, that we want to be listened to,” she said.

Steinberg was a transplant from Pennsylvania, and thus carried the no-nonsense demeanor and accent of someone “they did not feel they could trust” when she was first elected. Dorothy Gibson-Ferry, who also described the era of women’s rights activism in Georgia as exciting and frustrating, recalled testifying about living conditions for Georgia’s women prisoners. “Where are you from, little lady?” she was asked while testifying. “Because he could tell I wasn’t from Georgia, he wasn’t interested to hear what I had to say,” Gibson-Ferry said. Steinberg faced similar prejudices, which required her to build rapport over time, to earn their trust and take her seriously on women’s issues. A legislator, who initially warned her she was not

to visit his hometown related to Equal Rights Amendment campaigning, eventually warmed to her. “As we got to know each other, the comfort level was much better— [he and others came to see] that maybe I was a lot more like their wives than they gave me credit for.”

A review of the oral histories in this collection confirms the complexities of any era, many of which become simplified in their retelling. In the case of women fighting for the ERA in Georgia, Steinberg would later disagree with a strong faction of ERA Georgia members, themselves a coalition of many groups in the state, about who should be their second president. Steinberg was a strong proponent for the reelection of Joyce Parker, who would eventually be reelected after changing the bylaws of the organization to extend term limits. In Steinberg’s oral history as well as that of Moye, Millen, Kurtz, and Cahill, this election led to the split of the organization into two camps: those who felt Parker’s continuity as leader was important to their goals, and those who felt Carrie Nell Moye’s “political connections” would prove more useful. Upon reflection, both sides admit now that the riff was an unnecessary mistake, one that wound up distracting much of their effort to arguing, rather than working toward shared goals. While Millen argued in her oral history that Parker’s opponent would have been more politically connected and a true “southern woman” who could have made real inroads in the legislature, Cathey Steinberg remained a strong advocate for Joyce’s reelection, citing a long-game political strategy. In fact, Steinberg’s role as someone well-connected with pro-ERA groups in the state *and* an active elected representative in the state house came to inform so many of her decisions, even if those not daily involved in the machinations of state politics could see her goals.

As is reflected across so many of these oral histories, these women—even elected official Cathey Steinberg—were learning *how* to do politics in a state like Georgia. She reflected, “When I look back on it, I’m much more understanding of how they viewed this thing from their

perspective. I often think that if I could have done the Equal Rights Amendment in 1988 when I left the House a decade later, that we might have passed it because in the earlier years they were scared of me – ‘me’ in quotes. I was this woman who was very different than anybody they’d ever met, who was brash, who was outspoken, who sort of came in and said, ‘this is how we want to change the state.’ They didn’t know me as a person and a lot of politics is [based on] relationships and trust. I didn’t even know enough [to understand] that is something that you need to develop. When they began to trust me as a human being and cut through some of this, I could pretty much get them to do anything that they wanted.”

In the years leading up to the final legislative vote on the ERA in Georgia, Steinberg traveled the state with Joyce Parker, and saw her as a partner and opposite. “She was my sort of WASP [white Anglo-Saxon Protestant] alter ego. She just fit the role. She wore a cross. She’s so Southern and ladylike, and here was this brash me,” she said, recalling their statewide appearances as a duo. Sue Millen pointed to the significant image of the “lovely Southern woman” leading the charge in political and organizing leadership roles to garner the right kind of ear from those who you wanted to listen. Referring to Steinberg, Millen recalled their aim to get additional women elected to the state legislature, especially because many found Steinberg to be too direct, and that “having somebody who really understood good ol’ boys and who was from a good ol’ boy family... would be a tremendous asset to the Equal Rights Amendment.” Steinberg, from Pennsylvania and of Jewish descent, was according to Millen, a “woman who was coming into their good ol’ boy network and just saying, ‘Well, now, we’ve got to have this,’ ... and ‘we’ve got to make these changes,’” and they weren’t listening to her really well either.”

Jeanne Cahill, who was appointed by Governor Jimmy Carter to head the state’s Commission on the Status of Women, recalls the patronizing “don’t worry your little head about

this” attitude of most southern men. It required a great deal of strength to build up the courage to speak back, despite being perceived as “unladylike.” She realized “a lot of the weaknesses I had were societal things that were put upon me, not something that was really a part of me—it was my socialization. And it’s hard to overcome that. It’s still tough for me sometimes to say something that’s in my mind because it’s going to be so unladylike—but I struggle against that.” Nearly twenty years later, the cultural norms of traditional southern life remained clear as significant barriers to the issues they were fighting for—not only the Equal Rights Amendment but social improvements like prison condition reform, funding for battered women’s shelters, and rape law revisions that gave more agency to women accusing men of rape. Based on the experiences of the many transplants included in this collection, the perception of being not only a woman but also an “outsider” rendered them disreputable and in fact potential infiltrators.

As Cathey Steinberg points out, in the 1970s, southern legislators were reeling from federal involvement in desegregation and integration, and their distrust of federal forces extended to their distrust of nationally-based women’s rights organizations as well as women who weren’t “southern” in their eyes. “That basic distrust was a very prevalent part of their opposition,” she said. “Underneath a lot of it was the concern about the section of the [amendment] that talked about Congress—Congress would have the right to enforce the ERA. I have decided that putting all the other issues aside, Georgia simply did not want to deal with federal involvement.”

Alongside deeply entrenched cultural expectations for “the woman’s role” and a “good ol’ boys” political system was the pernicious religious establishment. Women like Margaret Curtis and Eva Parker who were deeply involved in women’s rights via their church communities confirmed in their narratives the wide chasm between groups like People of Faith

for the ERA (a group Curtis headed during the peak of organizing) and the Southern Baptists. Jeanne Cahill recalls being “thrown out” of a Baptist church, after members of its congregation complained that pro-ERA women were holding a meeting to share information about their cause. Just as the Republican party started the 1970s with a more amenable view to the Equal Rights Amendment and then pivoted to drop support of ERA by the 1978 convention, the Southern Baptist Convention came under new leadership in 1979 and made a vehement stance against the ERA, abortion, and gay rights. This ultra-conservative leadership “seized power from the moderates,” before “expelling the women newly admitted to its seminaries” and within a few years “officially remind[ed] women of the biblical injunction to be subservient to their husbands” (Spruill 308). The temporary organization People of Faith for ERA was founded in response to the power churches and church leaders had in swaying members away from the ERA, often based in misinformation that generated fear and concern for the central concept of “the American family.” Sherry Sutton recalls forming the group: “We were getting so much flak from a lot of the church people and the religious community that we felt that we needed a response from that quarter. So, we had a meeting and talked about it for a long time. And Margaret Curtis said, 'I'll be—I can be People of Faith for the ERA. I can quote the Bible and show people how they are not quoting it correctly.' And darned if she wasn't a very, very good one, too.”

As with any religious group, there was stratification for where denominations stood on various issues. While many of the deeply conservative like the Southern Baptists were concerned about women’s subservience, others saw the ERA as potentially opening the door for gay rights. This became something Georgia activists had to hedge against, to attempt to pass the ERA, and they were open in reflecting on the dissonance in their beliefs by the late 1990s. As I will discuss

shortly, the effort to gain women's rights at the expense of LGBTQ rights was a very real and, as they saw it, necessary strategy in order to make any gains on the Equal Rights Amendment in a southern conservative state. This confirms larger patterns in the movement in other states and regions, and the eventual support at the 1977 National Women's Conference of the trifecta of ERA, rights for lesbian women, and abortion greatly impacted the ERA's chances of ratification. After 1977, despite votes in several states including Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Virginia, and Florida, no more states ratified the amendment (Suk 130; Spruill 294).

Carrie Nell Moye shared the story of agreeing to a debate about the ERA with a church leader near Dalton, Georgia, far outside the Atlanta area even today and certainly forty years ago. "This was a religious group and the whole thing was being taped and it had been really super hyped from what I had been told. And so, it just went so beautifully in this debate. I said, 'I'm not for' – remember now, this was back in the '70s – I said, "I am not—you know, passing the Equal Rights Amendment is not going to say that men can marry men and [wo]men can marry women. What it will say [is], if there ever comes a time that men can marry men, women can also marry women. It has nothing to do with, promoting homosexual marriages or whatever. It's just saying that women shall have the same rights under the law as men... Well, when we got through the minister [...] stood in front of this huge congregation, I mean audience, and he said, "Buh-buh-buh-but—I agree with 99.9% of what Ms. Thompson –', I was Thompson then, Carrie Nelle Moye Thompson, '— of what Ms. Thompson had to say. But if just one tenth of one percent of this will mean that homosexuals will marry, I'm against it."

Afterward, Moye said, the local television station would not air the debate "because they felt that we had come out on top. I don't want to say that I had—but the point was, that we had come out on top, because I was one of them. I was not a foreigner. With an accent like mine, you

know, I can discuss the cotton farms if they want to. I think it helped a lot that I was a Southern woman speaking to Southerners.” Other women who were transplants to Georgia, including Steinberg, Millen, Paulk, and Kurtz, reiterated the value Georgia lawmakers and others seemed to place on this insider/outsider positionality. Being perceived as an outsider greatly impacted their efforts in organizing or persuading others that the ERA was not yet another federal set of laws to dictate how they might run the state and their own households. Likewise, women like Curtis, Moyer, and Parker held a lot of credibility with audiences given their ethos as “one of them.”

Margaret Curtis credited the “religious right” as the greatest obstacle to the women’s movement. Leaders advancing this pro-family political platform “pretty much took over the Southern Baptist Convention and that’s a lot of voters” Margaret said. “They went into independent churches. Their propaganda— and it was propaganda— it really had no basis in facts. The churches are a good place to disseminate propaganda because it’s not a public forum and nobody argues with their minister. I remember talking to one woman in the print shop where we took our ERA material to be copied and she said she was against the Equal Rights Amendment because her preacher was against it. That was all of the reason she needed—she didn’t need to think for herself; she just assumed that her minister would not lead her astray. So that was a very powerful force, especially in the South, to fight.” As historian Marjorie Spruill notes in her book on the subject, the Republican party found a strong ally in the pro-family forces that opposed women’s rights and leveraged their influence to gain previously labor-voting Democratic voters in the South. For causes of the major shift in southern voters from Democratic to Republican, historians can point to desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement, or they can point to the women’s movement and perceived threat to “American values” and American



families. Likely, it was a combination of both. “For the Republican Party, long seen as the party of big business rather than labor, embracing the pro-family movement’s positions enabled it to claim to be the champion of the family without championing programs designed to protect jobs or wages or providing enhanced services to meet the needs of poorer members of society” (Spruill 304). A campaign official for Newt Gingrich, who would become instrumental in Congress to advancing conservative politics, explained the strategy: “We went after every rural southern prejudice we could think of,” including “appealing to the prejudice against working women, against their not being home.”

Elected officials were not the only ones using rhetorical appeals to the cultural mindset of southern men. Jeanne Cahill recalled Phyllis Schlafly coming to the Georgia capitol “bringing busloads of church people” with their “big red STOP [ERA] signs.” She was disgusted when a legislator approached her “walking out after Phyllis Schlafly’s talk—he said, ‘Well, how does it feel to have two years of work destroyed in thirty minutes?’ But she was so clever. ‘You are such gentlemen, and you treat the ladies here so well, and don’t let these women come in here and tell you that you must stop treating your ladies the way you do.’”

### **3.3 The nature of the work: Coalitions built and sundered**

The work of the women’s movement is not easily or neatly packaged into a set of practices, objectives, or outcomes. Rather, there were many things happening simultaneously in this and other states across the U.S., the breadth of which is perhaps best illustrated via feminist rhetorical microhistory, as we can see many things happening all at once, often involving overlapping groups of people with their related but sometimes conflicting priorities. Efforts to build a coalition to support the ERA happened alongside other significant work outlined by the women telling this story.

One such space for advancing rights and access to women was the state's Commission on the Status of Women. Commissions like this were popular holdovers from the strong political support for women's rights at the start of the 1970s, and Georgia's was active. The Georgia Commission on the Status of Women was jointly headed for much of its existence by Jeanne Cahill and Dorothy Gibson-Ferry. The Commission was responsible for several major improvements for women in the state, as despite a shoestring budget (both women volunteered and shared the role to make it sustainable) they had the full trust and support of then-Governor Jimmy Carter. "That Commission did some absolutely amazing things—when I look back on it—when we had so little money and no staff," Cahill said.

The Commission worked to improve the living conditions for Georgia's female prisoners, culminating in a report that made front-page headlines and got Mrs. Carter speaking out for the reforms that would come. Cahill and Gibson-Ferry traveled the state to find out what limits to success were plaguing women, and both recalled showing up to vocational schools where courses were listed on pink and blue paper, for women and men respectively. In the same effort for educational and vocational access and equality, the Commission worked to eliminate quotas that capped the number of women allowed in professional school admissions. "It's hard to believe that back then [the 1970's] there were real quotas limiting women [admitted to] law school and medical school. The Commission worked to get those quotas dropped so that people were taken on their ability and not whether they happened to be male or female," Gibson-Ferry said.

Labor unions also played an important role supporting ERA work in Georgia, forming a key part of the coalition. After the Equal Rights Amendment was first drafted and proposed in 1923, labor rights activists—many of them women—opposed the amendment "on the grounds

that it might cancel legislation that supported women's needs" in the workplace, protections many of them had fought hard to enact into labor laws (Cobble, et al. 109-110). Labor conditions had essentially been so bad, and women's treatment so lopsided, many "social justice feminists" fighting for labor protections were unsupportive of "equal" in the eyes of the law; by the 1960s however, some of those labor organizations and leaders saw the benefit in raising everyone to higher standards. Key labor rights supporter Esther Peterson dropped her opposition of the ERA in 1971 and noted her belief that "we should direct our efforts towards replacing discriminatory state laws with good labor standards that will protect both men and women" (Cobble, et al. 63). Organized labor was coming around to support equal rights for women—in all legal matters.

By 1979, Sue Millen's professional background as a journalist landed her at the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL/CIO) in Atlanta, as editor of their *Journal of Labor*. This role would prove significant to her ERA activism as well as shaping her understanding of how to organize for a cause. In this role, she kept the Equal Rights Amendment in the organization's published content to its members and continued the work of women's rights as labor rights after the ERA battle as well. When it became clear the ERA would need coalitional support to pass in the state, AFL/CIO Georgia's secretary Sarah Butler persuaded the male-dominated organization to support the Equal Rights Amendment with funding, training, and with public statement. "As we all know," Millen said, "the secretaries in an office basically run the office, and so she basically told those men up there, 'This is what we're going to do. We're going to support this Equal Rights Amendment.'" According to Millen, "that was quite a coup, because the building trades weren't sure they — they were largely men, and they weren't sure they really supported the [ERA]." The years of organizing experience the organization carried, as well as their financial capacity and public reputation, was critical, to

Millen's memory, in early efforts by ERA Georgia to organize volunteers and expand understanding across the state about the benefits of the Equal Rights Amendment.

The swell of momentum for the women's movement in Georgia came from many organizations operating under a makeshift coalition, followed by eventual fissures and necessary evolution. Georgia ERA Incorporated was the umbrella organization under which forty-three men and women's groups coalesced to work for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, according to Janet Paulk. "The Equal Rights Amendment was sort of over all issues," Millen reasoned, which included the workplace. She served as a founding officer of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), alongside her continued work as *Journal of Labor* editor for AFL/CIO. "CLUW was very involved in support of right-to-know legislation, which is the right to know if you're exposed to various chemicals on the job, and there are a lot of jobs that women do where they're exposed to a lot of chemicals."

According to Cathey Steinberg, organizing for the Equal Rights Amendment was the "real beginning of a statewide network of women which has paid off." Beth Schapiro suggested something similar, noting the dozens of organizations—some formed with the distinct goal of seeing the ERA ratified in Georgia and others with different distinct goals—building coalition in this movement got the larger state involved in a way that could not have happened otherwise. "They were all organizations that had people all across the state who were able to get plugged into something larger than they might have had in their own communities," she recalled. The organizations noted most frequently across their memories include the National Organization for Women (NOW), Feminist Action Alliance, League of Women Voters, labor unions including the AFL/CIO, Georgians for the ERA (different from ERA, Georgia), the American Association of University Women, Churchwomen United, and the Business and Professional Women's

Foundation (BPW). Mary Long recalled “groups like One Hundred Black...[and] women from rural areas” who were mobilized in part because of this far-reaching coalition support system to the cause of greater rights for women. Margaret Curtis and Eva Parker were very active in their communities in the south and central regions of the state, with Curtis often working in the Savannah area. Curtis served as president of the People of Faith for the ERA to build inroads in one of the most critical arenas of negative rhetoric about what the Equal Rights Amendment would mean for American family values.

While several key issues became central to women’s rights organizers in the second wave—access to abortion, the creation of women’s shelters, and equal employment opportunities among them—by the late 1970s, much of that energy became focused on the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA was what many—especially white, middle-class and college educated women—saw as the single most important agenda item for how it might impact all those other issues they were working hard to codify with funding and legal protections.

While women like Cahill and Gibson-Ferry were working formally in their role on the Commission for the Status of Women, others were organizing simultaneously to see the ERA ratified. Sherry Sutton spoke of how they understood how “hard [it would be] for anybody to even try to begin to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia,” but many still shared the sense that it was important to try. Mary Long, who was a leader in the Georgia Nurses Association and employed first as a nurse at Grady Memorial Hospital and later as a community liaison for the hospital, emphasized that this effort consisted of “just general citizens. People representing women’s organizations all over the state.”

Eva Parker meanwhile was also working with people of faith across Christian denominations on committees, having started with what she called “workshops” at her church.

She was the first woman elected in her church to be on the Council on Ministries and was frequently sent to represent the church in larger meetings. Eventually, she became, as she describes it, a sort of liaison between the U.S. Department of State and United Methodist Women and in such role served on a citizen committee related to SALT II<sup>7</sup> in Washington, D.C. She recalled attending an interdenominational conference in Memphis within a year or two after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., observing that Congress “was six hundred whites, and I was the only black. They were doctors and teachers and this, that and the other, you know. I looked around and said—I’m in the wrong place.” She noted that these were early days into the “merger” of Black and white churches who were otherwise ostensibly the same denomination but for segregation, and that after this “a lot of the black people sort of stopped going because they felt like, you know, they were ostracized,” but that this didn’t bother Parker. “Well, I don’t care if they don’t notice me, I have a good time,” she said. Her memories perhaps demonstrate the doggedness required by Black women entering largely white activism for a women’s rights movement that was not representing the variety of class- and race-based needs of many marginalized women. Even more, Parker found herself hosting “church programs” in her community of Baxley, GA, often bringing in doctors and other “liberal leaders” to talk about equal rights. She also continued to speak up, often “popping off” and speaking her mind to white officials about voting practices in her town; through her persistent questioning, she got voting officials to move voting lines and booths to the same location as white voters, instead of voting “on the back porch” of the courthouse as she recalled it. She later served as voter registrar. Throughout her interview, Janet Paulk really tries to get to the heart of how Parker got involved in women’s rights as well as the other causes in which she invested her time, so that she

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<sup>7</sup> Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, occurring roughly between 1975 and when SALT II was signed in 1979.

eventually said she simply doesn't really know—she credits the church as “where she got her education,” and where she began “working with women” and using books to “brief me on what was coming up.” She began her work in earnest in her early fifties; while ages are not frequently brought up in the oral histories, in general many of the women included here were mobilized to civic and community action in college. Parker did not have access to college education and was working and raising four children in the years before she was deeply involved.

The array of issues, as well as their localized context, coming alongside many other narratives, suggest something significant about how Eva viewed her activism compared to her peers in this study. First, though there is not space to fully explore this question, it highlights a strong contrast between some Black churches to embrace and hold workshops related to women's rights, even in a conservative Deep South context, compared to some white denominations who used ERA battles as an opportunity to double down on women's role as subservient. But more related to the questions at hand, she saw many issues as important and interrelated, to the point that she was unable to tease them apart in her memories decades later. While many of the subjects included here worked on vast and varied projects, they keep them tightly related to what they interpret as “women's rights” in their oral history interviews; Parker has a hard time sticking to this theme, suggesting not that she didn't understand the intent but that to her, voting rights, nuclear disarmament, and the ERA were all part of the same fight. To her, coalition-driven work was the only kind of work, and it spanned all manner of critical spaces for improving the lives of Georgians.

Among women elected to the Georgia legislature, there was some tension among those who were already there and Cathey Steinberg. “I did not run on women's issues. I ran on motherhood and apple pie,” Steinberg said. However, she quickly wound up being identified as

the “women’s issues” legislator, and one of her first major efforts was a 1977 change to the Georgia rape codes, removing the corroboration requirement, which reduced barriers for a woman to bring charges against an alleged rapist. Representative Eleanor Richardson had been co-signer of this bill. Despite that, Steinberg found that her efforts on that bill alongside her quick interest in seeing the ERA ratified gave her this label in the press and public eye. This led to resentment on the part of Richardson at least, as Sherry Sutton observed. “Eleanor felt that anything that went forward on behalf of women should have really been her bailiwick,” Sutton said. “I hope that’s not too strongly stated, but I think she resented Cathey coming along and being the major sponsor of the Amendment.” Steinberg herself addresses the tension in her oral history, noting when they were working on issues relevant to women of the state, “We didn’t necessarily say, ‘Let’s get all the women.’ We kind of worked on our own in those days, for better or for worse,” she recalled.

If coalition-building was the key to mobilizing Georgians across the state, and to build a network that could communicate to their communities the facts about the ERA amidst strong forces of misinformation and the rise of anti-ERA forces, at the heart of that effort were individual people working for a cause they believed in. Eva Parker noted how important Margaret Curtis and Lucy Draper (who was a Founding Mother but did not elect to be interviewed for the oral history project) were in connecting her to the wider network and getting her involved in ERA events at the state level. Curtis noted that for all her work—not only leading People of Faith for ERA but writing and ghostwriting over 500 letters to the editor to Georgia newspapers over several decades—she was just a person with the time and relative privilege to do the work. She chalked up who led organizations and events, who lobbied and who traveled the state, as a matter of luck or timing. “There were women far brighter than me and more



competent and who [had] had training in making speeches and all that sort of thing but they were tied down to jobs,” she said. “The women who worked all day long and then had to go home and take care of family needs at night simply didn’t have time to spare to work for a political issue. So, a lot of the work fell to women like me—homemakers.” Curtis articulates as especially cogent point for the GWMP women, as opposition to the ERA were often painted by their leadership and in the press as homemakers, supporting the American family at home. Her personal experience (and that of many GWMP narrators) reminds that so many of them were mothers and running a home as well.

The very ordinary lives of many of these women—even if the things they would come to do seem extraordinary to the historical record—were a matter of regular people being in the position to take on something they didn’t feel quite prepared for when they started. Linda Kurtz had had political experience before, protesting Vietnam and working to ensure college women had access to healthcare. But Margaret Curtis started writing letters when she was angry, and the way she knew how to respond was through a letter to the editor. Eva saw what needed to change in her community and attended programs at her church to learn more. Cathey Steinberg ran for the state House of Representatives because she desired “a hobby” that would give her something beyond carpooling her kids on which to focus her energy. Their collective stories drive home what Sarah Schulman emphasizes about activist work as it is perceived in history compared to its reality: “with flaws and significant limits, these human beings made the future possible” (*xxvi*). In other words, imagining that the women telling this story in these pages had exceptional talents when they began does a disservice to the effort they put into learning and growing; it also suggests that one must already be exceptional to do exceptional work to improve a problem they observe, which is a dangerous precedent to establish in history. Rather, to see these and other

change-makers as regular people is critical to properly historicizing them and their activities—successes and failures.

### ***3.3.1 Black women and the lesbian question in Georgia***

Sue Millen recalled, in discussing her involvement in NOW, that “there was some conflict with the gay rights movement” in that organization which caused some of the group—“a whole bunch of home-maker type of members”—to faction or even leave the organization, based on what Sue described as “[feeling] like the gay rights people had taken over in that organization.” She deflects on more detail, noting this schism was forming before she arrived in Georgia in 1978, but she alludes to the two largest subsets of women, Black women and lesbians, who also stood to gain equality and access but who faced discrimination, especially in the context of Georgia.

The explicit focus on the Betty Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*-inspired plight of the American housewife during the middle of the twentieth century remains one of its major critiques and likely a main cause of its stunted potential. The view to consciousness-raising of white, middle class, heterosexual women that they were allowed and could aspire to things beyond the life of a housewife was a critical piece of that movement, but often left out women of color, including Black women as well as Latina and immigrant women, and people outside heteronormative limits. The central plight of the housewife also often neglected the nuances of class and income level that impacted many women generally and affected the viability of other white women joining this movement.

The chasm between white women of the movement and their Black compatriots was very much on the minds of the women recording their oral histories in Georgia in the 1990s, especially as by that time a few decades of reflection and critique had elapsed. Historical analysis

confirms the issue that race raised in the attempts of women's movement activists to build a coalition across wider groups of women.

Significantly, in the South, racism and sexism seemed to converge in the 1970s, and as it became "increasingly unacceptable to be overtly racist, it was increasingly acceptable to be overtly anti-feminist" (Spruill 305). At both state and federal levels, conservative southern lawmakers were still trying to grapple with federal mandates for desegregation that went against both a deeply ingrained Jim Crow system and their disinclination for what they saw as federal meddling in how the states governed their citizens. What this meant for the women fighting *for* legal and employment equity, access to education and credit, protection for health, and in cases of domestic abuse in that political context was that many white southerners saw "the women's movement [as] an extension of the civil rights movement" and were motivated enough by this fear to mobilize and fight back (Spruill 306). Thus, both racism and sexism combined to create an especially strong counterforce against achieving victories towards these and other women's issues.

Then, there was the matter of lesbians, and this would become enough of a dissention point as to further split some of the coalition they had worked towards. During the ERA battle in the South, gender studies historian La Shonda Mims shows, gender expectations hardened. "The long reign of southern belledom and the role of southern states in the anti-woman suffrage movements of the early twentieth century set the stage for continued opposition to women's equality efforts, distinguishing the South as particularly hostile to lesbians and feminist" (Mims 67). Further, Mims notes, "Some southerners viewed second-wave feminism as interchangeable with lesbianism, and this association threatened the gendered structures on which southern identity rested," especially expected purity and femininity of women (67). Jeanne Cahill shared a

simple but telling story that suggests the complication gay rights added to the cause of women's rights. "You know, the South has always been a very conservative area," she said. "One of the things we did to prepare materials for the legislature— back when we still were hopeful to get an Equal Rights Amendment passed— was [create] a list of the organizations supporting it, and we listed them all in alphabetical order. The Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance came almost at the top of the list, and I can remember the women from some of the church groups saying they would have a hard time going back to their church [with the list] because [their church] people really would not understand, and [asking if we] can we use their acronym ALFA." She continues: "[The Alliance] said no, they wanted it spelled out; they were tired of being pushed back in the closet and having to be quiet and stay in the background, all that sort of thing. I personally felt at that time, they [the Alliance] were more interested in their own agenda than they were the overall effort of the group, and I was hoping that they would go for the acronym. As one woman said, somebody would think it was a sorority [laughter] and wouldn't ask any questions about it, but they [the Alliance] said no, and it was spelled out on the list of the supporting groups. And we did get some flak because of that. People would use that as an excuse. They were probably going to be against it anyhow, but they said, 'If I vote for this and my people back home see that I'm working with this group [ALFA] I'll be defeated next time around.' Whether it was real, or just another one of their excuses, it was one of those things [reason] that was used [for opposition]."

As Cahill's story illustrates, many religious groups who may have supported advancing women's rights or the ERA drew a hard line at including gay rights as part of that. This tension was also a major factor that negatively impacted national and other states' movements. Some felt lesbian women needed to wait a little longer, take one for the team in order to advance equal

rights in a scaffolded way; others pushed back. Having also been initially excluded from the National Organization for Women (NOW), there were facets of lesbians who did not align with mainstream feminism given its desire to seemingly “operat[e] within systems of heterosexuality” that would always exclude their lived reality and demands for rights (Mims 66). Mim’s research on lesbian activists in the South support my claims that factions were struggling over how to achieve shared goals. Archived newsletters articulate the “labor of bringing ‘diverse masses of women TOGETHER to work toward common goals,’ which seemed overwhelming (Mims 75, formatting in original). Lesbian separatism was present in the South and reflected national debates that sought but could not find “sufficient common ground for lesbians, lesbian separatists, and heterosexual females” (75). Cahill’s narrative demonstrates the resistance groups like ALFA were able to employ within the larger cause, though as she notes, not without perceived “damage” to the public image of ERA support.

As has been discussed by historians and reflected upon by the GWMP narrators decades later, the notion that women’s rights were only that—leaving out large groups of those historically excluded, including not only gay women but trans people as well—remains one of the biggest differences between “second-wave” and contemporary feminism. At the time, this was a nearly insurmountable challenge to the cause, especially in conservative-dominant states like Georgia. Adding to this divisiveness were media portrayals that built the image of feminists as angry, ostensibly to encourage the divide or at least stoke resentment and fear in nonparticipants. This depiction seemed to work to lessen what nonparticipants saw as politically possible and influenced the interpretation in many Christian churches of the women’s movement as a radical revisioning of “family values.” Paulk illustrates the tension from her position: “It seemed to me that the outed gay women stayed pretty much out of the ERA effort because they

knew it could have such very negative connotations for the passage of ERA. Now, I may be wrong about that, but they were very supportive of ERA, and they wanted to do what was best to help get it passed. Patriarchy included much of the media, and media tried to define the women's movement as gays and as women-haters and people were so scared of those. So, they tried to take the fringe groups and the small groups and define them as the mainstream, thereby playing on the fears of the establishment and denigrating the power of the women's movement.”

This crucial divide over the rights of women who identified LGBTQ was nuanced and should be understood as such with careful listening to the oral histories. Carrie Nell Moye is vulnerable expressing her position at the time and upon remembrance. “I think it’s important that people realize that you can be a feminist without being—how should I put it? Without being so full of anger. I admit I am full of anger, and it takes that kind. It takes the Stokley Carmichaels to get us to accept the Martin Luther Kings. So [...] it takes the radical [women], absolutely: It takes the radical to make us accept what ought to be anyway. I’m almost ashamed to say I was never radical, though I’m considered radical by certain standards: Certainly, my family thinks I’m radical. [...] I was being defensive to Marlo Thomas, to her views and Phil Donahue’s views, but to me I was trying to say, ‘Look, we’re not all radical. We are all in one belief, that women should have the same equal rights as men, and that does not change our one-on-one relationship to a man.’ You know?” There are many layers to Moye’s reflection, addressing both the question of who is “radical” during the ERA work and since, and the automatic association of anger with radical activism. I also observe the assumption she makes that all those fighting for the ERA and even for women’s rights had the same agenda—“simply” equality to men. Her statement, in conversation with Paulk’s and Cahill’s, suggests the many positions and rationalities held by individuals to justify their actions or validate their reasoning.

Given the complicated layers of southern political and social context at the time, the women of the GWMP Oral History Project found it important to respond to the question of coalitions. One of the questions in the established set explicitly asked whether “the Women’s Movement [was able to work] in coalition with other movements that were going on at that time, such as [the] Civil Rights Movement or Gay Rights [Movement], or do you feel that there’s been some kind of conflict between the different social movements” (quoted from Margaret Curtis’s interview, appearing in modified form across many in this corpus). Here, I observe their desire to understand the many overlapping factors affecting their activism with an eye to both 1990s critiques of “feminism” and to state for historical record their take on it. Many who are asked this question answer vaguely, talking about something else related to being misunderstood, or perhaps lack a pondered-ahead response. The “it seemed to me” language Paulk uses in her response to the matter suggests that she did not speak with lesbians enough to gain an understanding of what they wanted or how they felt. Moyer’s reflection suggests nuance in motivation and level of anger but still points to a simplified “goal” presumably shared by all. By contrast, there were a few women who seemed to have a very well-conceived assessment of how well or not their coalition had worked with civil rights and gay rights organizers.

Beth Schapiro, whose 1995 interview is the earliest included in this corpus, speaks clearly and honestly about the hostility lesbians and Black women faced in Georgia, even from other feminists. “We tried to work in coalition with, I wouldn’t say the Civil Rights Movement, but with [B]lack women’s organizations, and I think that while there were many earnest attempts to do that, there were lots of things preventing [B]lack and white women from really coming together on a number of issues,” she said. “I don’t think it’s been until the last few years that a lot of us, a lot of white women, have understood that. I think that white women initially felt,

well, if we invite a couple of [B]lack women then, therefore, we're integrated, and we move forward. It took a while for a lot of white women to understand that it's not going to work this way." Beth continues, "We tried broadening the circle and involving more [B]lack women, more [B]lack women's organizations, and when those efforts weren't as fruitful as we might have liked, we got frustrated and people kind of went their different ways. And again, I think it's only recently that white women are beginning to understand that maybe there are not as many issues that unite us as we would like and what we need to do is focus on the ones that do unite us."

She is similarly blunt in her assessment of conflict over where gay rights played into the women's movement. "As far as lesbian groups, it's been conflict all the way," she said in response to the "coalition" question. "The reason we had two coalitions in the early seventies was that one of them had the audacity to have an openly lesbian group in it. And I'll never forget at the Women's Meeting in Houston [1977], one of the members of the Georgia delegation was the head of ERA Georgia and she stood up and said, and she was quoted in *Newsweek* or *Time*, one of those magazines, saying that, 'Lesbians were an albatross around the women's movement in Georgia' ... there has long been a hostility in Georgia, at least, among heterosexual women, toward the involvement of lesbians in the women's movement because—surprise, surprise—when women would go and lobby for the ERA, they were accused of being lesbians and they felt that the only way to insulate themselves from that charge was to try to distance themselves from lesbian groups. Little did they realize that was completely ineffective because, even if they went and proudly proclaimed their heterosexuality, there would be other reasons legislators would give for not supporting the ERA. Probably, if there has been a destructive piece to the women's movement in Georgia, it's been the inability of straight women to come to grips with having lesbian involvement in the movement."



This remembrance illustrates the value of feminist rhetorical microhistory to engage the complexities of social movement histories. Paulk, Moye, and Schapiro have distinct viewpoints and levels of understanding of why these coalitions didn't work across identity. We can only really learn this by reviewing individual stories and drawing connections. However, just because these narrator's understanding of coalition challenges is captured in retrospect, doesn't mean that the reasons the coalitions did not work long-term were not apparent at the time of the movement's crest; in fact, other identity or regional groups did recognize the challenges at the time, even if they did not or could not act to remedy the fractioning. The three distinct perspectives of Paulk, Moye, and Schapiro show the varying degrees of awareness of the failures and issues within second-wave feminism and what underlying causes were behind some failures. The diversity in reasoning provides a richer understanding of the era, something the "Founding Mothers" understood and which drove their efforts to create an oral history collection alongside written documents for their GWMP archives.

While Schapiro's comments are perhaps the most vulnerable and honest, others alluded to conflict in more general ways when asked that question. "I think that we were trying to work together. The difficulty came in that each group thought its own issues were more important than anybody else's [issues]," Margaret Curtis said. Cathey Steinberg pointed to the difficulty of forming coalition with Black women as one of the things that most hurt Georgia's chances for ratifying the ERA. "Black women never identified with it the way we needed it to be. It was perceived, as we know, as a white women's movement," Steinberg said. "We tried, we felt, to bring [all] women in or get everybody involved. As pointed out to us, these are women that represent women and families—they were trying to put food on the table. Where there are so many other things they were trying to do that it was hard to come around and say, 'we want this

equal and that equal,' so I think that we just couldn't garner the level of support that we needed in a state like Georgia."

By contrast, some are more resistant to critique or perhaps had experiences that shaped their view to this question differently. Dorothy Gibson-Ferry said, "I never felt that there was a conflict with the other groups, because we were all hoping [for], and looking towards, the same goal really. There was some idea, despite the fact that we had [B]lack women on our commission [on the status of women], that we were just speaking for white women, which, of course, we were not. There was sort of a problem there. The gay rights movement has been a much later development. There was not too much effort along those lines back then, in the '70s." Gibson-Ferry's response suggests some oversimplification (and a lack of good context on the start of the gay rights movement—arguably not what she's there to be an expert on). Mary Long, one of two Black women included in this corpus, comes across as aspirational in her view to past work. "I think that it's not been in conflict, and it should never be in conflict with any of those groups because they cross over," she said. Long continues: "I just never saw any conflict. There might have been personality issues, but I never philosophically saw any conflict in the movement, in where different organizations were going." Sherry Sutton took a big-picture progress view in her response, saying, "I think the women's movement came directly out of the Civil Rights movement. The gay rights or human rights movement came directly out of the women's rights movement. So, it's all been part of a huge emancipation in America."

These reflections on the coalition and conflict among organizers for related but vastly distinctive rights-based issues reveal several of the most fruitful spaces for my engagement with feminist rhetorical microhistory via these narrators. On the one hand, several women asked about this faced the matter head-on, with some astute reflection informed by the two decades of

distance and clearly some of their own continued work in related issues. I surmise it was by continued engagement and evolution of their perspective that they came to understand the overlapping machinations of three different movements with perhaps more nuance than was possible in the heat of the action. On the other hand, with a view to how one—and their cause—is remembered in historical record, there is rhetorical strategy in their willingness to acknowledge weakness or failure in retrospect. It is impossible to know their motivations for the answers they gave, but for those with astute assessments based on critiques of “second-wave feminism” that were common by the 1990s, it is likely a combination of critical reflection and the compulsion to show our enlightened selves in positive historical light.

What’s more, those nuanced and vulnerable responses are thrown into sharp relief by the vague, fluffy, or blatantly off-topic responses to the coalition-across-movements question. Stepping back to view the whole corpus, we might decide the women who gave these responses either were less concerned overall about this critique or had not kept up with the historical analysis of feminism or the women’s movement. We might conclude that they felt uncomfortable giving a more honest answer, or perhaps genuinely didn’t know quite what critique the question was getting at. Perhaps, they felt the women’s movement had worked in strong coalition with other causes generally, and therefore did not need to provide more complete knowledge to the record.

With an eye to oral history’s subjective and retrospective nature, they were not obligated to reply with anything more cohesive or thoughtful than what the question stirred in their memories. After all, one of the distinctive qualities of this oral history collection is its intentional settling of the historical record, its goal to acknowledge their achievements with the hopes that current and future generations might take solace from these archives and learn something helpful

for whatever cause they take up in their present. In other words, some of the narrators clearly had something they needed to put on record to help anyone reading better understand the women's movement in the 1970s, and what it did well and what it didn't; others did not see the same necessity regarding that facet of the movement, and neither is more "right" or "wrong" for it.

In practice, women not agreeing as a singular collective—especially considering the strong anti-ERA force that arose—hurt the image and credibility of the Equal Rights Amendment as a goal, and possibly the movement at large. The issue of perceptions in the media is one of the most noted challenges they faced during their work. Beth Schapiro noted that the reality that not all women are alike damaged their coalition-building efforts and their perception by state lawmakers. "We've been able to be divided much more easily than we've been able to be united," she said. "So that, for every Gloria Steinem there's a Phyllis Schlafly, and male legislators and male policymakers find it very easy to point to the Phyllis Schlafly and say, 'Well, look. Not all women agree with this, so until you girls get your act together, we're not going to bother with this. When you get your act together, c'mon back.'"

While Schapiro's comments highlight the very real threat of the countermovement that arose against the ERA to defend women's societal "privileges," Mary Long articulated possibly an even greater challenge to their coalition-based goals: differences internally regarding not only politics but strategy. "People had their own politics," Long said. It was important to keep the larger picture in mind, to ask, "Are we going to sit here and allow our internal politics to be destructive, or are we going to move forward?" And for the most part, I think there might have been internal politics going on, but a lot of us were just moving on. You did it anyway." Long stressed the importance of not letting those outside the coalition see the disagreements, as things

“we really didn’t want to highlight” due to distracting press and the risk of perceptions like those Schapiro noted.

Both real and imagined perceptions of discord affected the ERA coalition’s ability to be taken seriously in their lobbying efforts. In fact, several of the women noted that their internal political battles, factions that arose, and actions some perceived as “dirty” or “stooping to the men’s level” in fact proved that perhaps they had “made it” in politics. As the next section suggests, the period of ERA organizing would see women gaining political savvy that would remain useful for careers in politics, government, and nonprofit spaces that would far outlive the Equal Rights Amendment.

### **3.4 Legacy of the work of Georgia women, 1975-1982**

For their disparate experiences in the women’s movement, nearly all subjects in this study spoke of the importance of learning from other organizers who had come before them—especially Black men and women in the Civil Rights Movement and labor unions and organizers. As groups like ERA Georgia, Incorporated, the National Organization for Women (NOW), the National Women’s Political Caucus, and later the Georgia Women’s Political Caucus were building, evolving, and their members acting across the state, these women relied on networks of training, learning, and their own abilities in writing, even while the work each was doing in the movement differed greatly. Sustained efforts to learn tactics used by lobbyists were crucial. Linda Kurtz noted the research conducted on every single legislator, to surmise the best angle for influence. She talked of learning, and then training others to ask questions to document the legislators in their communities. For example: “Who the people were in each of the counties [and] what church they belonged to. How do you influence these people [in] the way that the right wing would influence them?” Sherry Sutton, who would later run for public office, noted,

“I was learning how to be a politician [...] I was in training to learn how to do some of these things that served me really well later when I was in public office. I learned to keep my mouth shut more, to listen more, to take in what everybody thought.”

While learning the tactics for the work, “We were learning to work together,” Janet Paulk said. “Certainly, with the ERA, women's groups were having to learn to work together for the first time.” Rather than the “behind the scenes” work of organizing, like doing dishes while the men hashed out political strategy, she noted, this time they were doing the work, and they “hadn't learned how to handle political issues and events that well at that point.”

The focus for the first few years of ERA Georgia, Inc. had to be on the impending deadline for ratification of the ERA, thus much of their organizing went to these direct lobbying tactics. They hired a coordinator who could carry out educational campaigns across the state. The coordinator traveled around the state “meeting with women in different locations to develop a grassroots network in as many of these places [as possible],” and educating in letter-writing, fundraising, lobbying, and working to support candidates in the regional areas who opposed those currently holding the legislative seats.

ERA Georgia was itself run entirely by volunteers, eventually with a single paid employee who did administrative work and was sent around the state for the group. Supporters of the ERA worked on a limited budget and relied on members of aligned organizations for knowledge and resources to execute events, lobbying, and research tactics. Elected leaders like Cathey Steinberg worked in coalition with groups and individuals organized for the ERA, but Margaret Curtis acknowledged that sometimes this meant being aware of their limited or developing experience and how this might impact the movement. “I think sometimes Cathey Steinberg got very disappointed that she had to work with volunteers so much who weren't really

politically astute, but we did the best we could and we learned as we went along. I didn't feel that I was politically astute, so I took advice from people like her about what we ought to do and how to do it. I'm sure it was difficult for her, but we did everything we could do," she said.

Sue Millen recalls the vast political savvy passed on to ERA Georgia activists by labor organizers in the state. "Organized labor [support] really helped the women's movement in Georgia get organized," she says. Their lobbyists held workshops on how to talk to legislators, "the importance of writing to [them], the importance of knowing what their family was all about." She recounts the large volunteer network at work in ERA Georgia, people who lived in a legislator's district who might inquire about "legislator so-and-so's wife" followed with connections like school PTA committees, sons on the same football team, or daughters in Junior Achievement. That type of conversation "would be an introduction for them to talk to the family and the spouses and the sisters or people that would see these legislators." Learning and enacting these strategies was new territory for many of the middle-class women activists showing up to this movement, but would not be the biggest challenge they faced: larger yet were the tasks of organizing and harnessing the energy and volunteers interested in seeing the ERA pass in Georgia, paired with the social and political context of the state at the time.

With such high stakes, with some veteran but many new leaders organizing on the scale that was required to build momentum across so many interest groups, ERA Georgia, Inc. showed its very human limits. Set against legal and budgetary limitations and trying to manage energy state-wide toward increasing support for ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment, ERA Georgia as a confederation of interest groups fractured before it achieved those goals. There was "a lot of disagreement about issues and how to, not so much on the issues but how to act on them," Janet Paulk said. Perennially aware of her place in this archival collection, Paulk notes "If you listened

to some of the other interviews which have been done, you will hear some of the braver and more honest people like Sherry Shulman and Cathey Steinberg talk about those [challenges]... We were not just stick figures, we were women with all our foibles and all. We were learning.”

Paulk’s comments refer to many of the growing pains of learning to organize simultaneous to mounting ERA opposition and an impending 1982 expiration date, which are perhaps best exemplified in the eventual split of ERA Georgia following its contentious presidential election. Even nearly two decades later, this event looms large in the memories of many of the women included here, who were deeply engaged in ERA Georgia. Carrie Nell Moyer ran unopposed, having been recruited and encouraged by members based on what now appears to be a somewhat weaker-than-expected connection to southern politics (her father had many years earlier been a state representative). Citing her southern pedigree, many felt she would be an impactful leader moving ERA Georgia closer to the ratification goal. Meanwhile, incumbent president Joyce Parker had been working very closely with Cathey Steinberg, traveling the state with her, and fighting misinformation that had been spreading fear about negative effects of the ERA. Based on Steinberg, Moyer, Paulk, Millen, and Kurtz’s oral histories, Steinberg felt strongly about Parker renewing her role as president, but this meant making changes to the bylaws of the organization to allow for additional concurrent terms. The two sides felt very strongly that their reasons and motivations were in the best interest of the group and its goals, to the point that when the bylaws were changed, and Joyce Parker was reelected, the organization split.

This ushered in the formation of the Georgia Women’s Political Caucus, a division of the National Women’s Political Caucus, whose work would greatly advance the goals of women’s



involvement in politics long after the ERA expired. Linda Kurtz served as the first president of GWPC. “When the Women’s Caucus came in,” Cathey Steinberg said, “I think Linda Hallenborg [Kurtz] and those folks and I had many of the same values about how you needed to approach the legislature—it was more of a mainstream approach. You know, let’s look nice and we don’t have to be nice, but let’s play the game a little differently. They really focused on the Equal Rights Amendment, it became their issue. That became one of my closest working relationships. We really saw the Equal Rights Amendment as a vehicle to organize women—that’s how I looked at that.”

Skipping ahead a couple more years to January 1982, when the ERA came up for a vote in the Georgia House of Representatives and lost 116-57, Linda made sure the momentum they had built would not be lost in its wake. “I had to be there to just be part of the experience of what was happening after the vote; because I really wanted to lend my energy of support and optimism to people, so they wouldn't feel like it was in vain, because it wasn't,” she said. “As a result of that [vote] the [Georgia Women’s Political] Caucus took off completely. Women all across the state started being irate. They were irate. We formed eight local caucuses within the next two years. Women started saying, ‘Oh, my God, they didn't pass the ERA, we'd better do something!’ All these little places that Roberta [Malavenda, ERA Georgia’s single paid employee] had been all around the states formed caucuses...there were eight caucuses that formed all around the state. And in Georgia, that's saying a lot.” Despite not being able to ratify the ERA, mobilization efforts would prove significant to a lot of improved conditions for women in the state, not to mention, as Linda notes, the impact it had on organizing women to even greater political ends in communities across the state, for goals that would wind well into the 1980s and 1990s.

Across the corpus, women point to the steep learning curve for many of the activists who showed up, delaying the movement during critical years ahead of the 1982 vote while they learned the ropes of lobbying, organizing, and building grassroots information networks. Sarah Schulman, writing about HIV/AIDS activists who built ACT UP New York and powerfully influenced changes in social understanding and public health policy in its short existence (less than seven years), notes that “in America... political progress is won by coalitions” (*xxiii*). To remember an activist movement at all in history means to leave some key message to contemporary activists, she implores, and to her that key is coalition. Especially when time is on the line (as it was literally life-and-death for many HIV/AIDS activists), coalition means more people with more community networks, ideas, and energy. Linda alluded to similar lessons *and* advances based on the discomfort and learning; indeed, she spends more time in her narrative on the impact of this organizing work in Georgia *after* the eventual failure of the ERA vote in the state legislature. That impact, the larger success to grow from the failure, is a key rhetorical act of remembrance she explicitly names, and which is supported by other oral histories in the collection at the center of this study. Such intentioned reflection on the nature of the movement forms the central ground for later chapters.

### **3.5 Feminism and Rhetorical Remembrance of a Feminist Movement**

The feminist movement “encompasses a number of sometimes conflicting movements” (Fredlund et al. 10) and thus is often overly simplified, flattened in historical record. Looking back on the variety of groups that organized in coalition to support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment—many of them based on distinctive causes within larger human and civil rights battles—it can be difficult to parse out the specifics when even the women involved in them have a hard time keeping some of them straight in their oral history interviews. Those

distinctions and sometimes-conflicting details should not distract from what I am trying to observe in these narratives: the rhetorical activity of remembrance of themselves in history. The ERA battle maintains an almost mythical nature in the historical memory of the narrators. Historian Elizabeth Lapovksy Kennedy notes the way in which such mythical grounding points in a community's history—in her study it's the Stonewall Riot in the LGBTQ history—“construct the nature of the oral histories we collect and the interpretations we derive from them” (279). Given the wholly central placement of the Equal Rights Amendment in the formation of the Georgia Women's Movement Project archival collection, it is impossible to separate the galvanizing effect of that period from the oral histories collected—and the questions asked. The two decades in between events and their remembrance shape what we can learn from the oral history collection and what we cannot. The interpretations we might derive from the narrators also differs greatly, and the motivations for sitting down to record informed each person. We may not know which “version” of themselves is prioritized—them as people in their present or as actors in history, but it is important to note that retrospection and interpretation of retrospection can only tell us so much.

These limits are relevant in studying social movements, especially as the multiple-centuries women's movement has often been concurrent to other key battles in the United States—including movements for civil and human rights by Black Americans, the LGBTQ+ community, for people with disabilities, continued labor rights activism, and work within historically excluded and communities of color. As any number of these identities or affiliations also apply to women, present day feminism is often defined and described as also encompassing the goals and values of many of these other movements (Cobble, et al.; Dicker; Schuller). The limit of a “women's movement” only encompassing women, in fact, remains one of its largest

contemporary critiques, for the great many excluded from “second wave” activity. The women who sat down between 1995-2002 to record their oral histories to be included in an archival collection about “the women’s movement” thus had some very specific things to reckon with and rectify for the record, as they saw it.

The public image that emerged of feminists (“women’s libbers” and the oft-cited, folkloric “bra-burning” “man-haters”) was in direct conflict with how these women saw themselves. I posit that this distinction—how they saw themselves versus how “feminists” were characterized in media and in subsequent decades—was a key motivating factor in the formation of the entire oral history project. Many of them sought to establish in historical record that their reality of fighting for women’s equality and rights throughout their lives did not match how they were portrayed by the media; nor did present-day women in the 1990s quite accurately understand what being a “feminist” meant.

“I think for most young women, they would not define feminism the way I do. They would say that they are not feminists. The word feminist has been so abused and misunderstood,” Cathey Steinberg said. “The term to me ‘being a feminist’ is wanting equality for women in all aspects of life, but the word has gotten such a bad connotation that I don’t know that most women would define themselves as feminist even though they might support the very same things that we support.” Others began to define the concept of “the women’s movement” as they see it—both in their lives and in larger public memory. Margaret Curtis “got sick to death” of the common phrase, “‘I am not a feminist, but...’ I can’t imagine why anyone would not want to be a feminist, because a feminist is just someone who believes that women should be treated fairly and given an equally fair chance in education and business and every way, and to say, ‘I am not a feminist,’ is like wanting to be against fairness toward women. So, I find that phrase

very offensive but, sometimes the women who say it actually do more to help women's rights than those who say they're feminist and don't do anything about it." Curtis continued: "So there's an ambiguity in people's attitudes, and I think it has to do with traditional feelings about women [who] should 'be a certain way, a certain very feminine way,' and that feminists have been given a bad image, which has nothing to do with reality. Almost all the feminists I know are people like me—homemakers and women who like children and raising families; some women have careers outside the home, and some don't, and those things don't really matter. What really matters is that you want to help women and that you want to help them have a chance for as good a life as they can possibly live and get rid of any discriminatory attitudes and barriers that stand in the way of women fulfilling their potential. I think there's a lot of wasted talent in this country simply because these bad attitudes are standing in the way."

To Jeanne Cahill, the women's movement meant "a lot of very positive things." She continues, addressing perception versus reality, "I never could understand the women [and men] who protested so against it and labeled us as 'leather lunged liberals.'" To Sherry Sutton, it meant "up from under." For her, the word "movement" was an important part lost in translation subsequently. "I've always loved the word 'movement' because of what it says. If you'll notice, right-wingers never used that word. They never talk about the pro-life 'movement' or anything like that because they see that as kind of a dirty word, radical, and out of the mainstream, I think. I guess that's why I like it so much." From observing the Civil Rights Movement while living in Atlanta—albeit from a distance as a white person, as she admits—she "saw what movement meant and it was coalescing and getting from where we are to someplace better."

Carrie Nell Moye spends a lot of time discussing what she has learned about women in the Islamic world in her decade-plus as a freelance writer living in Beirut, Lebanon. And in her

interview, she reiterates several times the danger of insular, narrow thinking and a fear that “there are far too many little girls who are being reared much as I was,” referring to lack of empowerment or agency as women. To her, the women’s movement “means something that began so slowly that we cannot even see a particular inception. It was like—I can only speak for myself, but for me, it was like a very, very slow, and a long-time-in-dawning realization that, ‘Hey! I may be a female, but I am also an individual who is not here just to be a helpmate to a husband.’”

### **3.6 Regained Complexity**

This collection provides us a rich narrative of some very specific elements and events that played out in the women’s movement in one state. Collectively, the oral histories reveal the context of the U.S. South as the setting for an uphill battle and an unlikely victory. They reveal the early machinations of ERA Georgia, Inc., and the numerous groups to comprise that coalition; they reveal what happened when the coalitions began to crumble, and the impact that had on their efforts. These oral histories reveal the essential support and training by labor organizers in the state, and the limits of coalition-building. They look back at the impact misinformation had on their goal and the legacy of the lobbying and political savvy they developed, and where it served them once the ERA battle was over and lost. Their voices restore complexity to this historical movement via their individual, localized experiences.

In my effort to “interrupt” the relationship between normal and exceptional (McComiskey 19), I have illustrated the challenges and activities of this period of work towards greater rights and access for women via the words and work of the women included in the GWMP Oral History Project. This is an analysis of history as *interruption*.

While normative interpretations of historic movements tend to characterize individuals as exceptional, this characterization belies the reality: that movements are fought, and progress made, by regular people willing to do hard things. What's more, regular people working towards a goal together in any kind of context—but perhaps especially in the face of long-standing societal and cultural norms—must be willing to risk failure, discomfort, and sometimes alienation by those around them. Mischaracterizing individual actors in any political or social movement as exceptional supports the dangerous and inaccurate view that one must *be* somehow exceptional to effect change in their own present context. This is what Judith M. Bennett seeks to convey in her feminist history work, to go beyond the “ever-expanding list of positive and encouraging role models” and instead for “substantive integration of history and feminism” that is willing to see and understand the lives and actions of real people—beyond “heroic” tropes and including the mistakes, failure, and even problematic activities (5). As microhistory contends, and feminist rhetorical microhistory extends, there is much to gain from understanding everyday actions by often self-proclaimed underqualified or “learning-as-I-go” folks, whose relative privilege allowed them to show up and to keep showing up for the improvement to women's lives they saw as critical.

These individual contributions, as a collective, illustrate that purported complexity that is so hard to attain in larger narratives of something like the U.S. women's movement. Indeed, the complexity of either the one long women's movement—spanning three centuries in the U.S.—or the peaks that tend to be recognized as “waves” includes much more than traditional historical accounts have included. Actors as disparate as labor organizers defending women workers in the 1930s to Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum members had their reasons for not supporting the Equal Rights Amendment; while those subjects are not the focus of this study, I present them as further

avenues for other researchers to explore the limits of our conventional approach to historical analysis—that is, looking for the generalizable in social movements or among one demographic (“women”) at the expense of the nuanced, everyday concerns, perspective, and action of individuals. Both labor organizers and members of STOP-ERA had very specific reasons for not supporting a constitutional amendment that limited discrimination based on sex. Feminist rhetorical microhistory might help us better engage with their reasons and how those played out in action.

I have tried to show in these pages the *exceptional normal*, the individual moments that seem exceptional in history but reveal deeper human ordinariness. In *Feminist Connections: Rhetoric and Activism Across Time, Space, and Place*, Fredlund, et al. study rhetoric both presented to the public as well as used within movements themselves. They suggest, “Placing these conversations next to one another allows us to see the importance of rhetoric to social movements” and that such rhetorical appeal is crucial for members of social movements to “reflect on, critique, and reconsider the movement’s own beliefs and actions” (Fredlund, et al. 10). In my view, their remarks suggest two related but distinct points: first, to reiterate the value of studying social movements toward effective social justice movements in the present, and second, that rhetorical moves are present and occur from all vantage points of something so large as a social movement. Thus, restoring complexity is essential to “treat[ing] social movements as fallible, human, dynamic collections of people” (Stevens and Malesh 199) in our work in feminist rhetorical microhistory. What’s more, Bennett suggests, is that such restored complexity allows us to “tur[n] to history for *strategy* as well as inspiration,” (5) and as I will show in subsequent chapters, the Founding Mothers of the GWMP held future activists’ work as motivation for forming the archives (and recording oral histories).



For the women of the GWMP Oral History Project, reflection and critique are woven throughout the oral history interview questions, just as often unprompted. Their remembrance of the pivotal events of the Equal Rights Amendment battle in Georgia, from roughly 1975-1982, form a pinnacle for restored agency in the historical narrative of that time. The themes I explored here illustrate their rhetorical intention to position their view of “feminism,” of the women’s movement, and what that meant to them, regardless of their challenges and failures within that work. The next chapter will engage this question of how one speaks when distinctly aware of being an actor in historic events.

#### 4 HOW WE SPEAK WHEN WE ARE ACTORS IN HISTORY: ORAL HISTORY AS RHETORICAL ACT

So far in this work, I have organized a framework for feminist rhetorical microhistory, drawing on key works in feminist rhetorical theory, archivist methods, and microhistory. I have applied that methodology to an expository narration of the women's movement in Georgia in the 1970s and early 1980s as told by a set of oral histories collected with the intention of documenting what that movement looked like for the women who participated in it. In this chapter, I expand further, using feminist rhetorical microhistory (FRM), to contemplate the *voices used* by the women who recorded these oral histories, especially with an eye to the oral document's position *in* an archival repository, *as* historical record.

Across this research, I have been building to what I demonstrate here: oral history is a rhetorical act, working as both form and method. The performative act of sitting down to record an oral history is steeped in rhetorical intention, contextualized by multiple factors: 1) intended audience, 2) intended permanent location, 3) relationship to the interviewer, 4) historical conditions of the period being remembered in the recording, and 5) historical conditions of the speaker's present period. I use FRM to examine the ways in which the women we met in earlier chapters chose to narrate and contextualize their activism in the women's movement within their oral histories. Frequently, this includes their work before and after the "main event" of fighting for the ERA in Georgia, which culminated in 1982.

Additionally, I suggest that for the women who created the Georgia Women's Movement Oral History Project, their *recognition* of the importance of archiving their own history *is a form of resistance* to history as a discipline and to archival collection in practice. Women acting on this exigency using oral history as a means for controlling how they and their actions are

remembered, is a form of rhetorical agency. As I illustrate, the women who formed the Georgia Women's Movement archival collection and the oral history project within it were not practicing archivists by intention when they began. However, they had a sense of the power of the form of oral history, based on the educational, professional, and activist savvy of the various "Founding Mothers." This sense, coupled with the rise in popularity of oral history as form for community-centered history by the 1990s (Gluck and Patai), led to rhetorical agency via collecting and recording oral histories. The work of collecting their documents and memories was a means of resisting the ways in which they imagined their actions and experiences could be interpreted without their own intervention—especially relevant as they considered the context of feminism at the end of the twentieth century. As other scholars have done, I interrogate *how* women have been recovered and remembered—but part of what makes this case study unique is the opportunity it affords to study how women are recovered by their *own* remembrance.

In her forward to *Feminist Connections: Rhetoric and Activism Across Time, Space, and Place*, Tarez Samra Graban asks "What are the critical possibilities of considering whether our field might be missing a historical moment where women's compositional practices are concerned?" (xv). In the present space, join me in considering how this question applied not only to the work of these women at the peak of Equal Rights Amendment mobilization, but *especially* to the intentional work of the narrative: performative oral history as compositional practice. In a meditative listen of the oral histories introduced in the last chapter, it is impossible to separate the stories, examples, and memories each woman shares from the intentional act of composing themselves in historical record. Oral history "[reveals] two different but complementary kinds of truths," as Elizabeth Laprovsky Kennedy notes, the first being new historical facts for us to better understand events of our past (271). The second is more important to my careful listen of

the rhetorical act of oral history: based in memory, it is subjective and thus an interpretation of the past through the narrator's eyes. If oral history is useful for conveying information about the past, it is equally—or perhaps more so—valuable for the subjective. In other words, “what the past *means* to a particular individual...adds new dimensions to history” (Kennedy 272, emphasis added). Taking both scholars' calls to consider the compositional practices women used to position themselves in history, we understand these acts to be rhetorical and an *interpretation* of history based on lived experience. And to Kennedy's point, that is equally as important to our understanding of history as it is to collect facts.

In the act of composing themselves within the historical narrative of the women's movement (in Georgia, in the U.S., in their lives), I identified some emergent themes across the twelve oral histories included in this study. I engage feminist rhetorical microhistory to hear these subjects' intentions to disrupt the standard historical narrative; after we explore the emergent themes told in their voices, I will return at the end of the chapter to further synthesize and discuss my use of FRM to build this chapter. Some of the themes that arose are quite intentionally informed by the questions prepared for/by the interviewer, many of which repeat throughout the busiest collection period (including all interviews comprising this corpus). Among these twelve interviews, the first is recorded in 1995 and the last in 2003. While the questions sometimes changed or evolved, and the interviewer's style changed over time (or indeed, the interviewer is someone different), the intention of the oral history collection, driven by the Founding Mothers' vision, remained focused on several themes that I observed throughout my close listen:

1. Reacting to 1990s feminism

2. Changing/disrupting the narrative of history for young girls and future generations, about how the women's movement is remembered as well as who is included in stories
3. Contextualizing failure, as well as the rest of their lives and work
4. How events look in the past compared to our lives today: normal people doing hard things
5. Speaking in the genre of oral history: what takes on meaning in the act of reflecting

The remainder of this chapter provides the evidence for these themes, as told via our twelve narrators.

#### **4.1 Reacting to 1990s feminism**

A central guiding exigency for the women of the GWMP Oral History Project was to narrate, for future generations, what it was like to be part of the women's movement—part of that moment in time. They are recording in the mid- to late 1990s, and their narration is heavily influenced by their view of present-day feminism. This includes criticism existing by the 1990s that second-wave feminism had been thwarted by the movement's short-sighted consideration of class- and race-related concerns—that promoting “equality” to men as the most important in a much larger array of goals favored white women, and thus left the needs of many out of the mission (Sidler; Hewitt; Cobble et. al; Schuller). By the 1990s, scholarly critique and some public memory held that the second-wave movement had not been as successful as it might have been due to divisions among identity groups, especially Black women and the LGBTQ community, which hindered collective action toward what many saw as shared goals. Additionally, the complexities of 1990s “postfeminism,” followed by “third-wave” feminism, left a lot for the women of the GWMP to consider alongside their experiences. In the oral histories, we see direct questions about, and many indirect or incomplete responses to, these

critiques and feminism's evolution. It is clear that all of this rested heavily on the minds of our narrators, decades later, especially in how their activism might be interpreted as time went on, as their lives became codified history.

Many of the women central to this study expressed concern for feminism and how it was seen and experienced (or met with chagrin) by young women in the 1990s. They expressed how young women mostly appeared to take for granted many of things those only one generation removed had fought to gain—the option to major in many more things in college, or the very idea that a career could be enough for a woman to pursue, for example. There is also a sense for some that becoming aware of one's value as a person beyond their relationship to others—as mother, as wife, as daughter—was a key part of the shift they saw in their lifetimes that felt all but forgotten to them by the 1990s (Paulk; Schapiro; Cahill; Long; Gibson-Ferry). Though many working within the feminism of the 1990s recognized how different the world looked for them just a few short decades later (Heywood and Drake; Faderman; Baumgardner and Richards), media perceptions and a changing of the way activism was executed meant many of the GWMP women, now older, perceived a disconnect.

Work in memory studies affirms the public nature of memory as something that “exists in the world rather than in a person's head” (Zelizer 232). The growth in popularity and use of oral history as a way of collecting and interpreting history in the latter half of the twentieth century provided additional affirmation of the practice as a way to position a *person* within larger historical events. For the women building this archival collection, and many of those opting to participate, the future of feminism depended on its accurate representation in public memory. It was not enough to hold an ideal of feminism as they saw it if that same ideal seemed absent from

the public interpretation and representation of “feminism” and “feminist movements” by the 1990s.

After asking about early life, including childhood influences and descriptions of their parents, narrators were asked, “When you hear the words ‘the women’s movement,’ what does that mean to you?” and, “What was it like to be involved in the women’s movement at that time?” Both questions garnered ruminations on the consciousness-raising that has been long associated with women’s movements.<sup>8</sup> The women of the GWMP speak with reverence for that era in their lives and note the concern that this kind of awakening is very hard for women in the last decade of the twentieth century to comprehend, given how vastly opportunities and access had expanded. Linda Kurtz recalled an early group where they “would talk about things that we had never talked about with anybody...And this kind of experience of connecting deeply and intimately and sharing experience, and then learning what we had all gone through to give us...a diminished sense of ourselves, and then [to] realize how much of that was imposed by society, by culture, by tradition, by history and then have to work together in order to shift that—internally, first, and then externally, second.” Janet Paulk noted her perception of herself was based on society’s assurance that she could marry a doctor to achieve a good lot in life—but only marry a doctor, not become one. This was the perception she then sought to change in her lifetime, for young girls coming up after her. “It was like coming up from having been underwater all my life and breathing fresh air ... That's really what [consciousness-raising

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<sup>8</sup> Kathleen T. Leuschen’s 2016 dissertation, *The Literacy Practices of Feminist Consciousness-raising: An Argument for Remembering and Recitation*, provides a wonderful analysis of archival texts, to show how consciousness-raising groups were literary practice.

groups] were talking about,” Paulk said. “That we had been submerged for so long. [I had] the feeling of being a part of [a] crusade to free women from oppression, make life better for all of us and life better for our daughters and for generations to come.”

To Margaret Curtis, much of the consciousness-raising that had been key to her awakening had not continued after the peak of second-wave activity, with the resultant risk that women were less vigilant to the threats to their liberties by the time she sat down to reflect in her oral history. “I’m disappointed that there aren’t more young women carrying the torch, so-to-speak. I think, again, we’re going through a phase, like I did in the fifties where we think everything is just fine and dandy and there are no problems, and sometimes it takes a while for people to wake up and realize there are still a lot of difficulties for women to face.” She continued, “I don’t think the women’s movement is dead but it’s quiet at the moment.” Her thoughts here are related to another question central to the oral history project, with its subtext of attempting to situate second-wave feminism in a larger, longer context: “Has there ever been a time when you felt that the women’s movement was over?”

“Well, I don’t know if I ever saw [the women’s movement] as being over. I saw it as changing,” Sue Millen said, echoing Curtis’s sentiment. “And I do think there are a lot of young women who have no idea what went on and how all this groundwork changed their lives. You know, they take for granted that they can go to college, and they’ll go on to get a management job or they’ll get this, or they’ll have this right, or their daughters will participate in athletic sports. And you know, all those kinds of things weren’t there 25 years ago for women...those were the kinds of things the women’s movement had to do to change, in order for this generation... to have choices like that.”



Linda Kurtz noted how her son and daughter are equally empowered today to ask someone on a date. These are the kinds of small but significant liberties they notice as life-improvements for future generations, often going unrecognized as such. Her children's generation "start out with a given, that certain things are given, [and] they don't think about them," she said. "They don't attribute them to us. They don't think, 'Thank you because you helped us get here.' They take it for granted. That's the success of our work—is that they do that. I hope every generation of women does that because the generation before them does the work to give them a new level that they then come in on."

These remembrances are delivered in direct response to questions that illuminate the creators' intentions and their strong rhetorical appeal to their position in larger women's and human rights movements. They were asked how they felt about feminism and young women today, as well as how their work during the women's movement impacted their personal lives and relationships. For example, "How important do you feel the movement was to you personally?" garnered sentiments like: "It helped to shape the rest of my life" (Sutton), "Very important because it made me a much stronger, more outspoken person" (Cahill), "I lived and breathed it for many years" (Steinberg), "It means everything to me!" (Curtis), and others who called it "extremely important" to their lives' purpose and work (Schapiro; Moye). Taken in conversation with one another, I see a larger pattern of wanting to document some of the more mundane shifts in public perception and cultural norms that changed in that era that didn't merit inclusion in history books. I also observe their prescient view to the risks women may be subjected to if the liberties they enjoy and take for granted were ever to erode. Several of the women remark on the abortion conversation that was happening in Georgia in the late 1990s, regarding "heartbeat laws" that were having a moment in the state legislature. They pointed to

matters like eroding protections on abortion as harbingers of what could be lost if future generations did not remain vigilant.

The oral history interview questions suggest the theme of considering present-day views on feminism. Across the interviews in this study, the first five to be conducted (from 1995-97) were not asked the question above, about whether they had ever felt the women's movement was over. All subsequent oral histories in this study include this question (those recorded 1998-2003), suggesting the collectors became interested in capturing a temperature check on women's movement work over time, especially present-day. In addition, every interview in this corpus posed the direct question, "What do you think about the relationship of younger women to feminism these days?"<sup>9</sup>

If many of our subjects took the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which things had changed, Eva Parker subverts this idea in her response. Sure, things have changed, but many times "they wind up in the same situation we were in, don't you think?" she pondered to her interviewer, Janet Paulk, sitting at Margaret Curtis's breakfast table during her oral history recording. To her, the biggest change isn't in women making different choices, but in being more willing and able to talk about when things aren't good. "Now the girls are willing to talk about it. Before, they took it, you know, and they didn't say anything about it. But now, a man strikes his wife two or three times, and they are willing to spill the beans, and then some of them are still holding it in," she said. Notice the last remark, in contradiction to the previous sentiment. Some things are the same, we are perhaps more willing to talk about it; and yet, perhaps not.

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<sup>9</sup> Technically, Sherry Sutton is the only one not asked this directly; but so much of her interview discusses her present-day work and the state of feminism, Paulk likely decided not to ask or perhaps thought she already had by the interview's end.

Mary Long expressed that, to her, the activism she saw in her generation “missed” the one just after, but then returned. “It hit my generation,” she said. “It missed my children, but then my children’s children are feminists. Kids that we thought would never be feminists are out there on the throes of the line talking about pro-choice. Doing it! Which is really wonderful to see. But there is a group, there is a group of women who are just below me [in age], who could be my children’s age, who don’t seem to need or understand the whole [women’s] movement. They think they got where they were because somebody just came down and said, ‘It’s okay for you to go where you are.’ And that’s not how it happened. A lot of us paid the dues.”

Dorothy Gibson-Ferry cites her 28-year-old granddaughter as “not really aware of feminism” despite accompanying Dorothy to the capitol as a young child. She notes that as an adult, her granddaughter is successful in business, but that her marriage was not doing as well. She echoes others’ sentiment of knowing young women in this heir-apparent generation of young women who might take up the torch of feminism but appear not to care or even have an awareness of the work preceding their adult lives. “I’m not sure that they’ve articulated [to themselves]<sup>10</sup> what feminism is really all about,” she said. “I’d like to think that the way many of them [young women] are living now—with good jobs and good careers—or successful [educational] studies that they’re [currently] doing—like law school, and medical school—I’d like to think that they realize they wouldn’t be doing that if it weren’t for the struggle that went on [before them]. I just think the women’s movement has accomplished so much; it is hard to know whether young women really realize that they’re indebted to older women who have worked in the movement and suffered the slings and arrows.” She then acknowledges it would be

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<sup>10</sup> All bracketed clarification here is included in the oral history transcript, rather than added by me. I have left this for clarity and to preserve the voice/intention of the unnamed laborer who transcribed the recordings.

valuable to ask her granddaughter “if she’s gotten the message of what feminism and the women’s movement really accomplished.”

Such responses articulate something important about how these women valued the work they had done in the name of women’s equality as well as a lingering concern over how their energies appeared mostly lost to the world of the late ’90s. Of course, third-wave feminism existed, but it was necessarily evolving and expanding, in ways that might have looked watered-down or nonexistent to the GWMP generation. As equality and human rights work broadened—including those identifying as LGBTQ+ and expanding to the global contexts of women’s rights—it may have been harder for the women sitting down to recall their work in the 1970s as part of the lineage of their efforts in contemporary human rights work in the 1990s. Mary Long admits to not knowing too many women in the generation just after hers—the one she claimed had “nonexistent” feminism, and many of them who had retired or not remained in the same spaces of activism were possibly too removed to see the evolved nature of feminist work in the 1990s.

Linda Kurtz’s professional evolution illustrates the larger changed nature of feminist work by the late ’90s: the issues broader, the scope bigger, the subjects being fought for not limited to women. By the early ’90s, Kurtz was traveling internationally as her understanding of female leaders and agents of change had moved to spaces beyond women’s equality. She notes that practically every issue—environmental to economic—affects women and thus requires the presence and leadership of women. She and her husband built the nonprofit Global Hopemakers, a program that served as a bridge between people in Lansing, Michigan, and St. Peterburg, Russia. She explained the intention and outcome of their work through this program: “We have created more powerful and deeper connections between the people of the two countries

becoming citizen diplomats and empowering ourselves to use the possibilities that are in our hands to go beyond government, to go beyond laws and structures that are there, to create our own connections with people.” She came to see the potential for diplomacy and action outside of official political spaces as the most effective way to build momentum toward change and “creating hope” as she put it. She saw her work as having evolved based on a lifetime of fighting for women’s rights. “I was expanding my vision beyond the political sphere,” she says of her work of that time. After dedicating much of her energy in the 1980s to lobbying for Planned Parenthood and donating money and time to political campaigns for female candidates, Kurtz came to see grassroots work by community-based women as more effective than anything in political spaces. Her observations and shift in work illustrate many of the others’ later trajectories, though hers is the most explicitly globally-minded.

Another ongoing challenge to understanding feminist movements in historical and personal experience is the ongoing issue of defining the term. The terms “feminist” and “feminism” have been interpreted in public memory and social contexts to the result of much discord across different groups, and are deeply tied up in language and perception. “I think for most young women, they would not define feminism the way I do,” Cathey Steinberg says. “They would say that they are not feminists. The word ‘feminist’ has been so abused and misunderstood. As my daughter said to me, ‘those women that call themselves feminists are so radical that I don’t want to be one.’” Cathey goes on to define the term for the record: “To me ‘being a feminist’ is wanting equality for women in all aspects of life, but the word has gotten such a bad connotation that I don’t know that most women would define themselves as feminist even though they might support the very same things that we support.”

A close reading of these subjects' response to the direct questions about 1990s feminism and the relationship of young women to feminism suggests a strong stance that young women didn't appear to have any collective sense of how different their lives could be than their mothers' or grandmothers' based on the advances they had worked to achieve. It appears much of this could be based in generational perception and translation, the nature of limited perception and context that happens as a younger generation attempts to distinguish itself from the previous. Historian Lillian Faderman documents the changing nature of feminism in the United States in her book *Woman: The American History of an Idea*. She illustrates how the "postfeminist" perspective of the late '80s and early '90s brought a reductive image of feminism that "stuck and turned many young women further away from second-wave feminisms" (Faderman 363). Faderman recounts the early feminist exposure of Kathleen Hanna, lead singer and songwriter of the '90s punk rock band Bikini Kill. As a child, she was influenced by her mother's brand of 1970s feminism, the "not-happy housewife" who read *Ms.* magazine and saw Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem as the leaders of her movement. While she found the energy of these women exciting, "'feminism' had become a bad word and hip women were 'postfeminist'" in Hanna's adolescence and early womanhood in the 1980s (378). She had internalized the "reductive image ... that all feminists 'have hairy legs and are anti-sex'" (378). Women like Hanna would challenge cultural rules of sex and even the typically male spaces of punk music by the 1990s, perhaps adopting a version of feminism that felt wholly unrelated to the women recorded in the GWMP.

In 2000, Michelle Baumgardner and Amy Richards published *Manifesta*, their part-history, part-call-to-action to pull back the veil on what had been happening in "feminism" during the 1990s and to declare proudly that the third wave was alive and well. They note the

movement as solidly, necessarily intersectional, and define it as has previously been established: movement for political, social, and economic equality, with the extension that “feminism means that women have the right to enough information to make informed choices about their lives” (56). This means the movement requires *access*, and that this fight also means “an organic intertwining with movements for racial and economic equality, as well as gay rights” is inherent to feminism (56). Then, they position their twenty-first-century feminism as reliant on what we can understand about past movements, “to build on this legacy rather than [to] rebuild” with every new wave (68). Their interpretation lacks some of the nuance that subsequent two decades of historical analysis has brought, including a disruption of the usefulness of the “wave” analogy (Hewitt; Cobble et al.). But they note that the women’s movement in history has “too often [missed] the essential tool of collective memory” and that by the late ’90s, “histories of the women who fought before us are just barely becoming archived” (Baumgardner and Richards 67). In other words, leaders in the feminist movement, in its evolving state, were aware and excited to learn from previous generations, while also acknowledging that their version might look quite different than what previous activists might expect.

The tension between GWMP subjects’ historical narration and 1990s notions of feminism is part of a long and complex question of historicizing feminist movements. As historian Astrid Henry notes, “the wave metaphor used to chronicle feminism’s history undoubtedly exacerbated generational tensions among feminists in the United States” (169). The delineation of a third wave “relied on a notion of teleological progress” in which the subsequent generation “had to describe the previous generation in monolithic and even caricatured ways in order to present themselves as the improved version of feminism” (170). Henry reminds us that this misrepresentation occurred in both directions, and that the older generation were quick to defend

themselves, and to critique the means and ideas advanced by the younger activists. To vocal members of the second wave generation, “younger feminists were all style, no substance,” offering “aesthetic sensibility rather than political perspective” (170-1).

In fact, some of the critiques of second-wave feminism that women in the GWMP respond to—lack of inclusivity, reluctance to embrace their sexuality, continued sexual violations in the workplace—sound like the natural evolution of an ongoing battle for access, rights, and equality. Baumgardner and Richards point out that by the end of the century, some young women felt ignored or excluded by the organizations founded by previous generations, and for some, that “Second Wave tactics didn’t speak to their media-savvy, culture-driven generation” (77). There was first the “postfeminist” sensibility, which was then complicated and rejected by women like Rebecca Walker (daughter of Alice Walker) who boldly claimed, “I am the Third Wave” in the *New York Times* in 1992 (see Heywood and Drake; Henry; Faderman; Baumgardner and Richards). Technology, sexuality, intersectionality, and a globalizing world contributed to the character of 1990s feminism looking quite foreign to women of the second-wave movement just a few short decades later. All of this is important to understand for our historical contextualization of the oral histories collected for the GWMP in the late ’90s and early ’00s. In fact, the *perceived* relationship of older and newer feminism is just as important as an actual relationship, and further highlights the value of applying feminist rhetorical microhistory in a close listen to these narratives.

In the era of the oral history recordings in this study (1995-2003), mainstream media “seemed to relish portraying feminism as a ‘cat fight’ rather than a political movement” (171), further influencing the stance and defensiveness present in some of the narrators’ feelings on “where” the women’s movement stood and how they saw young people’s relationship to



feminism. By the start of the twenty-first century, many in the third wave would argue how simplistic divisions of feminism were continuing to distract from the shared goals and complex history across demographic categories as massive as generational groups. Many social commentators and scholars have critiqued the limits of the wave analogy, noting how it invites a kind of laziness in understanding the much more complex people and goals within women's activism (Heywood and Drake; Jervis; Hewitt). Thus, the oral histories, with their language of "not ending but changing" and a sense that "someday they'll return to this," affirm a kind of necessary evolution of feminism as the twentieth century came to an end. As Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess articulated in 2000, "Because feminism is not, and cannot be, some form of received wisdom handed down across generations but is an active interpretation of the realities of women's own lives and struggles, the feminism of the future will continue to be reborn different in every generation" (219).

Because this study is located in three distinct eras—the height of the "second wave," the complicated 1990s, and the present day—it is important to recognize the changing historical consciousness also impacting our view of both historical events and our role in history. Specifically, often to build or continue historical consciousness, intentional construction of the past must occur. In 1997, Maria Grever noted, "nowadays people have vague, fragmented and often artificial images of the past" (368). In her work she is especially concerned with the nature of "invented traditions" that arose to build coherent and collective memory where it was lacking. In the case of feminist history and culture, practices of historical consciousness-raising have meant a sort of discovery and rediscovery process throughout the last two centuries that, according to Grever, were much diminished if not gone by the 1990s. Grever concretizes the importance of institutions and organizations to form and maintain "continued memory" but then

concludes that “feminist memory...is fading away,” that “the women’s movement seems to belong to a past that has become more or less ‘remote’ and different” (371). She pines for the kind of restoration of early suffragists that occurred in the middle of twentieth century, proclaiming that by the time of her writing “the ideological and moral attachment of feminism to its past is diminishing” (371). It is within Grever’s state of mind we might imagine a perceived historical consciousness (or lack thereof) by the 1990s that was compelling women like those of the GWMP to ensure discovery and rediscovery could continue well beyond their lifetimes. Grever’s call to understand “how these memories define a feminist identity” (372) remains prescient as we consider the ways in which feminism continues to be defined and interpreted along a sliding scale of reality.

#### **4.2 Changing/disrupting the narrative of history for young girls and future generations**

Other themes that emerge from the individuals’ oral histories suggest the implicit or intentional composing of themselves into history. This appears connected, for many, to the intent to disrupt the narrative of history for young girls, and future generations. Janet Paulk’s oral history indicates this as a key goal of hers (a subject we will return to in the next chapter).

How does the oral history collection within the GWMP work to disrupt the historical narrative as its founders hoped? For the intended outcome, scholars, students, and the public need to listen—to engage with the materials available. Scholars and students may do this directly via archival research; the public relies on GSU archivists to make parts of their work available online and in spaces for historical interpretation. The women engaged in both collecting for the GWMP and recording oral histories were certain that their words and documentation would have an audience, and that audience might come away with an altered view to what it was like living in Georgia as a woman during a tumultuous time for the expansion of rights.

As our subjects pondered the young women of their present moment, the late 1990s, Jeanne Cahill acknowledged the dissociation between what was available to them compared to just a couple of decades before. “It’s a little bit puzzling,” she notes. “They seem to not realize how recently a lot of the things they enjoy were not available to them, but that’s ok.” She is then quick to hedge with the reminder that none of them—she and her fellows—were in this work for the glory. “I don’t think any of us are looking for credit for doing these things or [for] accomplishing anything, we’re just happy that the opportunities are there. I think when they [the younger women], maybe grow a little older and develop more of an historical perspective they will realize that they got to do a lot of things and had a lot of freedoms because of some unpopular stands that women have taken fifteen, twenty years ago, and going on back.”

Cahill’s sentiments suggest the additional motivation, not just to contextualize and “get the record straight” for their own sakes, but especially to inform and inspire subsequent generations. Echoed across these oral histories are the hopes that the everyday effort, the toil and the frustrations, the failure, and the progress, made a difference and will continue to inspire—implore—future young women to heed their warnings and take up the call to continue defending women’s right to agency. Cathey Steinberg hoped future listeners might be mobilized to action: “I find it hard to believe that it’s almost twenty years [since introducing the ERA to Georgia]. I hope that as young students listen to this that they will join the cause in some way and will learn something from it and carry on in some way.”

The act of recording an oral history, in addition to collecting and archiving the various written documentation of their actions, suggests there was value in hearing the stories the papers couldn’t tell. Many of the narrators were exposed via consciousness-raising groups to the basic ideas that they could want more and have more agency than to be a mother and wife to others,

and these paradigm-shifting ideas were shared in living rooms and via small meetings and personal conversations. It does not seem a stretch then, to imagine them sitting down years later, in some cases a lifetime later, to carry on the tradition. Guglielmo and Wallace Stewart remind us that such efforts are central to lived feminist practice. As they say, “In the feminist tradition of consciousness-raising, personal narratives have been powerful catalysts in prompting political action and fostering social change, reminding us that the personal is, in fact, political” (cited in Guglielmo, 6). Women know the value of their stories, especially if they had experienced—as many note—a lack of women as role models in the larger cultural record during their upbringing—beyond family members (and a few teachers). Some of our narrators suggest they knew women were present, but were not being credited or documented in the historical narrative.

Another driving force for taking control of the narrative of their experiences “in history” was their desire to combat the continued perception of “women’s libbers” as anti-men and anti-family. “I never could understand the women [and men] who protested so against it and labeled us as ‘leather-lunged liberals,’ [laughter] I remember that was one,” Jeanne recalled. “The kinds of things they said about us, you know, they called us all lesbians and just things that were smoke screens and scare tactics that had nothing to do with the [aims of the] Women’s Movement. It [the movement] was certainly not anti-family. It was not anti-man. There may have been a few people who embraced the Women’s Movement who had their own agendas, but by and large, most of the women who supported [the movement] were women like myself—women with families and husbands that we loved. We were not out to change the world into a world run by women—we just wanted equity. [We] wanted women to have the same chance that men had. I mean, after all, they made up half of the population, but we [women] certainly didn’t have half of the opportunities.” Many of the narrators echo Jeanne Cahill’s bewilderment, years

later, of the misperceptions regular citizens—their neighbors—seemed to harbor about what the women’s movement’s goals were. They felt many of them had fallen victim to scare tactics promoted by oppositional forces from a growing “religious right” that were being very effectively spread through news and media. Kristina Graves’s 2006 master’s thesis, “Stop Taking Our Privileges! The Anti-ERA Movement in Georgia, 1978-1982” illustrates the oppositional forces specifically within Georgia, using sources in the Women’s Collection. Additionally, Robin Morris has written about the efforts of Georgia’s anti-ERA leader, Kathryn Dunaway, and the origins of Georgia’s Republican shift concurrent to the height of the battle over the ERA, using GSU’s archival collections. Morris notes that in the late 1970s, “Georgia became a hot battlefield” and that “both the pro- and anti-ERA forces focused on Georgia as an important prize” (163). The stakes were high and the forces of opposition, while a small minority of the American public, were strong.

Media efforts to be “balanced” during the height of ERA debate produced too much attention on an opinion held by a small minority, according to Cathey Steinberg’s assessment. “We always had a lot of television coverage and newspaper coverage” about the Equal Rights Amendment,” she said. “Of course, the media always insisted on both input from both pro-ERA and anti-ERA folks which were called STOP-ERA. In... the media’s effort, to be balanced, I’m convinced that the real truth about the [Equal Rights] Amendment really never came out. Every statement you make was countered by somebody. I think the public has a hard time sorting anything out.”

At the time and ever since, the GWMP narrator subjects had to clarify what the women’s movement was about. The women's movement says “do what you want because you want to,” according to Carrie Nell Moye. She and the others in this narrative had to constantly work

against a media and countermovement that were mischaracterizing, in their view, the reality of what pro-ERA women were fighting for. Moye tells the story of a woman she worked with who went to law school, became an attorney with a prestigious Atlanta firm, and confided to Moye “Carrie Nell, you’re going to think it’s just terrible, but I really would just like to be married and have babies.” Moye once again found herself repeating that the women’s movement wanted this for her too, wanted her to have the access and freedom to make the life she wanted, *whatever* life. “In the women’s movement *I* know, a woman does something because she chooses to do it, not because she has to do it,” she said.

Moye felt strongly that how the Equal Rights Amendment (and the women’s movement) was portrayed in the press and by the conservative religious right had a lot to do with its failure. “I think the Equal Rights Amendment was certainly defeated by women,” and that much of the motive behind rejecting it was fear, instilled in young women during their upbringing. The public “had been led to believe that [the ERA] would cause all kinds of things,” she recalls. This included threats that women would be drafted equal to men, public restrooms would cease to be gendered, and women might owe men alimony. She recalls writing to the show Barbara Walters hosted (probably ABC’s *20/20*), expressing her anger over the fearmongering that was swaying an impressionable public. “Of course,” Moye notes, “it’s the radical things that make the news. The sensational always does.” For what it’s worth, experts often retorted to point out many of the anti-ERA folks’ suggestions were unfounded, but that did not lessen their stickiness in the public fear that Moye illustrates.

For GWMP oral history narrators, it is important that future generations understand the crucial legacy of the women’s movement. Echoing Moye’s sentiment, it wasn’t about sending every woman off to work, to tire mercilessly next to men in labor markets. Instead, Paulk points

to the important shift in recognizing many forms of and spaces for labor—especially that labor in the home is also work. “The contributions of everybody from artists to homemakers are more fully appreciated” based on their movement. Paulk notes. And the movement’s accomplishments continue today “in a more subdued way through feminist organizations, lobbying, publications, legislation, increased records of women's history, [and in] the educational system.”

### **4.3 Contextualizing failure, as well as the rest of their lives and work**

Another goal, based in both the questions and the women’s narration of various events in their lives, is to contextualize the women’s movement and their role in it within their larger lives, work, and experiences. As we saw in the narrative of women’s movement activities in the previous chapter, failure is a significant theme of the historical context for the ERA in Georgia. Our narrators are keen to present it for the valuable experience it was. Sherry Sutton noted that this movement necessitated meetings and activities that were “for women, by women, about women...[but] also meant that it put us in conflict with each other because none of us knew how to handle [the] power,” she said. “When we look back on it now, we were in a historical situation that I don't think anybody appreciated—the gravity of what we were doing.”

In *Lives, Letters and Quilts: Women and Everyday Rhetorics of Resistance*, Vanessa Kraemer Sohan wonderfully recounts the meaningful acts of political and social resistance performed by women that had impact even if they were considered, by historical record, to fail to bring the intended change. “Even when social movements fail, they contribute to an ongoing sedimented change, enabling composers to redefine how they identify and position themselves in relation to dominant structures” (34). This is overwhelmingly the sentiment of the women’s narratives across the GWMP.

Sohan also notes that studying “failed” action in social and political movements is not only worthwhile, but that the very concept of failure in historical record is overdue for more expansive terms to define and understand it. Sohan illustrates her argument through the case study of Pearl Buckhalter’s unwillingness, in the years after the Great Depression, to sit idly by during a pension crisis for retired members of her community who had lost their financial security. Instead, Buckhalter used the means available to her to start a letter-writing campaign to influence legislative action on pension reform. Her work illustrates something we know about history but often cannot as easily repair: the narrative that persists is greatly informed by the record of those who *did* achieve legislative victory. The old “history is told by the victors” adage is at play in many of our historical narratives. It can feel antithetical to the conventional Western, teleological view of history as forward progression to tell a counternarrative that includes failure. As Sarah Hallenbeck discusses in her compelling work on this tension via the example of metallurgist and “failed” businesswoman Carrie Everson, the same favoritism might have been at play within the narrative of the ERA Georgia coalition’s efforts to ratify the ERA in a state they knew was inhospitable to changing the gender status quo, except the women of the GWMP intervened to share the counternarrative. These stories, Sohan says, “underlin[e] the value of taking action and fighting for a cause, even when the challenge of collaboratively imagining a better future seems insurmountable” (69).

For the women of the GWMP, like Margaret Curtis, taking action and fighting for a cause brought lasting impact, even if it did not include one of their key agenda items. She saw the media and misunderstanding within the larger public as detrimental to the ERA, but not to the overall effect their movement had. “Although confusing the ERA with irrelevant issues helped cause the defeat of the amendment, ironically, it helped feminists in other causes,” she writes in



her self-published memoir (106). “Public discussion of all these matters of concern raised consciousness in consciences. Feminists gained rape crisis centers and shelters for battered women and children. Laws protecting women from assault and sexual harassment were passed. Men benefitted as well. Child custody laws were changed to give men equal access to child custody, and men gained the right to collect alimony and child support. Schools previously reserved for females began enrolling men as well” she continues (106). Attitudes more generally changed, she notes, and more women than ever “acquired the courage to participate in the political arena, and now more Georgia women than ever before hold public office” she reports of the political arena in 2010 at the time of her writing (107). Curtis and many others highlight the ways in which their mobilization in the 1970s and early ‘80s would continue to inform the volunteer and, in some cases, professional work they would take on throughout the rest of their lives.

In the following sub-section, I document the theme of failure by more specifically framing it through Linda Kurtz’s individual narrative. In my long close listening, Kurtz’s oral history was the one that demonstrated especially strong rhetorical intention related to the narrative of failure, and that helped me to consider the theme more closely in others’ narratives. Kurtz’s narrative explicitly frames failure as a positive, realistic outcome of her work and the women’s movement writ large, which is best illustrated in her own words.

#### ***4.3.1 Failure as told by Linda Kurtz***

When Linda Kurtz sat down in 1998 to record an oral history, framed around her life as it related to the women’s movement, she expressed some disillusionment with the state of activism at the end of the twentieth century. Kurtz narrates a whole collection of experiences she had after the failed ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, comprising a lifetime of political and

activist work. Across all of it, she maintains a strong position that failure is a short-term understanding of longer-term goals, that every failure she experienced in her career and observed in the women's movement was part of a shift forward—a victory. She maintains this at regular intervals throughout her oral history narrative, informed, as I observe, by an evolution of her ideas on women's and human rights later in her career. The movement was not over, she answered—rather, “its focus changes,” and “its energy is shifting.”

In the immediate aftermath of the Georgia legislative vote on the ERA in 1982, Kurtz spared not a moment when pivoting a recognition of failure into a message that could motivate others. She spoke to news cameras and reporters outside the capitol, reminding her audience “we had lost the battle but had not lost the war.” This was “merely one” battle in “the overall progression of the human spirit towards equality and justice for all,” she recounted. She framed her response to this failure, in her memory of the day, as “a greater educational opportunity for more people.” She had been scheduled to fly out to business related to the National Women's Political Caucus and canceled that, feeling overwhelmingly that the distressing time right after the ERA's failure in the State General Assembly was when people who needed to stay optimistic also needed affirmation from leaders that their energy and effort wasn't in vain.

In fact, failure to ratify the ERA in Georgia would mobilize a whole new collective energy towards a different goal: electing more women to office (also discussed in detail by Sutton; Millen; Moye). In the wake of the failure, women were reminded yet again that without representation in elected spaces—city councils, mayoral offices, state legislatures—advancement of women's rights would be slow at best. The goals of the women central to this study speak to the advances made *after* the failed vote as the most productive time for women's advancement in the state.

As a result of the ERA vote failing, “the [Georgia Women’s Political] Caucus took off completely. Women all across the state started being irate. They were irate. We formed eight local caucuses within the next two years. Women started saying, ‘Oh, my God, they didn't pass the ERA, we'd better do something!’” Kurtz said. In an earlier contextualization of Georgia, she notes that when she arrived in Atlanta due to her husband’s job, she was discouraged from the hopeless political outreach work to build support for the ERA. The shift in mobilization by 1982 is significant; this enormous energy was not lost on Kurtz, and perhaps plays into her reflection on the overall optimism required for the work she dedicated so much of her life to.

“The baseline mission of the Georgia Women’s Political Caucus was to elect more women to office and to pass legislation that is going to improve the legal status of women,” said Kurtz, who served as the organization’s first president. “All along as we were kind of focused on this ERA thing, but we were” also focused on getting more women into office. She continued: “Cynthia Fuller—we helped get [her] into office— Barbara Couch, we [also] worked with. You know, we certainly helped constantly, Mary Jane Geller and Eleanor Richardson and Cathey Steinberg, and all across the state we were pinpointing women who were [political] candidates, who were thinking of being candidates, who could be candidates, and moving them up. In the Atlanta City Council, we started getting more and more women [there] to the point where they were in the majority.” With a focus on supporting women candidates and men who were supportive of women’s issues, the GWPC (as an extension of the National Caucus) shifted their work to making sure any future vote on women’s issues (and the definition of “issues” would be far-reaching) would not face the landslide of opposition as it had with the ERA vote in 1982. As Kurtz put it: “The strategy was and is at the national, state, and local level to get more women elected to office because the whole philosophy is that only women are the bearers of the

feminine vision that can bring in a sense of balance to the male vision that is there. And that is the only way we can hope to have a healthy balance in life and in the legislature.” Much of her understanding of the work that was possible in Georgia came from her role as membership chair for the National Women’s Political Caucus, and her eventual election to vice chair of the NWPC (a role she held from 1983-85).

“We were becoming mainstream,” she recalled of that post-vote era. “Our message was for everyone.” While she was vice chair of the NWPC, “the Georgia Caucus was doing beautifully—I mean, really developing and raising the membership and developing new local caucuses”—exactly the payoffs that would bring the longer term change their strategy promised.

After serving as president of the Georgia Women’s Political Caucus, Kurtz worked part-time as a “grassroots level” lobbyist and educational advocate for Planned Parenthood. This work “really took me full circle back, to what had really, passionately, involved me at the beginning,” which was reproductive freedom, she said. This work kept her energy level high mobilizing more women in her work with the national caucus. “I was traveling around the country, meeting women from all over the country,” she said, “teaching women how to organize and run for political office and raise money and do membership and whatever, and really being a spokesperson for the National Caucus.”

Then she ran for chair of the National Women’s Political Caucus—the highest role. She lost that election “by fifty votes,” but remembers the movement in 1984—the people, the energy, and getting Geraldine Ferraro on the presidential ticket for vice president—as far more meaningful than the loss. Echoing her remembrance of the day the ERA died in the Georgia House of Representatives, she reflected on the meaning of getting a woman on the presidential ticket: “Seeing all the energy that we had devoted to putting women into office manifest at this

highest level. I mean, once again, you can't look at any one defeat as going downhill. It's just the first time this occurred. Thank God, it occurred. It will occur again, and she'll get there— whoever the next person is. So, I was there helping to make this first happen, and I feel extremely grateful and honored that I was able to be part of that making history.”

Here again, we sit with Linda Kurtz’s conscientious view to the larger meaning of events in her life. She credits running a campaign for the top National Women’s Political Caucus position as “very growth producing, a very interesting experience” that involved a “massive... nine-month, twenty-two-state campaign” against her New York Filipino opponent, Irene Natividad. She noted the many political strategies Natividad’s campaign used against her, “acid sledgehammers brought out on a continual basis.” She sets this characterization against her own campaign in Georgia: “we were this sweet, totally naive people on one level—in the sense that it wouldn’t have even crossed our minds to use these techniques against our sisters...we believed in the collectivity.” Her rhetorical intention while remembering this campaign highlights the tension women have and continue to face in political spaces, where feminist ideals of collaboration, collectivity, and a “working with” approach to achieve social and policy change is at odds with the default concept of “winning,” in this case, an election. She was also up against a candidate of color, which she recognized as another difficulty for her campaign—even if Natividad’s election was ultimately a huge advancement for the organization’s leadership.<sup>11</sup> Instead, “they painted me in the South as more of a stereotypical role of the southern women, who weren't as able to lead the caucus,” Kurtz said, which of course was interesting to her, a southern transplant who had spent so much energy battling against those very stereotypes and a

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<sup>11</sup> Gloria Steinem called Kurtz about a month before the national convention, where the election would occur, to explain she needed to support Irene as the minority candidate.

flattened concept of the southern woman that still had such influence on women's social status in the region.

Still, Kurtz recalled her eventual loss to Natividad as a success. "What I say in my life now, and I said at the time—this was the best thing that ever happened to me because I did absolutely everything in my power, everything I could, to manifest my vision. There was not one stone that was left unturned. But when I lost, it released me back into my life in a different way." Afterward, in her search for her next professional move, she received a Kellogg Foundation leadership grant, as she sought "to look at a broader view of change in the world" in this next phase in her life. The grant gave her space to reflect on and evolve many of her ideas about social and political movement that clearly inform the oral history she recorded. Work with the Kellogg Foundation, where she would meet her second husband, allowed her to travel to places beyond the U.S. (Iceland, Brazil) and to see the women's movement in a larger, global context.

Kurtz came to see many of the destructive patterns of human behavior as inextricably linked to patriarchy, which was deeply engrained into social, political, and economic structures. "What the women's movement in America has done is foster this massive global awareness of women's right for potential to be manifest and to balance the male energy in the world," Kurtz said. This perspective would inform her shift to grassroots action as the more effective means to solving the larger issues humanity faces. The future of feminism, to Kurtz, is a "female presence at the lowest grass roots level to affect change." She also notes the way we measure success can impact our ability to observe real change: we must measure things on a different scale than simple or obvious progress, she insists, "but we have to measure it in the way that we can measure global, slow political change."

Kurtz takes issue with the very premise of the question of whether the women's movement was successful. "I disagree with the people who don't think the Women's Movement has accomplished a lot. It has changed the face of our country and the world. Period. And that's the beginning; that's only the very beginning, because we are in the process of creating the most massive change that we only now see the very, very tip of. Look at just the time between [where] we are here now in this moment and the time that our grandmothers lived. The reason why women might not say they belong to the Women's Movement is that we have already done so much of what, seemingly, is obvious."

As Kurtz's extended example illustrates, the GWMP oral histories allow for narrators to contextualize failure and success, in prior and subsequent experiences. In many ways, this element shares the patterns present in traditional oral history, considering experiences in a life lived, toward how both success and failure look from their present vantage point. This retrospective way of thinking, and the importance of proper framing of failure, remain present as we move into another narrative theme; as the themes get more subtle, they also become harder to separate into sections, connecting as they often do to themes that we have already explored.

In the next section, Cathey Steinberg contextualizes failure of the ERA within her larger career. Steinberg sponsored the legislative votes on the ERA in the Georgia capitol in 1981 and 1982, and characterized the ERA as a means to a larger end. Her perspective on the potential impact she could have had in the state legislature brings us to the next theme recurring across the oral history narratives—the idea that regular people can do hard things and that this reality is often overlooked in historical remembrance.

#### 4.4 Mundaneness and heroism in the past and present

Traditional methods for narrating events in history can frame people taking action in history as being “heroic,” painting them to have somehow distinct characteristics from “the rest of us.” The GWMP narratives suggest what other microhistorical accounts confirm, which is the truth of regular people doing hard work. The value of oral history for disrupting larger, more polished, and “fated” views of past events remains one of the key strengths of the form. The mundane activities involved in fighting to improve women’s equality in Georgia are visible in the stories across these oral histories in ways that are impossible via many other means of historic documentation. These stories remind us that mundanity exists in times of major upheaval just as it does in our present lives; these stories help us to see regular people as important in events of the past. Through this medium, we arrive at the recognition that our own daily experiences are part of the history we—the listeners—are living in, too. Such perspectives are especially important for mobilizing people today in the fight for social justice, as we still have much to accomplish that archival spaces and resources can meaningfully impact (Caswell, et al., “Imagining,”; Cifor, et al., “What we do”).

One of the more subtle themes I heard across the GWMP narratives emerges when we adjust our scopic lens on this binary between “heroic” historic figures compared to “regular people,” that always, one can be both. History is comprised of people who do hard things, based not on some sort of innate or extraordinary talent but on a combination of luck, timing, and willingness to try (put another way, *kairos*). As the women of this collection show, what they did not know they had to learn. Where they had limits on their time, demands in other facets of their lives, they had to make difficult choices. How we are positioned in history informs the fullness of our lived, everyday experiences and how those experiences and actions impact larger events



that become “history.” Feminist rhetorical microhistory allows us to listen for the “exceptional normal,” individual moments that *seem* exceptional in history but reveal deeper human ordinariness.

Imbued with the central consideration of rhetorical listening, FRM is especially useful for us to go beyond efforts to “recover” rhetorical activities by women living through “historical events” because of its attention to the ordinariness of human activities. Narratives that live in public memory of women challenging gender expectations, but which are absent of their fullness as people risk flattening the record for all of us, and can detrimentally impact the potential for history to be a source for inspiration (as people who look flawless can make emulation feel impossible). Importantly, public memory’s tendency to omit or simplify troublesome details that complicate a person’s experience leaves us with glossy renditions of individuals that do not help us move toward accurate, messy histories that push us closer to a present and future we aspire to. As Patricia Wilde’s work in this space implores, “confronting inaccurate, shallow, or misleading public memories, in whatever form they may take, is necessary to ‘disrupt’” what we understand life to have been in the past as well as what it might look like in the future (307). In Wilde’s case study, two women “boldly defied” nineteenth-century gender expectations but with the end to preserve and expand slavery; the risk inherent in heroic renderings of their story that “gloss over troubling aspects of historical female figures” invites the tendency not only to ignore inconvenient facts, but to misunderstand the entirety of the person (306). Such “troubling entanglements,” as Wilde calls them, demand our action in the work of a feminist historiography.

In another salient example, Sarah Schulman’s work preserving the narratives of members of ACT-UP New York (activists fighting for advancements in health and rights for people with HIV/AIDS) explicitly names the real, flawed nature of the people pushing for change. The story

Schulman shares, based in hundreds of oral history recordings she collected (from 2003-2015), shows ACT UP as “a collective that intended to do good, and actually did in fact make the world a better place” (36). “Inside those accomplishments,” she continues, “are realities of a human dimension: people who do great things also do bad things, sometimes out of bias and supremacy, and sometimes out of vulnerability, fear of demise, the desire to live, or all of the above” (36). The value of assessing history is not for “a game of call-out” she notes, but so that we might “really understand and make clear how AIDS rebellion succeeded, and to face it where it failed, in order to be more conscious and deliberate, and therefore effective, today” (36). Public memory, and oral history within its wheelhouse, is guilty of simplifying systemic experiences like racism, as well as more mundane or even “forgettable” things like disagreements, localized failures, and ideas not pursued. Wilde and Schulman articulate that we are capable of *doing* so much more with our history if we are willing to engage the fullness of a person, the realities of their lived experience, and the mundaneness inherent in their impact.

Rhetorical listening is especially useful across locations of time and space, and thus is also concerned with historiography. Ratcliffe’s conception of the methodology considers “eavesdropping” within scholarly discourse, where she extrapolates both “the uses of history [and] history as usage” (107). She cites Heidegger’s concern with “origins” and how we might trace “how a historical moment emerges, how it gets constructed, how it becomes not just a past fact (something that happened) but a historical fact (something that happened and is preserved within cultural discourses)” (108). The problem with this goal is its search for an empirical location in historical knowledge, when we know as feminist scholars that such a goal is impossible and unproductive. Instead, Ratcliffe suggests a “love ethic,” engaging something far more centered in the mess of humanity, in ethos and pathos, to center our historical curiosity and

understanding. Here, a love ethic offers our stories, “exposing the past not simply as a series of fixed points on an abstract historical continuum but rather a series of inscriptions...that continually circle through our present and inform our identities” (110). Ratcliffe invites us to reject the dominant historiography in favor of this far more elastic one. Time and again engaging with the stories of the women narrating this work alongside me, the mess of humanity has felt like the central tenant—guiding not just the “ordinariness” of lives lived but the curious feeling of considering how things look in retrospect, as opposed to in the moment. It is perhaps central to being human, and aging, to try to understand or give meaning to things later, to perhaps marvel at all of what you have accomplished that didn’t feel extraordinary during the fatigue of living it. To illustrate this claim more eloquently than my explanation, I turn to FRM and focus on two microhistories: first Cathey Steinberg’s sojourn in Georgia politics, followed by Sue Millen’s professional and volunteer work in women’s and organized labor spaces.

#### ***4.4.1 Cathey Steinberg in the Georgia General Assembly***

Cathey Steinberg became known as the “ERA Lady” in the late 1970s and had an impactful career in state politics and later in policy consulting and advocacy training. But she was first a housewife and mother of two young children whose whole existence, by 1977, felt centered on carpool coordination. When a friend suggested she run for an open seat in the Georgia House of Representatives, she decided this was an important step for her, a “hobby” that would also bring in a little extra money for the household. She ran against George Petro, whom this friend described as “defeatable” and “an idiot.” And anyway, “The general assembly is only forty days and you get seventy-two hundred dollars. I’ll help you get elected,” she recalled her friend’s argument. As a northern transplant with a master’s degree in counseling, she found herself working as a representative in the Georgia General Assembly in a political system that

was perhaps more than she had bargained for, comprised of men who weren't quite sure what to make of her. She would serve in the Georgia House of Representatives, representing District 46 DeKalb County, from 1977 to 1989, and then in the State Senate for District 42 from 1991-93.

Steinberg implores the value of diversity in the legislature, as more eyes who understand and have experienced marginalization ensures better advocacy for marginalized groups. She notes how across her time in the Georgia General Assembly, this work of looking out often began by simply reading the laws from her perspective. During her tenure as a State Senator in the early 1990s, the legislature was voting on revising the Rules of Evidence related to legal cases involving rape in the state. Observing the disregard for women by the state's legal system early in her career was a galvanizing experience for her, as noted in chapter two when she watched colleagues heckle and make off-color jokes about women as they voted down a revision regarding women and rape law. Decades later, over a cup of coffee at McDonald's, she found that harmful revisions had been snuck into a bill, where evidently they hoped no one would notice. She pointed to this experience, decades later, as exemplifying the necessity of having women present *anywhere* decisions are being made. As she recounts:

They were trying to revise what they called the Rules of Evidence; it was a hundred-page piece of legislation that the Georgia Bar Association wanted—technical, legal stuff. As any conscientious, good, new female [representative]—I decided I better look at this thing before I voted on it. I was flipping through it about the second day of the session—a hundred pages. No person, unless they are a technical lawyer would read all of this stuff: [it was] gibberish to me. In the middle of it, I found some language that would have amended the [current protections on disclosure of] past sexual history of women in law [cases] dealing with rape— in the middle of the Rules of Evidence—buried in the middle

of it! I think I was sitting, having a cup of coffee in McDonald's, reading this one page over and over and over again. I was in such shock that this was happening. The person who was sponsoring this Rules of Evidence Bill was the President of the Senate, Nathan Deal, who happened to be the second most powerful person in the Senate. I got along very well with him over the years—pretty low-key kind of guy. He had learned to listen to me on some things. We came to the committee meeting and everyone thought that they would just [automatically] pass this legislation because nobody was paying attention to it—it was Nathan's bill and I said, 'Excuse me, but we have something to discuss. Why is this in here? You are trying to hurt women, what's this repeal of the past sexual history law doing in these Rules of Evidence?'

There was a stunned silence in this packed room. This guy got up from the University of Georgia and tried to get out of it. Somebody from the [GA] Bar [Association] tried to get out of it. I said, 'This is unacceptable, I can't vote for this. I need time to understand what this is. We can't vote this out today.' They adjourned the meeting in a huff. What was interesting about it was it became front page news. Every woman in the Capitol, the secretaries and the wives got involved in this. It was fascinating. [Senator] Pierre [Howard] stuck solidly with this and they turned the whole thing around. I found myself going up against the President Pro Tem. I said to myself, 'My lord, that's why you have to have women here.' A lot of women had worked on—from the Bar—had worked on this, but just never realized it was going to be in there. No matter where you go, those things happen.

The intent of the legislation she recounts was to repeal some of the existing law that gave women more agency in rape cases. As it stood, the regulation meant that in legal cases, a woman

accusing a man of rape would be protected from having her sexual history used as evidence against her claim; the Georgia legislature was attempting to repeal that law by burying it in a larger Rules of Evidence vote. The repeal would not occur as its sponsoring lawmakers had intended.

Steinberg is the first to remind her audience that this was not a feat achieved by an exceptional person. “My point is that it’s not me, Cathey Steinberg” she said. Rather, she reiterates both her role as a regular person, not trained in law, and as someone looking out for a wider swath of people than apparently any man in the room. “My point is that while it’s very frustrating, at the same time, one woman being in that position was able to keep a very bad piece of legislation from passing. *Everybody* makes a difference in this process.” The difference of having *one woman* in the room prevented the repeal of a law that would have been harmful to women.<sup>12</sup>

*Table 2: Timeline of women elected to the Georgia General Assembly*

Year	Total Women/Total Senate	Total Women/Total House	% Total Women
2023	16/56	65/180	34.3%
2003	13/56	39/180	22.0%
1993	6/56	40/180	16.9%
1983	2/56	17/180	8.1%
1977*	1/56	12/180	5.1%
1975	1/56	9/180	4.2%
*The year Cathey Steinberg is elected to the Georgia House of Representatives.			
Source: Center for American Women in Politics ( <a href="https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/state-state-information/georgia">https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/state-state-information/georgia</a> )			

<sup>12</sup> Steinberg was not the first woman elected to the Georgia General Assembly, but she was elected at the start of a moderate upward trend. See Table 1 for the percentages of women in the Georgia legislature from 1975, the year of her election in 1977, then in 1979 and today.

The 1977 Rape Bill was an early legislative measure where Steinberg found herself making a stand for women's causes. The bill removed the "corroboration requirement" from the Georgia legal code, as she puts it, the line that read "No conviction shall be had on the unsupported testimony of the female." Georgia was the last state to remove this line, she recalled. "What it implied to the police and the district attorneys is that you can't convict if you don't have a witness." She noted it was on a piece of legal code that seemed to directly target women, even including the word "female" in the language. "You don't have to have a witness for robbery."

Based on some of this early work and the timing of her election in 1977, Steinberg quickly became known as "the ERA Lady" in the state legislature. As she saw it, the anti-rape law efforts put women's issues "on the map," helping to rally women and garnering strength around the Georgia Women's Political Caucus. Up until her tenure, "people were afraid to put the ERA in because the Speaker didn't want the Equal Rights Amendment in the House," she said. "Therefore, it kept going [up for a vote] only in the Senate. Women up until then were afraid. I figured that he [Speaker Tom Murphy] was so mad at me anyhow that it didn't matter. So we said, 'What the heck.' We knew the ERA probably wouldn't pass, but we wanted to be involved." She continues, "Once I introduced the Equal Rights Amendment and I became the primary author, I became the women's issue person. I didn't mean to be that way but, in terms of the legislature, that was such an enormously visible issue, that any issues related to women usually—the press would go to me. Any issues that had to do with women—women's equality, women's dignity, women's credibility were very important to me. I got involved in many of these issues."

In contrast to her influence (potential, perceived, and actual) in the legislature, Steinberg was eventually also a divorced mother of two taking legislative calls from her kitchen. “House members did not have an office unless you were a Chairman, so all my phone calls would come into my kitchen,” she said. She often felt the pressure of being a working mother, and remarks how both she and [GWMP contributor] Sherry [Sutton] were “traumatized” by the silence they felt they had to keep to go through a divorce while maintaining important leadership roles in the state. “I lived it and breathed it. It was so time consuming. When I first got involved, I was married to the doctor, I could afford full-time, live in, help. I did it. It was my—not only my legislative occupation so to speak, it was my hobby. We did it almost full-time for a couple of years.” She served in the House of Representatives for District 46 DeKalb County from 1977-1989.

Steinberg’s oral history provides a valuable nuance to the historical context of being a woman and elected leader during and after the historical peak of the second-wave women’s movement. She gives credit to her early training in running a campaign to the Feminist Action Alliance. (She would rely on their resources again when she later ran for a state senate seat (serving 1991-1993 District 42) and later in an attempt for a seat in U.S. Congress. As she describes it, when she first ran in 1976, “That was the only group around to help women candidates at that time, I think. They had this workshop. I was just in awe of meeting these women. I didn’t know them. I was just a mother of two kids.” The workshop “changed my whole life,” she said. “I wanted to be like these women. I learned so much.”

Steinberg, like other subjects in this study, came to see women running for office as a cornerstone strategy with which to affect change in the systems the ERA was meant to address. Lacking constitutional equality, the next most effective thing was to have women in more elected



roles, in more rooms where decisions were made. In her oral history, she suggests that a large part of her motivation to run for U.S. Congress was to show voters that a woman could beat a man in these elections. One of the things she learned early in her political career was the strategy that women should run for open seats, as it was more difficult to defeat an incumbent. After redistricting in 1988, “The Fourth Congressional seat became an open seat,” she recalled. “We knew it would be difficult because it was heavily Republican. I knew it would be taking a chance, but I had thought about running for Congress back before 1988 and didn’t because my kids were still home with me and still in school. Now I really felt that I couldn’t let the opportunity pass.” Despite loving her work in the state senate, “I again felt that I had to take the risks—win or lose.” She emphasized especially women like her, with name recognition and political experience, had an obligation to run, to push the needle. “I defeated the very popular district attorney in the primary, which shocked many people because after all, he was this Southern white man district attorney,” she said. She lamented the energy she spent during that campaign convincing people (voters, fundraisers) that she could beat a man in this kind of race. “No matter how much experience you have and how much you run, when a woman starts running for seats like this, they always assume that you can’t beat one of these kinds of men, no matter what.” Winning the primary “big” against Bob Wilson, she wound up losing by a half percent to John Linder, a Republican, in the November election. “I did much better than anybody ever predicted,” she said, citing the 49.46 percentage of the vote, to her memory. “Once again, I didn’t get elected, but I didn’t see it as a total loss.”

Running for Congress was one of the hardest things she’d done yet, and she spoke about the challenges women candidates face(d) in fundraising that their counterparts do not share. This is where organizations like Emily’s List, which arose to fundraise and financially support women

running for elected office, became crucial. She recalls the many women working for her campaign, old and young, and called the experience “empowering.” She also pointed to being one of the few people to run for Congress and not incur any debt. The cost and the time commitment (and thus diversion of time from other commitments) continue to be two of the biggest reasons women don’t consider running for elected office as often as men. The Brookings Institute reported in 2008 that the “persistent gender gap in political ambition” is linked to these factors:

Women are less likely than men to be willing to endure the rigors of a political campaign. They are less likely than men to be recruited to run for office. They are less likely than men to have the freedom to reconcile work and family obligations with a political career. They are less likely than men to think they are ‘qualified’ to run for office. And they are less likely than men to perceive a fair political environment. (Lawless and Fox, 1-2).

These barriers contribute to the perceived reality that it is exceptional women who run and are elected to political office. Challenging this idea is top of mind across Cathey’s oral history, paired with the honesty that the role was rewarding and also demanding.

Steinberg is also forthright about the nature of her relationship to ERA Georgia and the leaders organizing from the grassroots side. She speaks candidly of her responsibility to look at things from the political perspective, and that this vantage drove her choices. For example, accepting too much support from national organizations like ERA America<sup>13</sup> would likely anger her fellow legislators, many of whom were deeply distrusting of federal and national “meddling” in state politics. Additionally, she had no illusions of the difficulty they would face in ever seeing the ERA be approved by voters in the Georgia House or Senate, but she saw the strategic move

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<sup>13</sup> She is referring to ERAmerica, a national organization founded in 1976 as an alliance of civic, labor, church, and women’s organizations to work in coalition toward ratifying the ERA.

of putting it up for vote. These kinds of considerations put her at odds against some of the other subjects in this study.

Though she admired the Georgia Women's Political Caucus and partnered with them successfully at times, they were the exception in her memory. "I don't have a lot of extremely favorable memories of the ERA organizations particularly of the ERA America [and] some of the conflict that occurred on both the state and national level... I lost my respect for them. I think these organizations, I don't think they did that much—certainly not for Georgia. We managed quite well on our own, except for getting money. I think that Sherry [Sutton] and Joyce [Parker], Linda [Kurtz] and Roberta [Malavenda], Beth [Schapiro] and you [the interviewer, Janet Paulk] and all these women that came in, I think that we did quite fine for ourselves." She continues, "I think that our presence was extraordinary in terms of the impact that it made on the legislature and the press and that's what it's all about."

It is worth noting that every single woman she mentions by name also recorded an oral history, and all but Roberta Malavenda's is included in the corpus for this study. Steinberg's extended narrative illustrates several important themes of the overall collection and its purpose. Her experiences and risks highlight the murky nature of political preparedness—that in fact no one is quite "ready" to run for office, but you can do it anyway. Her experiences and reflection on them also suggest that her embrace of challenges, again and again, led to a meaningful career serving far beyond what she could have imagined when she first ran for a seat in the House in 1976, often incurring failure but just as often pushing the limits of what was possible in legal spaces during her lifetime.

Engaging with Cathey Steinberg's narrative, I am both buoyed and dismayed. Despite my stance that hearing stories of real people doing hard things enables us to imagine taking action on

the problems we hope to address in our own times, running for an elected seat just seems harder to do now than in Cathey’s era, due to the associated financial, personal, and professional costs. But while there is some evidence that races are more expensive now, to challenge my perspective, I looked it up, and a lot of that assumption is just that. There are a lot of helpful resources to counter the idea that it costs a lot to run for local seats.<sup>14</sup> What’s more, there are far more resources to help someone launch a campaign for an open seat than were available to Steinberg when she ran (though thankfully she had the Feminist Action Alliance). Cathey’s reminder is important to even those who’ve just read it and still think, “But, it’s different now.” It’s different, but it’s still just regular people with the urge to enact change who try something hard or seemingly “impossible” anyway.

#### ***4.4.2 Sue Millen’s activism through writing***

While Steinberg’s role as the “ERA Lady” and as elected politician had great impact and put her in many rooms where her perspective *brought* women as a group to the fore in decisions, her level of influence may be hard to relate to and thus too extreme an example to illustrate this theme for some readers. How many of us imagine running or serving in elected office? Perhaps Sue Millen’s story does more to suggest the “regular” nature of the women who found themselves leading key initiatives during the peak of the second-wave women’s movement.

Sue Millen always knew she wanted to be a writer and paid her way through a journalism degree after her father declared he had enough money to send his sons to college but not his daughters. She worked as “women’s editor” for a newspaper in North Carolina and later as education reporter for a newspaper in upstate New York. By the time she moved to Georgia, she

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<sup>14</sup> Two of the strongest resources working to support women running for elected office are EMILYs List (<https://emilyslist.org/>) and She Should Run (<https://www.sheshouldrun.org/>).

had influenced two major policy changes based on her reporting and her position as a woman in the newsroom.

The first was in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling that pregnant high school students had a right to complete their education and could no longer be suspended due to their pregnancy. The Wilmington, North Carolina, school district “was just blatantly ignoring that ruling and girls were still not allowed to attend school.” She did a story on this, and on continued discrimination against unwed mothers, and the newspaper’s publisher—not the editor, the publisher—came into the newsroom and had her change the language of the story. As Millen tells it, it was very unusual to see him making editorial changes to stories, “but the school board people had called him and said, ‘You need to stop this story,’ because basically the story said the school board was in violation of the law.” After he left, the women’s editor she was working with changed some of it back. After it ran, the school board was forced to change their policy.

Earlier in her tenure at the same paper, she’d confronted leadership about getting paid less than a man she was dating who also worked at the paper, despite having more years’ experience than he. She got the staid response of the era, that men need the higher income because they have a family to support; she pointed to a more senior reporter than both of them, who was a single parent, who was being paid even less than Sue. The newspaper leadership’s response was to fire the young man Millen was dating, for disclosing his salary to other employees. “I reported that to the Labor Department because it was a violation of the labor laws, and they had to change their entire hiring policy. So needless to say, they didn’t fire me. They couldn’t fire me,” she recalled, but “they made it pretty miserable” so she moved on to another paper in upstate New York, the *Times Herald Record*, “a very liberal paper in a very conservative area.”

In Atlanta, she worked for United Press International, and joined NOW (National Organization for Women) as soon as she arrived, around 1976. One of her first actions with NOW in Atlanta was a march against Sears Department Store to protest their policies against women workers and customers. It was during that work that she encountered Cathey Steinberg and Joyce Parker, by then leaders in the ERA efforts in Georgia, at a fundraiser in a local bar. “I went to the fundraiser, and they were in need of an editor, which was right up my alley,” she said, “for the ERA Georgia Newsletter.” The ERA Georgia board voted to add the newsletter editor as its newest board position. She “immediately signed up to be the editor,” she continued, “so that’s how I got on the ERA Georgia board and was one of the few people that I know of that was more plugged into ERA Georgia than I was to other women’s organizations here. I just immediately threw all my energy into working for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, because that was the really important thing to me.”

Millen’s position, tapped into ERA Georgia strategy, as well as her affiliation with the AFL/CIO and labor rights noted in the previous chapter, ensured ongoing use of her writing and editing experience to support the ERA. She had been working as the editor of the *Journal of Labor* since 1979, and she made sure the ERA appeared as frequently as she could fit it in the pages of each issue. She and other women involved in labor organizations used their access to influence the fully male leadership. “Georgia State AFL/CIO ended up funneling a lot of money into the ERA,” Millen said, also noting they held rallies and supported the ERA legislatively, based on the women’s influence. This support “was quite a coup, because the building trades weren’t sure they — they were largely men, and they weren’t sure they really supported the [ERA].” Such buy-in was crucial for the women learning both how to lobby and how to run a grassroots movement across a state. “Getting the AFL/CIO to support Georgia ERA helped

enormously with organization.” State and national AFL/CIO groups “had been doing a lot of lobbying for years and years, and they—if there’s anything organized labor knows, it’s how to be organized. They got everybody organized.” Volunteers in ERA Georgia began researching legislators and their families, to begin writing letters to the women surrounding the lawmakers, based on training from labor lobbyists. “Their lobbyists used to do little mini workshops with us and explain how you had to talk to legislators, what you had to do, the importance of writing to legislators, the importance of knowing what their family was all about,” Millen said.

It naturally followed that she was involved in women’s rights and their overlap with labor, in the workplace. She was a founding member of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), which took up support and lobbying for the ERA as a pillar of their goals in the late 1970s. “Obviously the Equal Rights Amendment definitely affects the workplace, so CLUW—that was a natural issue for them,” Sue said. “CLUW was very involved in support of right-to-know legislation, which is the right to know if you’re exposed to various chemicals on the job, and there are a lot of jobs that women do where they’re exposed to a lot of chemicals,” Millen explained. “Beauticians, for example, are exposed to a lot of hazardous chemicals in their job.” In addition to lobbying for right-to-know legislation, CLUW held workshops educating women about “those kinds of issues in the workplace,” she said.

In the same span of time as her work in labor and women’s issues, some paid but much of it volunteer work, she was also a regular person with joy and grief—in other words, experiencing challenges in her personal life like the rest of us. Married in 1975, “we didn’t start having children until 1980. I lost the first pregnancy, and that was also related around ERA because I got pregnant, and as I was pregnant, a friend of mine got breast cancer and she died in September of 1979. And I was very, very overcome with grief about that because she was so young. She

was just thirty. And I wanted to go home and tell my family that I loved them, and as the plane was landing in O'Hare [airport, in Chicago], my brother was killed in a car accident. And then a month to the day that he was killed in the car accident, I lost the baby that was getting me through all this terrible stuff. I was just thinking, 'Well, this is — I've got this new life, and you know, life goes on, and I'll get through this.' And when I lost that baby that I had promised her [the friend] I would name after her, it was just devastating." Her friend Melanie's death would later lead to continued activism in the form of fundraising through sponsored runs/walks to support cancer research.

For her first few years in Atlanta, Millen's professional work was with United Press International, first as a reporter and later as night editor. By 1979, she was recruited to work as editor for the *Journal of Labor*, where she stayed until 1986. Professional and personal obligations occurred alongside her volunteer work for ERA Georgia and later, the Georgia Women's Political Caucus. The work of the GWPC extended beyond the Equal Rights Amendment effort, since by 1982 the required number of states had not ratified it. By that point, Millen and many others had shifted their efforts to women's participation in the legislative process, which the GWPC reflected.

Serving as co-chair of the Caucus, "I was working out of my home, and it was unbelievable. My phone rang literally off the hook. Sometimes I would pick it up and there would already be somebody on the phone. It was just non-stop. And I had intended to run another year, to be the Chair during the Democratic Convention when it was here, but it was — at that point I had four children, and it was — you know, my kids. I had quit my job at the Georgia State AFL-CIO to be with my family and yet I was constantly on the phone, and I mean constantly on the phone. People would call me from Washington, and we didn't have call



waiting. I didn't want to get call waiting because already there was too many calls coming into our house.”

In the wake of Ronald Reagan's election to presidential office, political parties and interests recognized the voting bloc power of southerners across various identities (Kruse and Zelizer). As the GWPC was the primary interest group supporting women in political spaces in Georgia by the mid-80s, Millen found herself on the front lines, fielding calls from across the U.S. “It wasn't just people from Georgia. Because we were about to embark on a presidential election, people like Al Gore, and people like that would call because they thought if they could win over the leadership of the Georgia Women's Political Caucus, then we would endorse them, and they would have the women of Georgia behind them. So, it wasn't just the women in Georgia calling.” She continued, “At the same time that I was co-chairing the Georgia Women's Political Caucus, I was also a vice-chair with the National Women's Political Caucus. I was a vice-chair of the Democratic task force of the Caucus up there. And so I worked with a lot of the people on the national scene, and that would be why candidates like Al Gore and [Richard] Gephardt<sup>15</sup> would be calling here at our little house.”

It was this pressure on her family life that led her to decide not to step into the role as chair at the national level. “My kids at that point were like six and under,” she said. “I didn't feel like I could do it justice, and it was a presidential election, and I felt it was really important that the person who was the Democratic chair be able to give it all the time that it needed. And it would have involved a lot of trips to Washington, D.C., and there just wasn't any way that I could do this. NWPC Democratic task force chair Ann Lewis pleaded with her. “That's what a

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Andrew Gephardt served as a United States Representative from Missouri from 1977 to 2005. Al Gore was United States representative (1977–1985) and senator (1985-1993) representing Tennessee. He served as vice president during the Clinton administration from 1993 to 2001.

vice-chair is supposed to do. They're supposed to step up," Sue quotes how she remembers the conversation. "And I said, 'Well, then, I'm going to have to step down because there is no way that I can do this,'" and they finally found somebody else who would step into that position, and I stayed as the vice-chair until the end of my term. But it was a very intense period in my life." She admits she would have taken the chair role of the NWPC if she hadn't had children; but she also felt very good about her decision to recognize the limits on what she could give by the time she had four children. And she sees it as deeply relevant to her narrative to contextualize her decision within the political pressure of the time: there was no "step-down" culture. Instead, there was the expectation of her as a major leader to "step up" to even more responsibility.

Shortly after she discusses all this in her oral history, she is asked which "women's issues" are important in the present day. She replies, "I still think work — when [women] work outside the home, they still come back home and do most of the work at home, too. So, we still have a double standard in that sense." She points to the egalitarian relationship she and her husband shared that allowed for so much of the work she did in the 1980s.

One thing Millen observed, as a writer and editor working in these spaces, eventually as a leader in ERA Georgia, and in both the Georgia and national women's political caucuses, was the "psychology" surrounding how to talk about women's issues in a way that would appeal and not alienate one's audience. "There was a psychology in talking to even friends of the movement and just to try to make sure that you got certain issues promoted,' she said. She remembered disagreeing with Carol Ashkinaze, reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution* from 1976-1989 (whose oral history is in the collection though not in this project's corpus), about how she covered the ERA for the paper during the height of the push to have it ratified. Millen recognized her audience, and that there was a strategy in how to talk about the ERA in your community as

opposed to when confronting a state lawmaker. She was critical—at the time and again in her oral history—of the affect Cathey Steinberg brought to her role in the state house, that perhaps it was less effective than had they elected a Southern woman. “Cathey was a wonderful advocate for our position and always was a wonderful advocate for women’s and children’s rights while she was a legislator, but you know, those guys really looked at her kind of askance,” Millen said. “They were [thinking] like, here’s this New York<sup>16</sup> [sic] Jewish woman who was coming into their good ol’ boy network and just saying, ‘Well, now, we’ve got to have this,’ and ‘we’ve got to have that,’ and ‘we’ve got to make these changes,’ and they weren’t listening to her really well either.” Millen’s own experience—which eventually included freelance public relations work—and her place in leadership positions in key organizations during the peak of ERA-based mobilization, is what she relies on as evidence for the importance of audience consideration in making an impression, in changing a mind.

This kind of awareness was key in building telephone trees and networks for reaching legislators and their families during the peak of grassroots organizing. “Sometimes the people that lobbied for the ERA would first talk to the wife, if they thought the husband opposed ERA, and get her to understand the importance of ERA so that we’d have somebody at home who could talk to the legislator all the time, telling them the importance of passing ERA.” Millen’s intentional use of her available means—in leadership roles and outlets for writing and editing—demonstrate the effect a “regular person” can have toward social and policy change, even and especially when the stakes are high.

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<sup>16</sup> Steinberg is from Pennsylvania.

#### 4.5 Questions of legacy: Retrospectively speaking

Finally, I observed the way in which oral history as rhetorical act—as a means of composing oneself into history—invokes a way of speaking that is reflective and retrospective. Many of the narratives I have shared in this chapter are already demonstrating this composing of self in history. Our twelve subjects observe the meaning of events with the benefit of hindsight, personal evolution, or societal change. While this is not a new characteristic of oral history as a genre in history, it takes on an important role when what is being remembered relates to significant social and political movements, and especially when the speaking voices belong to groups who are marginalized in traditional narratives. While the women included in this collection represent primarily (but not exclusively) middle-class, college-educated white women living in a major metropolitan area as it was itself going through immense social changes, they note how their version of events as they experienced them still risked exclusion from historical memory. The act of writing and speaking their experiences worked “as a means of taking hold of and controlling the tools of representation” in a way that had not previously been available to most women and that finally ensured they might “represent themselves rather than to be represented by others” in the historical record (Ritchie and Ronald *xxiv-xxv*). They saw themselves as marginalized in historical narrative, and their oral histories confirm and perform this concern.

Many subjects in the GWMP collection pondered or expressed outright concern for the fragile state of women’s rights, despite their historic advances. Janet Paulk noted that she stayed involved in women’s issues because as long as women don’t have codified protection in the Constitution, gains can be lost. “Laws can be changed, and that’s why we needed the Equal

Rights Amendment. [Now our issue is] ... keeping our gains from eroding... So, it's things like that that we have to be constantly vigilant about.”

Jeanne Cahill called her experience in the women’s movement positive, “in spite of the names that we were called and the things that we were told down at the [Georgia] legislature; the put downs that we got, you know you just have to take that, it’s a part of it and when you are making social change, it’s never easy and people who are comfortable with the status-quo are going to fight you on it.”

Cathey Steinberg reflected on the complexity of maintaining a coalition towards the achievement of women’s greater equality. She said, “We were younger [then] and we were under a lot of pressure. I think that sometimes organizations like [ERA Georgia] can get in the way. I’m not saying they didn’t do a lot... The organization had so many interpersonal conflicts that I think it takes energy away from what really needed to be done. Sometimes I think organizations—and I saw this particularly on the national level— they exist and become the end all... Sometimes we can be our own worst enemy and we can self-destruct.”

Mary Long’s work during and after the peak of ERA lobbying was with a rising tide of nurses advocating for themselves and their patients via lobbying and community advocacy. Mary had been a practicing nurse at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta before the hospital shifted her to full-time lobbyist for healthcare-related legislation. “Inside, I was afraid of everything,” she recalled about her early days in “the nurse’s movement.” Outwardly, she worked hard never to show it. By the time Ronald Reagan was elected president, “we started...looking for other routes” to make change, beyond the ERA and even beyond only lobbying as a strategy. In the crest of the women’s movement, she recalled, “most of ours [participation] was down at the Capitol, and being reactive.” After that, when thinking through marching on the capitol and other

activities, she recognized the shift. They reconsidered “working with elected officials, and trying to get our friends elected was our proactive approach and, we weren’t going to be reactive anymore,” she said. “We wanted our friends in office. People that we could talk to, and we could spend time with” toward real advancements for citizens in the state.

Sherry Sutton saw the changing laws in Georgia as a major legacy of their work, calling them cumulative in effect. “Our efforts with the ERA...pushed some of the really discriminatory laws out of [the lawbooks],” she recalls. She cites the law that assumed man as the head of household, which merged a woman’s legal and civil existence into his and often rendering hers all but nonexistent. “Despite the fact that we knew some of these guys, and the women, too, that we would never be able to get them to vote 'Yes' on a national equal rights amendment, there opened up a bit of a willingness to say, 'Well, yeah, I am willing to look at the Code and see if I can help you in any other way.'”

“I don’t know if I could do this on one tape,” Cathey Steinberg said of what she thought the women’s movement accomplished. “In the big picture [the movement] has accomplished a great deal of what we wanted to accomplish. I read a piece of legislation and [now] you don’t see everything written in the male gender. Things we [now] take for granted.” As she notes several times in her interview, she saw the ERA as “a means to an end,” and one that brought some of the “respect and credibility we deserved.” She notes the legislators she served alongside “are still apologizing for what many of them had to do”—namely, vote against the ERA, citing commitments to their constituents. Like her experience with the rape legislation that was foundational to her early career in politics, Steinberg felt that “all that hard work” translated into changes in the how the General Assembly operated in the state, challenging what had been, literally, a boy’s club. “I think it organized women, put women on the map in the state,” she said,

despite the long shot the amendment faced in Georgia. From her vantage point in 1997, “We have the same struggles in many ways, but our organization is so much better,” she said. However, of Georgia, she felt, “I think you can look around and say, ‘We have a long way to go.’” She points to the recently finished legislative session of 1997, during which Democratic women tried to filibuster to prevent passing a law restricting partial birth abortion, which was one of contentious pieces of abortion conversation in the late 1990s.

The erosion of what they had worked for was foremost in Janet Paulk’s mind when she sat down to record her interview. Paulk’s viewpoint was especially reflective, given that she had also been present for so many other oral histories already recorded—as the interviewer. While that role likely had an impact on her answers to questions she knew were coming, Paulk’s work throughout her life illustrated her view to posterity, to how she and others might be looked upon in the future. “Fortunately and unfortunately, many of [the young women in 2002] don’t even think of themselves as feminists. The fortunate part is we were so successful that they take it for granted, they take for granted the hard gains that were made. Their level of expectations and aspirations are much higher,” Janet noted. “As I said, though, little do they realize that laws can be changed. So, I’m afraid they will only become staunch feminists as rights are taken away, and that’s scary. I don’t want us to have to fight that fight again.”

In her work across a lifetime, Linda Kurtz observed the ways in which previous generations heard the same arguments for why women should be excluded from politics, professions, decisions. Especially when teaching courses in English and in women’s studies, she noticed the similarities in arguments made by opponents of women’s suffrage and those opposing the Equal Rights Amendment. During the peak of second-wave feminist activism, she and others “had to listen to these same old arguments that died a hundred years ago,” and as the

reference to time suggests, she was still hearing those arguments against equality at the end of the twentieth century. “We have a long, long way to go; but we’ve come a long way. And we just need to acknowledge both.” That sentiment seems to capture the mood and intention of our subject narrators.

#### **4.6 Thinking about ourselves in history—some concluding thoughts on the narratives in this chapter**

The GWMP oral history collectors wrote their questions based on matters that felt the most urgent to remember and how best to contextualize their collective experiences. The things that took on meaning in their lives, considering their work for the ERA, in the women’s movement, and subsequent to it, was specific to the actual and intended audience(s). The actual audience was the one they were speaking to at the time, which, for six of the twelve included in this corpus, was their interviewer, Janet Paulk—herself one of the subjects of this study and a woman with a demonstrated eye toward her role (and that of her subjects’) in history. The intended audience(s) are less precise but firmly focused on the future—future researchers, future students at Georgia State, future feminists, future activists carrying on in their footsteps the work unfinished.

As we will examine in more detail in the next chapter, several of the women at the center of the archival collection’s formation felt the ERA would be revived someday and it would be important to have a record of how things had occurred in the country’s previous attempt to ratify this Constitutional amendment. What took on meaning, when looking back and recording their oral histories, were often those elements of their experience that most spoke of their legacy—the legacy of the women working and often volunteering to see equality for women in Georgia.



This retrospective consideration of legacy is indicative of the genre of oral history. As a method for collecting historical documentation and individual detail, oral history can have a distinct way of glossing over complicated or uncomfortable events; indeed, our memories can be selective without the intention to misguide the listener. Sometimes, something is too painful to talk about; other times, we've repeated a story so often it becomes crystalized, details amplified or omitted. Perhaps a narrator who has come to terms with earlier actions or has learned something that changed their perspective is able to ruminate on faults or mistakes made decades earlier. Other times, the way in which their experiences don't match up with cultural narratives of events make them defensive or bewildered. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli deftly sums up what I illustrate across this project about memory and the nature of our relationship to "history" via lived experience:

But what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context. Changes which may have subsequently taken place in the narrators' personal subjective consciousness or in their socio-economic standing, may affect, if not the actual recounting of prior events, at least the evaluation and the 'coloring' of the story (52).

Oral history as a practice, then, is intricately rhetorical for both the person collecting the narrative and the person in the "subject" seat. And as a half-century of feminist scholars have shown, empirical history is an impossible goal, history itself being an act in rhetorical positioning. Instead, oral history, and FRM as an extension, is highly concerned with the *usage*

of history, rather than any empirical origins. It is about the positioning of events, positioning their *meaning* and *value* to those remembering as well as those listening.

“Rhetorical listening turns hearing (a reception process) into invention (a production process)” and “turns *intent* back on the listener, focusing on listening *with intent*...instead of listening *for intent* of an author” (Ratcliffe 46). Rhetorical listening turns the “meaning of the text into something larger than itself” based on its ability to “locate a text as part of larger cultural logics” (46). These motives within rhetorical listening invite harmony and dissonance among the desires of both speaker/writer and the subject on the receiving end, the listener. The women who recorded their oral histories have done what they can, namely put their work and perspective on record, and the rest is in the hands of the listeners to understand and use, to interpret and to grapple with. The GWMP intention to intervene in traditional historical narrative can only work with *invention* on the part of the listener, years into the future, of which this research is one form.

Some of the dissonance I have experienced engaging with these oral histories is based in what Ratcliffe recognizes as assumptions we make with an overly simplified view of identification. The identity makeup of the majority of the GWMP subjects as white, middle class, largely college-educated, primarily urban-dwelling (even if they have rural roots), and southern or southern-transplant necessarily inform my research, but can also inform my assumptions. Assumptions about people, histories, cultures, or artifacts play into our expectations and “affect the data and conclusions of a scholarly study” (51). Listening rhetorically to these oral histories focuses just as much on *my* intent. In that way, I become an interlocutor, ensuring the intent of the oral history creators is successful—in other words, my work bringing their words to life is

critical to changing the conventional narrative of southern women's history in the 1970s and 1980s.

In this chapter, I engaged the relationship of memory and meaning in how we—all people—interpret events of the past, make sense of our own experiences, and understand our present circumstances. As they have narrated in their own words, many of the women in this study found themselves responding to and grappling with major historical critiques of their work in the women's movement. On the one hand, there were people who had lumped all of "feminism" into the reductive definition of "man-hating, bra-burning" radical women. On the other hand, concepts of "white feminism" were being critiqued by the late 1980s for the way in which white women's access and success were gained at the expense of other marginalized groups (Hamad; Henry; Schuller; Sidler). Those articulating an intersectional feminism argued that white women were and continued to "attempt to win their rights and opportunities through fighting for inclusion in fundamentally unequal systems" with the narrow view of feminist liberation as based singularly in gender (Schuller 5). Scholars working from within multiply marginalized identities would continue advocating for something that looks entirely different than a feminist movement from the limited view of "white feminism"; in fact, the movement was (or is) building to something much bigger than women's rights. Historian Kyla Schuller notes that intersectional feminists call for harmony rather than a zero-sum battle over resources, imagining a world in which "all have access to what they need to thrive" (9). While movements that today align naturally with women's rights—like those advocating for LGBTQ (especially trans) rights, Indigenous rights, and disability community rights—seem to have obvious shared goals for things like equity, access to resources, and legal protections, these movements were often separate from the largest factions of the women's movement during the period labeled

“second wave.” Rather, “forms of feminist activism after 1990 dispersed across a wide range of projects” that necessarily became intertwined with larger goals for human rights and acknowledged that “gender justice is inextricably tied to other social justice movements” (Henry 185). Not only that, worsening economic conditions in and since the '90s for low- and middle-class wage earners have exacerbated many inequalities and left women in the “third wave” and after without the “choice” of whether or not to work, regardless of whether anyone felt empowered or independent (Sidler). We see these rippling effects expressed in the perspectives included in the oral history collection, in the many and varied causes the women would go on to support in professional and volunteer capacities. The shifting nature of feminism is also traceable in the views they express on feminism in their narratives—the kind they wanted to remember and what it had evolved to be by the end of the century.

My understanding of the distinction between the “second-wave” women’s movement and the other movements for marginalized groups continued to expand as a result of careful listening to the narrators of this story. Affirmed by many of the voices included in this and the previous chapter, I observe that white, middle-class women working for legal equality and access to jobs, credit, and education in Georgia were working within the parameters of feminism that felt transferrable to the patriarchal political system they inhabited. White segregationist leaders and those with thinly veiled contempt for Civil Rights Act policies that were changing the landscape of their communities would not take kindly to a feminist movement that also argued for inclusion of communities of color in their plan for “women’s equality.” Conservative Christians and powerful organizations like the Southern Baptist Convention across the U.S. South were already hesitant to support women’s rights based on the slippery slope to gay rights.

A few women in this study note using language in their arguments to fellow southerners to assure them the women's movement was about women's equality, explicitly *not* about changing definitions of marriage or suggesting same-sex marriage as a related evolution (especially Curtis; Moye). Their brand of feminism falls victim to "the reductive idea" built into white feminism that "feminism simply means endorsing equality between the sexes" (Schuller 2). We see this sentiment across some of the GWMP oral histories, as something they could point to that felt less "radical" than they were being painted as by opposing forces and the media (Moye). I observed in the previous chapter how much of the intentional narrative in the oral histories casually oversimplifies or seems to dismiss the movement's interaction with other, concurrent movements for civil and human rights. This seems to be a meager attempt to address the critiques while still "unremarking" on race, as Jamie White-Farnham helpfully articulates as a term "which refers to what texts and discourses are not saying about race, class, and privilege and what the rhetorical effects of these are" (n.p.) This term helps us consider the tendency among mid-century white feminists to center their assumed shared goals based on gender while ignoring other axes of identity and marginalization. By the 1990s, some of them articulate in their oral histories their sympathy for aligned movements—especially gay rights (Parker). Some, like Linda Kurtz whose work became more globally focused, and Beth Schapiro who later earned a PhD in political science, understood with greater nuance how these movements overlapped in ways that were harder to engage in the 1970s and early '80s. Indeed, asking narrators, "Has there ever been a time when you felt that the women's movement was over?", gives space to this grappling of terms, and goals, and evolution. Third-wave feminism was in full swing during the recording of these interviews, and women's studies departments were evolving to women's, gender, and sexuality studies—directly suggesting the nuanced nature of these

terms, as well as creating space in academic conversations for trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming communities. In this context, referring to the “women’s movement” feels both outdated and exclusive. Even with an additional twenty years from the vantage point of this remembrance, we are better able to recognize the rhetoricity of what’s *not* said in these oral histories, the unremarked.

I posit this tension was even more reason the women in this study felt the need to postulate, to hold their ground. “Look at the political and cultural odds we were up against” they seem to collectively shout. Making inroads in any of the challenges women faced in Georgia in the late ’70s—access to jobs and education, healthcare, humane treatment in prison, shelters and resources for battered women, legal rights in rape trials or inheritance cases, *any* kind of diversity in elected offices—was huge progress and represented a tireless and uphill effort. That these efforts were forgotten or worse, misunderstood, just a few decades later provided the utmost urgency for their rhetorical acts of remembrance(!).

“I think we have probably as much need now for the Women’s Movement as we’ve ever had, but in a different direction,” Carrie Nell Moye said in her interview in 2001. Cathey Steinberg noted that in her time in office as well as at the time of recording, women continued to use positions of leadership—elected or community-based—to support other women. She sees this as continued evidence of the success of their work— of expanding the number of spaces in which women were involved. Both sentiments suggest the legacy of second-wave feminism and the complications inherent in its remembrance. Any scholar investigating the past engages the tension between complicated individuals’ failures and blind spots, with the added challenge of grappling with our own as historians writing in our present moment. I think oral history, as historian Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy says, “if used sensitively, can provide a window into how

individuals understand and interpret their lives” (278). Rather than harshly criticize a person electing to share an experience with vulnerability, we can listen deeply to their interpretation, the way the memories have formed, shifted, and solidified, imbuing meaning—becoming more than historical fact. And rather than apologizing for the mistakes or shortcomings of the protagonists of historical narrative, we can understand them as fully human, acting to the best of their understanding in their time, with their available means. We can see them, as Janet Paulk put it, “as women, with all our foibles.”

What and who is the women’s movement for, in history, and today? As we continue to ask and answer this question, it is unhelpful to reduce the work of the women who were engaged in what we interpret today as white feminism to the limits they faced—real or imagined—during the peak years of their feminist activism. This tension is one reason feminist rhetorical microhistory is especially useful for examining this era in history. In a larger narrative of the advances for women’s rights achieved from roughly 1960 to 1982, we can observe the ways in which classed and raced views of women’s equality were detrimental to the movement’s overall potential. Even within a decade of the ERA failing, critiques of the movement as too focused on the goals of white, middle-class women arose to diagnose its inevitable failure. In the even longer history of a feminist movement spanning three centuries, we see a continued insistence on white feminism’s myopic “fight for the full political and economic advantages that wealthy white men enjoy within capitalist empire” (Schuller 4), at the marked expense of other groups. Scholarship and continued activism in an intersectional feminist movement would suggest there is little to admire and much to critique in the work and motives of the women engaged in the women’s movement in 1970s and 1980s Georgia; how very wrong that assessment would be.

Instead, feminist rhetorical microhistory invited us, across this chapter, to listen with empathy to the mundane and human experiences of the women working—often on top of family and professional obligations—for the cause of their and their communities’ liberation from multiple systems of suppression they inhabited. Here we see the narrators’ experiences come to life, revealing “much more than new information about dates, places, and events” for the historical record (Kennedy 277). The voices in this collective narrative demonstrated conscious reflection of their experiences, a sense of fear and vulnerability in how their work was being remembered, and the hope that stating their interpretation for the record might positively influence the future. Levi asserts, “The starting point of microhistory is... an awareness of the inconsistencies of reality and the necessary partiality of our knowledge” (129). Adjusting our scopic lens allows space for deeper understanding of events that now hold multiple interpretations in historical record. FRM invites and acknowledges “the possibility of further discussion and other possible interpretations” (129) and resists reductive assessments of *individuals’* actions, even if our present reality brings their context into new relief. Instead, the tension of critique and understanding must exist together, widening our comprehension of reality, just as microhistory as practice implores.

As Carrie Nell Moyer invites: “I appreciate your asking me to do this [oral history], and I just hope that there will be those in the future that will look back and say, ‘You know, we have come a long way baby. And there’s still a way to go.’ But it’s not just for women, there’s a way to go for everybody.”



## 5 FORMING THE GEORGIA WOMEN'S MOVEMENT PROJECT AND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

### 5.1 The Water's Edge Project

After exploring rhetorical agency within the oral histories themselves, in this chapter, I contextualize and analyze the formation of the Georgia Women's Movement Project (GWMP) and specifically the GWMP Oral History Project. How an archive is formed, including the goals and experiences of its founders, is important to understanding the collection's meaning, intended audience, and impact. The urgency experienced by the women who formed the Georgia Women's Movement Project archival collection at Georgia State University fomented in failure, the failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The pro-ERA activists whose oral histories are preserved in this collection are, in the historical narrative, the "losers" of a galvanizing political battle. The "Founding Mothers" of the archival collection explicitly use the phrase "unsung heroines" in the narrative of the collection's formation ("Historical Timeline"). In establishing an archival collection in the 1990s, they saw themselves as defending the work and history of the (mostly white) feminists of the women's movement in Georgia, who, without conscious effort, they felt might not be accurately represented in larger historical narrative.

In this chapter, I narrate the formation of the GWMP and its oral history collection alongside three key Founding Mothers Margaret Curtis, Lucy Hargrett Draper, and Janet Paulk, and frame it within the era of its founding and the context of community archives movements. I use feminist rhetorical microhistory to illustrate how the subjects we've been listening to understand the nature of their impact on and relationship to history.

In her self-published memoir *My Life as a Feminist in Georgia: A Personal Reflection*, Founding Mother Margaret Curtis narrates up to the moment of the ERA's failure in the state legislature on January 20, 1982. After the lawmakers' verdict on the Constitutional amendment was clear, each person faced the question of what came next: "What should we do now? For each of us there was a different answer," Curtis writes (99). She notes that for Beth Schapiro, with the help of Linda Kurtz, that meant getting more women elected to office, as we have explored in other chapters. For Lucy Draper, a founding mother who elected not to record an oral history, she worked closely throughout the 1980s with two organizations that played a significant part in electing candidates who supported the right to abortion. "Always thinking ahead," Curtis notes, "Lucy believed that someday, the ERA will be revived." Margaret Curtis narrates the origin of the GWMP as the brainchild of Lucy Draper:

Believing that future feminists might learn from our experiences ... she realized that women will continue to be ignored in historical records unless feminists make certain that 'her-story' is told. She wanted a permanent record of the unsung heroines of the women's movement from 1967-1997 secured and housed in the Special Collections and Archives Department of Georgia State University Library, where Georgia feminist scholars could read, use those materials, and possibly be inspired by them. (101)

In the wake of a breast cancer diagnosis in 1993, and the untimely deaths of two significant feminists in the state, Draper was motivated by a race against time to collect historical material about the women's movement in Georgia.

Draper worked for at least the next three years and submitted eight different proposals to institutions (including Vanderbilt, West Point, Emory, Harvard, and the University of Georgia),

before solidifying the agreement with GSU.<sup>17</sup> “The purpose of Lucy’s proposals was to establish a center to identify, collect, and preserve important feminist papers and memorabilia collections, and to solicit endowments with which to fund the Georgia Women’s Movement Project,” Curtis writes (101). Once Draper had a location, she needed the support of other feminists who had been part of their work and movement to donate and locate documents and personal materials, and to encourage others to do the same. In 1995, “At Lucy’s suggestion, I invited about seventeen local supporters to our home,” Curtis said, “where Lucy presented her idea of establishing the... archival collection” (102). This same effort established the first advisory group for the project, comprised of many of the women who have narrated the history we’ve engaged here, including Mary Long, Linda Kurtz, Dorothy Gibson-Ferry, and Beth Schapiro. During this initial meeting, attended by GSU leadership and with many founding mothers present, Margaret Curtis read a poem, from Olive Schreiner’s 1890 collection *Dreams*:

And she stood far off on the bank of the river. And she said, ‘For what do I go to this far land which no one has ever reached? Oh, I am alone! I am utterly alone!’

And Reason, that old man, said to her, ‘Silence! What do you hear?’

And she listened intently, and she said, ‘I hear a sound of feet, a thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, and they beat this way!’

He said, ‘They are the feet of those that shall follow you. Lead on! make a track to the water’s edge! Where you stand now, the ground will be beaten flat by ten thousand times

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<sup>17</sup> Lucy Draper also established the Lucy Hargrett Draper Center and Archives for the Study of the Rights of Women at the University of Georgia’s Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, and the Lucy H. Draper Collection at the United States Military Academy at West Point Library.

ten thousand feet.’ And he said, ‘Have you seen the locusts how they cross a stream? First one comes down to the water-edge, and it is swept away, and then another comes and then another, and then another, and at last with their bodies piled up a bridge is built and the rest pass over.’

She said, ‘And, of those that come first, some are swept away, and are heard of no more; their bodies do not even build the bridge?’

‘And are swept away, and are heard of no more—and what of that?’ he said.

‘And what of that—’ she said.

‘They make a track to the water’s edge.’

‘They make a track to the water’s edge—.’ And she said, ‘Over that bridge which shall be built with our bodies, who will pass?’

He said, ‘The entire human race.’

And the woman grasped her staff.

And I saw her turn down that dark path to the river. (Curtis 103; Schreiner np)

This poem contained the immense hopes the group had for the collection and the future, especially the idea of their work being part of a larger, longer story about women and humankind. Curtis’s reading of this poem at this milestone meeting sheds light on the spirit and motivation behind the collection of materials for the archives. They saw this next endeavor as a

continuation in the fight for women's rights, as a space for community and remembrance. Rebekah Sheffield notes that community archives can both "preserve and provide the material tools necessary for the construction of a collective identity [and] are fundamental to sustaining a movement" (368). The importance Curtis places on this origin story is in many ways an extension of the rhetorical intention that continues in the oral history collection—she sets up the collection of their history and the formation of its long-term home as a conscious continuation of their efforts to improve the lives of women. That one of them might be swept away, but there is another, and another, alludes to the never-ending work to be done, by women, in the interest of humanity. Here was the recognition they deserved, and the preservation that would ensure scholars and activists might listen, learn, and continue the work for equality in whatever future they inhabited. They named the initial fundraising and archival materials collection phase "the Water's Edge Project," invoking the imagery of the poem (Curtis 104).

## **5.2 Rhetorical Intention: Forming of an Archives**

Creating a community archives is an extension of the narrators' rhetorical agency and says something important about the time and place of such action—in this case, about the 1990s and these women's response to the issues they saw continuing and evolving, despite a very different looking "feminism." Grobman and Greer acknowledge "interpretive flux" in public memorials (136), and oral history is affected by this same phenomenon. Those who create public memorials often are responding as much to the present moment as anything in the past, and that influence informs how history is interpreted in public and shared spaces. The formation of archival collections falls into the same patterns of temporal response.

Public memory is frequently tangled in issues of identity and questions of personal and national legacy. The remembrance of the United States Civil War in the U.S. South has a legacy

of shifting interpretation spanning more than a century, from the Lost Cause era's memorializing of Confederate heroes as an intentional act of reinstating white racial dominance in the South (Essex) to the recent removal of many southern states' still-standing statues to those same individuals. In the mid-nineties, a culture war flared regarding how the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., chose to interpret the Enola Gay B-29 airplane responsible for dropping an atomic bomb and killing thousands of Japanese citizens (Kohn). The original exhibit "portrayed the bomb as unnecessary to end the war," and backlash roared at the exhibit's implication that so many civilian deaths might leave a complicated legacy of American military leaders' and soldiers' actions and wartime decisions (1036). Such an interpretation also threw into question the value of the lives of those who survived at the expense of so many Japanese lives. Many Americans were not yet prepared for an interpretation of WWII that depicted the country's actions in any way but heroic. The nature of public memory is nearly always in flux—and deeply politically and culturally bound.

Oral history captures the subject's perspective from a particular moment in history, often removed by years or decades from the events they are recounting, and is thus susceptible to similar interpretive flux, intentionally or not. Oral history sometimes provides us with conflicting accounts of events, further engaging and embracing the unstable nature of memory and historical record. Listening closely to oral history accounts, we understand the rhetorical agency of the narratives. As we saw in the previous chapter, the women of the GWMP enacted their oral histories to say something in the 1990s about how they defined feminism and the women's movement, and indicate where there was still work to be done.

In the introduction to *Remembering Women Differently*, Letizia Guglielmo frames the collection's important interruption in historical narrative: "we know that prevailing value

systems play an important role in shaping history and public memory and may often determine who is remembered and when” (5). Within such systems, women’s lives “were constrained in a variety of ways that both limited their rhetorical agency and determined their reputations” (5). The “Founding Mothers” of the Georgia Women’s Movement Project understood this about their own historical place; working against these constraints was a key part of the worldview leading them to their various actions during the height of the second-wave feminist movement. Especially since the Equal Rights Amendment was not ratified in Georgia, and never added to the U.S. Constitution, it mattered greatly to them how all their work would be remembered in history.

The women who formed the GWMP and its oral history collection were responding to the ongoing, coupled exigencies of an unfinished, evolving feminist movement alongside a historical narrative that rarely frames “failure” like that of ERA ratification accurately or completely (or at all). Lest their hard work, galvanized in those critical years in Georgia, be forgotten, the formation of an archives was a final extension of the work, this time *remembering* the ERA battle and imagining what it might mean for those of us in the future. That so few people know or understand its complex history is testament to their urgency. “I did talk to a young woman who was about to graduate from college, and she had never heard of the Equal Rights Amendment. And that was a little scary to me,” Sue Millen remarked during her interview. “And so, I think maybe we need, at our schools, to spend a little more time on our own U.S. history, recent history, and talk a little bit more about how deep these changes were.” To Millen, the grand narratives of U.S. history failed to include one of the more formidable experiences of her life, and one that was essential to public memory if women were to maintain the social liberties and relative access they had achieved in the 1970s and ’80s.

The women founding the GWMP archives were acting in a corrective effort with the hopes that their experiences, documented in formal spaces of study, might play a role in continued and future efforts for women's equality. In the 1990s in which they were interviewing the initial group of women central to the oral history collection, they were responding to what they saw as both a diminished sense of feminism—at least as they understood it—and the work yet to be done. As highly involved feminists in the highest crest of the “second wave,” the founding mothers were enacting their feminism explicitly *upon* history.

While today's historians are far more comfortable with the nature of history as both subjective and political—any time we collect a narrative of the past, it is with a view to tell or understand something important about our lives and present conditions—the general “culture wars” of the 1990s were far less amenable to that malleability. As early as 1983, feminist scholars in history understood the task at hand for a generation: in “Feminism as History and Politics,” Sara Evans writes, “the feminist movement, like any democratic social movement, will build its vision of the future—implicitly or explicitly—on some vision of the past. Having a history is an essential prerequisite to claiming the right to shape the future” (235). As movements for the rights of Black Americans, the LGBTQ community, Indigenous communities, and women have shown, agency in telling the history of a community from *within and by* its members is essential to gaining equity, justice, and basic human and civil rights.

How the subjects of the GWMP Oral History Project remembered events, and which organizations and players were significant in the movement, would be framed by the positionality of the women recruiting participants, as they began requesting and inviting women to sit down and record their memories. The chairs of Phase I of the oral history project, Janet Paulk, Sue Millen, and Linda Kurtz, alongside other early committee members of the collection's



formation, carried the responsibility of establishing the intended scope of the interviews, and the questions they sought to ask (and have answered). Each likely had her own concept of the collection as they drafted questions and invited participants. Importantly, who they invited would be influenced by their existent networks both at the time of the Equal Rights Amendment battle and subsequent work. Thus, the very formation of this collection is initially influenced by the founders' and first chairs' identities as white, straight, middle-class, college-educated, generally politically liberal women who were residents of Georgia. Of the fifty-seven oral histories included in the GWMP Oral History Project, there are a small number of women of color and two men.<sup>18</sup> While the focus on women is more intentional, the lack of women of color included in the collection supports other historical accounts of the women's movement as having factions split often along racial lines, especially as Black women's issues were often more related to class and racial barriers and the discrimination they faced as being *both* Black and female.

What I can include in this study is limited by what was collected. This study is also limited by the positional barriers and biases of *my* identity and that of the founding mothers of the GWMP Oral History Project, which shape the limits of possible new knowledge. As I've noted in previous chapters, GSU's Women's Collection contains two oral history programs, and the founding documentation of the GWMP program requires that what is obtained for this collection be related to the Equal Rights Amendment and women's rights in Georgia; the other Activist Women's Collection includes a wider range of subsequent activist movements and causes, and an expanded set of voices, including women who were against the ERA; that collection continues to grow. For the most part, especially as the women involved in the ERA

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<sup>18</sup> The GWMP Oral History Project's information about each narrator does not expressly identify them by race. Of the fifty-seven oral histories included in the collection, three are Black women based on professional photographs included in the index or by their identifying as such in their narrative (or both).

battle and the “second wave” women’s movement age or die, the GWMP Oral History Project is a mostly established, if incomplete, collection. Women’s Collection archivist Morna Gerrard still hopes to get oral histories with several key women who have turned them down (including Lucy Draper), but as the years pass, she is less confident we will ever get their narrations. Gerrard noted that the GWMP could expand in the future if ERA-related activism picks up in Georgia once again. While the deadline for state ratification has long expired, the amendment has, as of Virginia’s vote in 2020, gained the required 38 states needed to ratify (Williams, “Virginia Approves”). The deadline expiration remains the singular reason the amendment has not become law in the U.S. Constitution, so depending on ongoing legislative technicalities, it’s not impossible for this collection to grow in the future, with an entirely different generation of activists.

The next section follows the format of earlier chapters, illustrating via feminist rhetorical microhistory the rhetorical intention behind forming the GWMP archives, and oral history project, using Janet Paulk’s narrative. She provides clear evidence for the remembrance of self in history through *both* her oral history recording and the numerous for which she was the interviewer.

### ***5.2.1 Janet Paulk and the shaping and intention of an oral history collection***

If Lucy Draper was the archival project’s mastermind and architect, Janet T. Paulk was the oral history collection’s key arbiter. Both were aware of the historical value of the work they were doing, sometimes even while it was happening, as Paulk’s oral history recollections confirm. Together with Sue Millen and Linda Kurtz, narrators we’ve heard throughout this story, Paulk served as co-chair for Phase I of the GWMP Oral History Project and was responsible for organizing the initial interest in and collection of recorded narrations to accompany written

records in the archives. This role gave the three of them—whether they volunteered for the role or were assigned it—some authority in having a larger-view picture of the women’s movement in Georgia, based on their activities or social networks during the collection’s formative years, from the mid- to late nineties. Janet Paulk would be one of the most active interviewers for the project; for twenty-five of the fifty-seven interviews in the collection, she is the interviewer opposite the narrator (or about four of every ten recordings). The interviewers throughout the project were either an in-community member, i.e., individuals who had worked in the women’s movement and often knew the subject they were interviewing to some extent, or archivists associated with GSU’s special collections. No one comes close to recording as many interviews as Janet Paulk does, though.

There are times when Janet Paulk, who interviewed many of the other subjects whose narratives I engaged with for this research, includes a reference to a person, event, or organization in her questioning that illustrates her position within the community and her existing knowledge of the events they discuss. Often, these come not as part of the prepared questions but as clarifications, addendums, helpfully providing names if the subject can’t seem to think of a name, place, group, or event. There are likely questions she did not ask because they both already knew the answer—a downside to interviewing someone within one’s own community—and at the same time, her in-knowledge often enhances the interview, giving the (future, intended) audience a sense of her stakes in this story, too, as the one asking the questions. Many interviews helmed by Janet Paulk have moments that sound more like conversation with an old friend but with a very important goal. Based on everything I’ve learned about Janet, enacting herself and these women into history was long at the heart of much of her work—even during and especially in the years after the ERA battle.

Listening to Janet Paulk's oral history recording is a practice in rhetorical listening. It is also a practice, for her, in oral history as rhetorical act. For her, finally sitting down on the other side of the recorder for two sessions, in 2002 and 2003, she is start-to-finish aware of the way in which she has control over the narrative and interpretation of her life and the women's movement. After all, she has asked these questions dozens of times, she knows how they build, she knows what she will be asked to reflect upon. Throughout her oral history recording, Janet references notes she has brought with her; the shuffling of paper is caught on the cassette tape recording. There are moments in her narrative where some of her memories read and sound like lists—the paltry number of women she remembers from history and literature in her upbringing, the names of women who were important during the women's movement in Georgia—because they *are* in fact listed within the notes she took in preparation. There are moments when Joyce Durand, who interviewed her, moves to ask another or a follow-up question, and Janet replies that she is not yet done with “that section”—of her notes, of her thoughts, of her memories. The quick-fire nature of “things she was involved in during her work in the women's movement” makes it especially hard to only read or listen to her oral history once through. She seems to cover years, even decades of work, in what amounts to a few paragraphs. This narration of organizations and activities she contributed to works well as an accompaniment to her papers, which also reside in the GWMP collection, but can feel like a whirlwind as she's describing them so quickly in audio form.

Each interview begins with early-life questions to establish the context and “life story” sense of the narrative. Janet shares about life during World War II, moving briefly from their native West Virginia to Washington, D.C., so her father could interview to be a chaplain in the Navy. He was not admitted due to a heart murmur, so the family moved instead to Mississippi

where she lived until college. She reminisces on the affordances of being the minister's daughter, especially the kind of immediate acceptance she found when arriving to new places. Instead of feeling limited by what was "allowed" of her, she recalls her parents "always treated [me] with a great deal of respect," and "[gave] me a great deal of freedom." With only one sibling nearly ten years her senior, Janet grew up basically an only child, one who got very good at knowing how to get her way. She notes that this skill "can be very destructive in adult relationships, with a husband," and would play out in her first marriage. The mutual respect within her family and the extent of freedom she had for a young woman in small-town Mississippi in the late 1940s and early '50s seems to have given Paulk a predisposition to bravery and curiosity, and certainly independence in action and thought.

She notes the impact of wars—both contemporary and historical—on her early sense of personhood. Nine when WWII started, her mom went back into the formal workforce after years as a housewife, and her sister stopped college to work ("because that's what you did during the Second World War, you went to work"). Amidst an actual war, she started learning about the U.S. Civil War, first as a fifth grader in West Virginia, then the following year in Mississippi. This was "a major influence" in her life, she says. "It really showed me that textbooks could lie. I mean, it was two different wars" based on the differences in what she read from one state's textbook to another's. "It did influence my ability and my wanting to analyze whatever I read." She experienced "two different worlds" of education, where "one was the War Between the States and other was the Civil War."

Against the "puzzling" history lessons at school, there were blackouts during energy shortages in the present, ongoing war. She and her sister learned to play the family piano in the dark, so they could entertain family and other adults without power or light. This early influence

of what it means to live through as well as historicize war gave Paulk an early eye to what and who was (and was not) included in historical narrative; her motivation to place more women in historical records than she found in her own education was intentional throughout her life and is an obvious throughline across her oral history narrative. “Textbooks don’t always tell the story and history is not always written as it actually happened,” she notes again a little while later. This especially “pertains to the history of women, because it just simply wasn’t written,” she notes.

Paulk’s failed first marriage was another galvanizing experience in her journey of self-consciousness. She understood as a young woman that if you were single or widowed, you worked in the post office, the bank, or as a schoolteacher. But women could have either a domestic or professional life, not both. None of the professions seemingly open to women appealed to her, so instead, “I went with the aspiration of the day, get married and live happily ever after, and never [think] beyond that.” She’d left college after one year to follow her Cuban boyfriend to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. When that relationship ended unceremoniously and left her in what she later understood as “serious depression,” she wound up with a job as a typist in the purchasing department of Louisiana Governor Earl Long’s government. (The machinations of government she learned during this time would turn out to be useful to her in her future work in the women’s movement.) Given her one-track mind for marriage, she quickly married a Chilean man, recently graduated from college, and together they moved to Chile. “It was just, what an adventure, I was living in my own movie.” She recalls what an odd and informative time this was for her, exposed to his family’s affluence and influence: “this little girl from Mississippi would sit in the presidential box at the [horse] races, and the ambassador had parties...it was breakfast in bed, a chauffeur.” Before long, she got “so damn bored” she started working with a

Methodist mission to have something grounding her days. After about a year, they moved to Atlanta and she “learned a lot more about myself, and one of the things was that I really didn’t do too well walking ten paces behind someone. My South American husband, who was very proud of his independent wife when we were in Chile, wanted me to walk ten paces behind him.” This was the mid-fifties, and she “began to think about the role of women and equality,” and especially that the married-happily-ever-after wasn’t panning out how she expected. “That’s when I began to be awake to who I was and what kind of life I wanted to live,” she recalls. She felt her marriage was at odds even with what she observed her parents had, an egalitarian partnership for the standards of the day.

That relationship over, Janet’s next lesson came from a supervisor at an auto parts company, where she was a Dictaphone stenographer. She was bad at the job, finding it dull and tedious. The supervisor needed to fire her because she wasn’t good at the job, but, he said, “it’s because you need a job that has [more] responsibility and a variety of work.” He let her stay on while she found another job and assured her he would give a strong recommendation for where she went next. “That helped me set directions and make decisions about [what I will or won’t do, and] the importance of finding out what you were good at,” she says. She emulated that interest in others when she found meaningful work in human resources at Emory University’s library. “That man who helped me also enabled me to help other people,” she notes. When employees and students were struggling in the library, she would encourage them to learn from this job while on the longer journey toward finding what they’re good at.

By now, working as an administrator in human resources for the Emory University library, she was also married and a mother of three. These lessons from personal and professional challenges had shaped her, and her father’s dedication to human good motivated her

to get involved in the burgeoning Civil Rights movement. Recognizing her limits given family and professional obligations, she recounts a focused effort to organize her subdivision so they could pay Social Security benefits for the Black women employed as domestic laborers in their homes. Across the 1970s and '80s, she served as editor of several newsletters for various small and large organizations, including for the Democratic Women of DeKalb County and the Women's Caucus at Emory. This suited her as an outlet for discussing and persuading readership about the importance of passing the Equal Rights Amendment: "Being newsletter editor, you could put in lots of stuff about feminism," she said. "I found that I liked writing, and it was a good place if you wanted to have voice and some possibility of influence. I liked doing that better than being an officer," she said.

Paulk remained constantly aware of the limited portrayal of women's activities in historical records and began consciously working to correct that. Beginning at Emory in 1975, by 1981 she conducted an oral history of Mamie K. Taylor, "to put in the Emory archives" along with some background context on Taylor based on documents she references in the interview (Mamie K. Taylor interview 1). The transcript and audio are stored in the Janet T. Paulk papers in GSU Special Collections.

Taylor had been a suffragist in Georgia and Paulk interviewed her just weeks before a large rally ERA Georgia, Inc. was planning for later that month, August 1981, to commemorate the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and to "honor some of the women who have worked for many years to help ratify the Equal Rights Amendment" (1). In the opening explanatory statement of the recording, Paulk notes the importance of this oral history to capture Taylor's memories and experiences with trying to pass the ERA "so that we women who are trying to



carry the torch and obtain equal rights under the law for women will have this [background] to help give us the stamina and the courage to continue in her footsteps” (1-2).

In 1984, she initiated efforts to have the collected papers of Democratic women in DeKalb County who were elected officials donated to Emory’s archives. “It was important that that history not be lost,” she says in own oral history. “Because I felt like these women were coming out from the back rooms where they’d been stuffing envelopes and coming into the forefront of the political scene by being elected.” Some of the earliest women to be elected in DeKalb County agreed to give their papers based on this effort, including Liane Levitan, first woman mayor of Decatur. “They had never even thought about saving them. Men knew that they should be saving their papers for posterity. Women hadn’t learned that,” she notes. The papers of the ERA Georgia, Inc. organization are housed in Emory’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, materials created from 1973-1982 during the organization’s active years. “Any researchers, of course, need to be looking at Georgia State, need to be looking at the Georgia Archives. There were certainly enough papers to go around,” she notes *in* her oral history. At the time of this initial effort though, to collect the Democratic Women of DeKalb papers, she was employed at Emory and thus that’s where she had the best opportunity and access. She “persuaded the archivist that this was important.”

Toward Paulk’s effort, DeKalb County Chief Administrator Greta Dewald (pictured) sent several boxes of materials to Linda M. Matthews, Head of Special Collections, in August 1984. Matthews wrote a letter to Dewald clarifying that much of the material “has raised some questions in my mind about the appropriateness” for the collection. Matthews notes memoranda and reports that she thinks belong in County Commission records, rather than the “personal correspondence, memoranda, writings, and records of your work” that should go in the Greta

Dewald collection at Emory. She remarks that Georgia law perhaps mandates that government records not be duplicated and held in personal archival collections. This letter, and Greta Dewald's colorful reply, are part of Janet Paulk's papers at GSU, rounding out the meta-



*Figure 3: Greta Dewald during her tenure as Executive Assistant to the DeKalb County CEO Manual Maloof, Atlanta, Georgia, March 17, 1988*

awareness and impact Paulk sustained.

Dewald's reply drips with derision; she is clearly furious that an archivist would not see the originality of the records, and their value within the context of Dewald's own work in county government. Dewald was Executive Assistant to DeKalb County's CEO for at least most of the 1980s, based on records in GSU's archives.

Dewald writes:

I may have misunderstood what type of study you would want to come from these records, but I do remember however, it was suggested and requested of me that even phone notes, slips of paper with scribbled thoughts, drafts and the like from my organization were not to be discarded.

I believe moreover, you have no idea what my job entails... Now my job is the Chief Administrator for a county of about 500,000 people. I hands-on direct about 30 departments. These papers are a direct record of what it takes to manage departments,

deal with the public, prepare legislation for Commissioners, do all those tasks given, assigned, etc., by the Chairman of the Board.

From this, students could learn -- if the papers are organized -- how, for instance, we reorganized the Public Safety Department, the drafts of a personnel policy -- on and on...

I don't mean to sound pompous, but until Shirley Franklin<sup>19</sup> became the Chief Administrator of Atlanta, I was (and still am) the only woman Chief Administrator in a government the size of ours (actually larger than Atlanta City) in the state of Georgia.

So you see, much of those papers are my documents. These are records of my work which you suggest I stick in the Democratic Party phase of my work...

Believe me, none of what I put to you is part of the Commission Office retention schedules official documents. These are living, breathing files of action, coordination, planning, developing, molding... I will be glad to sit down with you and discuss these, but I can tell you, these papers are not ones which should be kept with the Commission files -- these are not duplicates...

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<sup>19</sup> Shirley Franklin was Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Atlanta under Mayor Andrew Young in the 1980s. She later served as Atlanta's first female mayor and the first Black woman elected mayor of a major southern city, from 2002 to 2010 ("Shirley Franklin").

There aren't a heck of a lot of us top women administrators around... [she goes on to describe more of the kinds of issues she worked with that form this collection of materials].

If these files are too massive for you, I will be glad to take them back off your hands and stop sending them across.

Paulk is BCC'ed on Dewald's response, with the note "I didn't mean to become a burden!", which suggests her attitude about sending materials only to be told those weren't the right kind of materials (as if the letter hadn't made that clear). Paulk's personal interest in collecting this history seems to be why she was included in the communication as well as why she kept this record too, perhaps to confirm the ongoing challenge to the historical value of women's work. There is not a Greta Dewald collection listed in Emory's finding aids; records of her work are contained in the Donna Novak Coles Women's Collection at GSU, including her oral history.

Paulk's presence of mind to collect documents related to the changing state of women's opportunities *while* the work was happening illustrates a growing sense of historical consciousness within social movements of the late twentieth century. Valk introduces us to activists participating in Take Back the Night marches, beginning in the mid-1970s and protesting violence against women, and how some members of the community were aware of the history they were creating. Take Back the Night activists were keenly aware of the value their own present records were for continued organizing, so expanding their archives was an immediate resource. This also became a significant source for sharing records and experiences

across communities and cities, as Take Back the Night actions were highly localized and not connected formally via national leadership (Valk 91). Similar information-sharing occurred in ACT UP organizations, across and beyond local networks in their HIV/AIDS activism (Schulman). Paulk's efforts to have Greta Dewald's papers kept for reference for future women in high positions in government, so others (especially women) could understand what the work entailed, shows the same recognition that there is action-driven value in saving records to guide others working in similar spaces, both concurrently and in the future. Community archives can be actors in social movements whether or not their creators are explicitly creating them to be part of political action. Rather, Rebekah Sheffield notes, "The very act of taking control of one's documentary heritage is political" (369) and thus keeping archival record supports progressive liberation movements where each of these examples is situated. In other words, having a broader sense of who is making history and what they were doing ensures the continuation of liberatory social justice movements.

Janet Paulk notes several other significant initiatives she was a part of to improve the well-being of women faculty, staff, and students at Emory, all of which she sees as part of her work related to these archives and this history. She suggested holding receptions as space for first-year students to talk to female faculty, since it was not unusual to go a whole year in college with all-male faculty. This was space for them "to talk about what it was like to be a faculty member in higher education, to have worked in a male educational institution to get their PhDs and now to be working for pay which was much less, to be the token woman, we felt this was important." She became secretary of the Emory President's Commission, through which they started programming about date rape and published the institution's first "status of women at Emory" report. This commission mirrored many of the commissions established by governors on

the status of women in their states in the 1970s. The report led to the beginning of observing patterns of discrimination and to the university's appointment of a director of equal employment opportunity. Paulk notes how they also changed specific benefits, like the courtesy scholarship, which until their work was only provided to men-head-of-households employed at Emory, to fund their children's tuition. It was in this role that she was asked to prepare a speech for then-President James T. Laney, which he would deliver at an event honoring women suffragists; she made sure to add the line "I strongly support the ERA." "Much to my surprise," Paulk recalls, "he delivered the remarks that I had laid out as suggestions almost in toto... including that remark." After the demise of the ERA, she remained active by serving on the board of the Georgia Women's Political Caucus and in the Unitarian Church Women in Religion organization. And as we've seen, concurrent to her professional and women's issues work, she saw the collection and remembrance of the era she had lived as equally her responsibility.

As Janet Paulk took on the role of interviewing so many of the subjects for the GWMP Oral History Project, she saw this work as the necessary restoration of women into history. One of her biggest personal takeaways from the movement, when reflecting, was that "women should be included in history, which they weren't since it was written by men." Collecting both written and oral materials was reparation. She notes her role as interviewer for the oral history project, and co-chair for the acquisitions committee of the GWMP, as important work she is doing towards the same goals she has kept central throughout her life. Sprinkled within other oral histories, we get more of Paulk's intentional credit given; we hear moments of her making sure things get said, to be recorded for history's sake.

Paulk is quick to ask narrators to clarify or expand on something that might need more context for "whoever's hearing this" in the future. When Cathey Steinberg mentions the Georgia

“heartbeat bill” on abortion limits, a major legislative battle in the late ’90s, Paulk notes that “people hearing this twenty years down the road [may] not know what this particular bill is about.” In an astoundingly prescient response based on her experience as a state legislator, Steinberg says, “I’m not sure that we are not going to be somewhat where we still are [by then]. It may be a different issue. Since I came in the Legislature in 1977, we were still pretty much debating the same issues.” Then she dutifully contextualizes the bill’s controversial limits on abortion access.

In Sherry Sutton’s interview, Sutton notes the relationship she and other activists were trying to make between the ERA and women’s suffrage; Paulk jumps in to clarify this very intentional step: “As I remember that day, we were trying to equate the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment with the Suffrage Movement.” Right, Sutton replies. Paulk continues, “Because so many people had been against that, and it had been such a major fight.” Narrator and interviewer agree the stakes for them were just as high as women having the right to vote, a concept which had *been* controversial but by the early 1980s was a given. It added fuel to their argument to illustrate that even that basic right had been hugely opposed in its time. Later, Sutton recounts the lunch she and many ERA leaders had in a restaurant’s private room, in the hours just after the ERA vote failed that fated day in January 1982. She is evasive on the recording but notes that Carol Ashkinaze, longtime reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution* (and whose oral history is also included in the collection) was privy to the room and would later write and publish her account of the lunch; emotions were high and colorful language abounded. Sutton notes it as “another lesson” that “you are never off the record with a reporter” and how angry she was that the same reporting would not have been printed if it had been men to “say things about their colleagues and criticize them.” The particulars of that lunch are in a copy of the article, which Sutton was

sure to include in her donated papers. Paulk remarks: “So whoever is wanting to know can do some sleuthing on their own and find out.” Sutton then refers to a notebook she and a colleague kept with their notes on the various legislators they spoke to in their ERA lobbying efforts; the ledger is in her papers, she notes, and she explains the shorthand they used for whether someone was “hopeless” (denoted by an “x”) or a “friggin’ pig” (marked “fp”) or possibly a little less so, just a “pig” (denoted “p”). “The friggin’ pigs,” Sutton clarifies, “you didn’t want to get alone in a corner of the hall with them. I mean they would—I remember one time down there one of them asking me if I wanted to ‘funch’ with him, so, I mean, you know, those were the ‘frigging pigs’ that we just wanted to identify for our own purposes.” Paulk adds, “This is an important part of history, isn’t it?” Sutton agrees. “This is what makes us human,” Paulk says.

Eva Parker’s oral history interview contains some very specific power dynamics the other interviews do not; her recording was collected during a larger event related to the women’s movement collection,<sup>20</sup> and Paulk opens the recording noting she is sitting at Margaret Curtis’s breakfast table. Parker is not only an outlier as one of few Black women in the collection, but her work was also staunchly based in her rural, South Georgia community rather than in the Metro Atlanta area. She’s also one of the voices whose narration feels a little less neatly packaged into a larger consciousness of the women’s movement. Supported by scholarship illustrating the different ways Black and white women worked within liberatory movements, Parker’s narrative shows her goals as less explicitly for women’s equality and far more for the improvement of the quality of life of everyone in her community—especially Black people. Parker’s narrative also details her own early domestic labor as a young girl, and her parents’ work in agriculture, railroad labor, and domestic spaces, in a markedly different kind of childhood both based on race

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<sup>20</sup> A bracketed addition to the transcript notes this was the Diane L. Fowlkes Georgia Women’s Movement Project Annual Spring Event – A Convocation for Feminist Transformations, in 2000.



and rural setting. Possibly for these reasons, Paulk is motivated to add a claim to the end of her interview that doesn't appear in others she's led: "I know there will be researchers down the road that will be so excited when they hear your voice and when they read what you had to say and know about the involvement that you have had in making the lives better for young people. So, thank you again."

Janet Paulk asserted herself as interviewer *and* colleague in the GWMP oral histories she recorded; she also makes direct reference to the GWMP papers and oral histories throughout her own and others' recordings. For Paulk, this labor was the critical documentation of real people taking on projects for the betterment of many. This project corrected the course of historical narrative for women in Georgia, and she had the institutional history in college libraries to understand how those mechanisms worked—and thus, how they could be used so that future generations might understand women and their work with more nuance than the "influential figures" she notes from her own education: "the history books only had maybe Joan of Arc, some nasty witches who now I know were wise women, Betsy Ross, Jane Adams and Marie Curie. That was just about it in the women's history books, because we were effectively excluded from the textbooks." Her sense of historical exigency echoes feminist scholars at the end of the twentieth century pushing for restoration and recovery of women in rhetorical and historical record, and the intentional addition of women's records to archives—especially beyond the most common historical locations like suffrage (Voss-Huabbard; Moseley; Farge; Mattingly).

Back in her own interview, before the interviewer can ask, Paulk knows what questions are coming next and moves into the activities she was involved in during the height of women's movement activities, culminating around Equal Rights Amendment ratification. From the jump, she acknowledges the competition that disrupted some of their work, as organizations like NOW,

ERA Georgia, Inc., and the Georgia Women's Political Caucus working in partnership towards passing the ERA meant "women's groups were having to learn to work together for the first time." She notes this caused factions in collective efforts, as each group wanted their name credited in outreach and press materials, or in news features. "If you listen to some of the other interviews which have been done, you will hear some of the braver and more honest people like Sherry Shulman [Sutton] and Cathey Steinberg talk about those things. I think those are important. We were not just stick figures, we were women with all our foibles and all. We were learning." Paulk's self-referencing to other narratives in the collection not only illustrates just how close she was to these stories and experiences, it shows her heartfelt belief in and excitement for their experiences to mean something, now but especially in the future.

At the end of the interview, Joyce Durand asks Paulk if there are any other thoughts she'd like to add. "Do we have a little more [time]?" Janet asks. Then, as if she had not preempted her interviewer multiple times as she predicted what came next throughout the process, she proceeds to read a poem she's written. The conscious, audacious act of reading a poem you wrote at the end of your oral history interview feels to me like the culmination of the performative, rhetorical act of oral history. She's had a lot of experience interviewing and knows exactly how she wants hers to go. "I have a muse that comes to visit me in the middle of the night," she explains. Titled "The Freedom Fighter," the poem is about Maria Getzinger Jones, whom she describes as an elderly woman in her church who was heavily involved in the women's movement and "whose papers are at Georgia State." But it's also about feeling "connected to women, past, present and future" and "warriors who refuse to fade away, women who still rail against inequities." The poem synthesizes much of what she's appealed to across her narrative. She reads:

We sat together on a Sunday morning

She smiled and said that this Christmas she felt so validated, so special, and that at nearly 80 she now knew her life had made a difference.

She told me of being interviewed by a student for his master's thesis and that Georgia State University wanted her papers for the Georgia Women's Movement Archives.

A woman of vision who always spoke of our sisters

And the way she said it made you feel connected to all women, past, present and future.

A wife, a mother and a proofreader.

A woman who could seriously focus, and focus she did.

On the liberation of women.

On the freeing of women from the narrow confines of what society said they could do and be.

And she never wavered.

She was one of the first.

An ardent member of NOW from the late '60s on

An activist, a martyr for freedom

And a woman whose comrades in arms included the likes of Betty Friedan.

She's one of those about whom it might be written

And in the beginning, a rebel force arose out of the United States of America

And it grew into a world wide army of freedom fighters

Among those was Maria Getzinger Jones

A gallant foot soldier, always in the first wave of any battle

And battles there were

Forays, skirmishes and assaults galore

And Maria's only one of the many warriors who refused to fade away

Women who still rail against inequities

Women who continue to work for equality, wholeness and freedom for all

“Janet T. Paulk, 1997,” she signs off.

### **5.3 Intention, Legacy, and Community Archives in the GWMP**

The women of the Georgia Women’s Movement Project archival collection were working to preserve their activist lives, as feminists in Georgia during the fight over the Equal Rights Amendment. Their work was during a fruitful era for community archives formation and occurred on the crest of oral history as a popular means for collecting the memories and history of everyday lives compared to a larger narrative history. Regardless of the type or repository for community archives, Rebekah Sheffield suggests “the very act of taking control over the documentation and storytelling about one’s own community calls attention to issues of power and politics” in how archives are created and maintained (352). Founding mother Lucy Draper briefly entertained the idea of a self-funded archives before deciding this was not only financially infeasible, given limited resources and space, but that then the archives could wind up serving mainly their own community of creators, one of the biggest challenges to community archives (Sheffield 368). Instead, Draper and the rest felt their largest impact was especially in making sure their history was shared and known beyond those who lived it. She had the foresight, as Margaret Curtis credits in her memoir, to instead affiliate with an institution who could serve as long-term custodian, as well as invest in and maintain capacity for expanding the collection and sharing it with generations to come.

While a history of exclusion may have previously turned off many groups hoping to find a home for their collections, in many ways by the 1990s, aligning with a formal institution was the most sustainable way to ensure histories got into the hands of scholars, students, and larger communities. Kate Eichhorn's *The Archival Turn in Feminism* explores the extension of archival work by women born in and after the second-wave feminist movement, who similarly found archiving their generation's feminist activity to be a way to legitimize their voices in public and historical spheres. Eichhorn suggests that archives are, perhaps more than ever, a constructive location for cultural production, especially in the last fifty years when neoliberalism has brought a disinvestment in practically any feminist cultural initiative, since such endeavors run counter to economic productivity (10). In other words, the archives "arguably strengthens contemporary feminism" as a space for generational discovery and as a bastion working to sustain "the production and circulation of works produced" in an era of economic hostility (Eichhorn 15). These "works" begin with archival collections like the Georgia Women's Movement Project and continue with feminist archives like the zine collection at Duke University's Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture and the Riot Grrrl Collection at NYU's Fales Library and Special Collections. If even institutional archives supported by public and private university systems are under threat, independent collections would be even more in peril, suggesting the essential relationship of community-based archives with well-established partners. Fifty years into GSU's Archives and Special Collections, the Women's Collection is one of its earliest and remains one of its most robust of the nine primary collection areas ("Special Collections").

In reflecting on lessons learned after concluding a 1987 oral history project they conducted, Laurie Mercier and Mary Murphy note time and labor as major barriers to community-centered and community-led oral history projects. They noted first how their

enthusiasm to build an oral history project alongside a 1987 conference, titled “Molders and Shapers: Montana Women as Community Builders,” had taken the place of a “coherent work plan,” where they instead saw this as an “important project that needed to be done and we would and could do it” regardless of the sustainability, practicality, or results of that exigency (Mercier and Murphy 177). Labor, technology, and communication limits throughout the project illustrated that “over the long haul not even hardy souls with the best intentions can afford to continue without some sort of institutional assistance” (186). Writing from 1991, their lessons published and read by oral history and feminist scholars would have been influential to those looking to conduct similar projects to preserve women’s history in the 1990s. Mercier and Murphy prescribe lobbying state institutions and grant-based programs for financial support to fund public history projects focused on women’s lives. They echo Draper, Paulk, and other GWMP founding mothers in articulating their collecting of history as an extension of their feminist activity. In the case of the Montana community-builders oral history project, a key realization for the feminist historians who created it (of whom Mercier and Murphy comprised half the team) was that their tireless effort and dedication did not automatically inspire others to drum up copycat projects in communities across the state. Instead, they recognized they held a specific role as feminist historians to “record, interpret, and publicize that history as our contribution to community-building” (183). They also articulate the immense responsibility that role entails in maintaining strong partnerships with those communities whose experiences they collect and preserve. Similarly, Georgia’s women’s movement memory-keepers understood archival collection was a productive and important place to invest their energies in the 1990s and beyond, with the same considerations of partnership and responsibility to community.

While community archives are often not explicitly sites of tangible resources for ongoing or future activist movements, it is useful to conceptualize them “as actors within social movements” Sheffield suggests, noting that “the scholarship that is produced from the evidence they preserve makes possible the social cohesion necessary for social movements to develop shared heritages that strengthen otherwise loose ties among participants” (368-9). In other words, despite major differences in the makeup of ongoing feminist activism and within a much-expanded agenda that necessarily includes more issues than the women of the GWMP conceived of within “feminism,” their oral histories (and collected papers) offer productive space for a shared and complex view of feminist work. The vulnerability and conscious framing within their acts of remembrance also suggest what younger and future activists might take away from their experiences—not only gaps in their thinking but mistakes they willingly highlight, and the value of learning through those mistakes in their own time. As we have seen in the women’s narratives included across these chapters, they very much saw what they experienced and learned as valuable for historical record—but also, crucially, as being for the next feminist movement, whom activists hoped would be facing different problems but, as several recognized, could very likely be facing the same ones they fought for in their time (Steinberg; Long; Curtis; Curtis “My Life”).

It aligns with recent discourse in archival studies that knowledge-sharing across generations and activist movements is central to an archives’ purpose, and scholars have begun to explore “activists as current or potential archival users” of collections (Cifor et al. 89). Within social movements of the twentieth century, Cifor et al. acknowledge the work of “individuals [within those communities who] initiated archival projects within, by, and for their communities as a crucial means of self-representation, identity construction, and empowerment” (71).

Collecting the lives of those who would not otherwise have been written into history was considered *both* a tool for making change and a means to reconstruct the past, a suggestion supported by the oral histories represented in this study.

Additional scholarship in archival studies, especially by Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor and colleagues, as well as Alana Kumbier and Kate Eichhorn, complicate how we remember social movements via archival collections. “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives” advances that a feminist ethical approach holds archivists to mutual affective responsibility to the creators, subjects, users, and communities engaged with their collections (Caswell and Cifor). Operating at the starting point that “community archives are created to document and interpret the past for community members in the present,” Cifor, Caswell and Migoni suggest that archives and those who steward them have an obligation to present-day historical context but even more so to the advancement of social justice (70).

However, they found in this study that the community-based archivists they interviewed held complicated relations to the concept of activism. They often used other terms used to self-identify their work, including “community organizer,” “advocate,” “form of advocacy,” and “as mindset and practice” (Cifor, Caswell and Migoni). In “Critical Feminism in the Archives,” Cifor and Wood examine the ways in which feminist movements became tied up with archives, and especially how archives can be “understood as critical tools and modes of self-representation and self-historization” (3). This piece reads with urgent criticism of “blind spots” that are revealed as we continue within the “archival turn,” offering ways they see critical feminist theory contributing to existing archival discourse, especially to concepts like community and organization whose roles in archival collection formation have for too long gone unquestioned.



In “‘To be able to Imagine Otherwise’: community archives and the importance of representation,” Caswell et al. acknowledge the strong sense of value community archives can sustain for self-ideation and self-historization: “These organizations and projects are framed as ways for communities to make shared, autonomous decisions about what hold[s] enduring value, shape collective memory of their own pasts and control the means through which stories about their past are constructed” (7). They also importantly note that using the same means of measuring impact as traditional archives will not be effective in considering the ongoing impact of community-driven archives because such archives are often “formed in opposition to symbolic annihilation” of the group’s identity and memory (21).

Alana Kumbier’s *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* is a book-length exploration of the ways archives are deeply embedded with power structures. This power extends itself to matters of the production of subjects, conditions of language, possibilities of histories, and the exclusion and erasure of particular groups and experiences (21). Connected as I see it to Royster and Kirsch’s methodological concept of critical imagination, Kumbier’s ruminations accept that “the past isn’t settled and is, instead, very much open to interpretation and intervention” (44). She analyzes several case studies of projects that intentionally “queer” the archives, and which illustrate our ability, in and with archival materials, to “act as advocates for our predecessors and for future researchers/genealogists; and [illustrates] that archival absences can haunt us in productive ways” (44). She notes that our continued work in these spaces affords us the opportunity to investigate the absences that remain in the archives—and to rectify them. Within the context of this chapter, this “we” necessarily includes subjects/communities, scholars, archivists, and their intended audiences.

Kate Eichhorn's analysis of the archival turn in feminism illustrates via case studies of several key archival collections formed by women in the generation after the women's movement—those whom, it has been suggested, were not feminist in the way their foremothers quite hoped or understood. She shows instead how these collections continue to engage and expand what we understand about feminist movements, and what they mean in history. She notes that “the archives is where academic and activist work frequently converge,” and that “the making of archives is frequently where knowledge production begins” (3). Similar to Kumbier's conceptualization, Eichhorn suggests that for feminist scholars, librarians, and archivists born after the second-wave women's movement, the archives is not “a site of preservation (a place to house traces of the *past*),” but instead “an apparatus to legitimize new forms of knowledge and cultural production in an economically and politically precarious *present*” (4). Indeed, her work speaks to some of the perspectives and reasoning for remembrance articulated in the oral history collection at the center of this study, which is exactly her thesis—and advances the premise of an evolving feminism that does more for more people. In the context of this study and this chapter, these texts help to frame how the remembrance of political and social movements is enacted via archives, and continues to challenge our ideas of their *purpose*, beyond historical narration. If, as Margaret Curtis suggested in her memoir, the founders expected the Equal Rights Amendment battle to resurface someday, the GWMP would be important for learning about the victories and defeats in the previous round, as well as understanding how much has changed within feminism (as well as some of the challenges still lingering).

Scholars in rhetoric and composition continue to engage a robust archival turn, especially in the last three decades, toward reframing, reimagining, and recovering rhetorical figures in the past (as well as in expanding who and what is rhetorical). Feminist rhetoric is expensively

discussed in the first chapter outlining FRM, but the archival turn in rhetoric and composition bears considerable influence on this project beyond my methodological approach. Contributors to Ramsey et al.'s edited collection *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition* informed the basis of this entire project as I first began analyzing how I could do the work I wanted to do in this field and merge it with my previous scholarly experience in history and public history. The editors recognized the recursive nature of archival work, which I knew from personal experience. In Tarez Samra Graban's work devising an emergent rhetorical taxonomy for working with archival records, she identified "tensions" in the texts she engaged. I went looking for tensions in archival collections. Throughout my close listening to the GWMP and as this project evolved, my work has borne out Graban's affirmation that as an archival researcher I situate my research "in fluctuating contexts and historical moments" and that my project is "often defined by inquiry rather than by method, and that inquiry sometimes strains against available methods" (208). My forming feminist rhetorical microhistory is evident of the level to which I encountered the limits of available methods (and methodologies) and I could not have predicted when starting this project just how recursive the work would be across time periods: the one being remembered, the one where that history was recorded, and the one I was writing in.

To an extent, these temporal limits and the biases of each era remain a challenge to researchers working in archival collections, as Liz Rohan illustrates in "The Personal as Method and Place as Archives: A Synthesis." Rohan notes the challenge—nay, impossibility—of transcending her own historical location to understand the woman she was studying. "I could not see this bygone history because history moved; it crumbled; it was *unmappable*" (240). Such acknowledgement of the personal limits remains critical when we (researchers, archivists,

community members, stakeholders) engage with those we find in the archives and what they say about what they experienced.

Rhetoric and composition scholars advance and complicate those practices in the recent collection *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives*. The “archive’s own rhetoricity and history” (Bessette 25) has been central to this study and remains a fruitful space for my and others’ continued work in understanding the non-neutral spaces of institutional collection and community history. Additional work in the collection complicate facets of historical remembering that I have teased out regarding archival collections and the nature of community work, especially the premise of “triumph” and the danger incomplete historical records pose when it means we cannot learn from the past (James). As I engaged in the opening chapter on FRM, the important “unsettling” of archival practice by rhetoric and composition scholars engaged with critical archival studies ensures boundary-pushing research in and on archives.

My use of feminist rhetorical microhistory in these chapters furthers the conversation on the complex nature of archives as space for remembrance of activism, of failure and success, of coalition building and breaking down. Making historical and narrative sense of movements of resistance has “always been a complex and contradictory endeavor,” Eichhorn notes (157), making it all the more important to do so. The complexity of interpersonal relationships alongside institutional power engages enduring questions on the nature of the relationship of archives to groups seeking to resist. But “how [the archives] is deployed in the present” is one of the key sources of power that may be wielded by the group seeking to document its actions (Eichhorn 160). As I have shown in this chapter, the GWMP creators dedicated labor first to collecting documentation of a movement’s activity and then to contextualizing that record with

oral history narratives. These are rhetorical acts of remembrance, and thus, the Georgia Women's Movement Project is a significant site of historical record that helps us to better understand the agentive nature of documenting social movements.

#### **5.4 Intention and Legacy in 2023**

Draper, who to this day has no plans to record an oral history, has spent the past three decades dedicated to collecting women's history across three institutional collections—at Georgia State University, University of Georgia, and U.S. Military Academy West Point. In March 2022, as a panelist in an event titled “The Importance of Archives in Communities” held by the GSU Archives and Special Collections, she reiterates the founders' theme of restoring the “unsung heroine” to historical record as central to the collection's goal. “When I began my feminist activity, I noticed that the unsung heroines in the movement were not documenting the prices that they were paying and the work that they were doing,” she said. “And I felt that the important role that I played in the various organizations that I founded was to encourage women to save their work product and their collections and that their collections were of value.” This led, in her view, to not only the existence of historical records to save but also a willingness from women to hand them over for posterity—both pieces that make archival collection of marginalized groups possible.

The specific era and type of activist included in the GWMP creates the challenge of its finiteness, which could impact the collection's perceived relevance to its intended audiences. Today named the Donna Novak Coles Georgia Women's Movement Archives, the collection remains one part of the larger Women's Collections in the GSU archives. The GWMP Oral History Project lives alongside the ongoing Activist Women Oral History Project, the latter of which has a larger and more open scope (including women who were anti-ERA as well as

women activists working in movements post-1982) and continues to grow. While several key “Founding Mothers” are involved and actively collecting for the Donna Novak Coles Georgia Women’s Movement Archives, this archives seems to be shifting into an older generation of archives, those documenting movements that now seem “past.” Cifor et al. highlight archivists’ perceptions of their work as activism or advocacy, and the value of timely response that independent archives might use to respond to contemporary political concerns in their communities (85). While the founding mothers of the GWMP are not formal archivists, they often partnered with GSU archivists and disciplinary scholars to see their collection grow and be used. They suggest such partnerships are also a way for institutional-based archivists to continue their stewardship of history in a way that supports their personal beliefs and activism. As the women most personally associated with the collection age or pass away, archivists are left with the challenge of keeping the women’s collections relevant to subsequent movements, scholars, and students.

Draper does not see it as finished, though she acknowledges that time is not on their side. There are still more women’s stories to collect from the era memorialized by the GWMP, especially those in rural communities whose work, challenges, and victories looked different from the Atlanta-based activists. Identifying herself as having grown up on South Georgia farmland, she notes the “number of women [who] stepped out in these communities during the women’s movement and risked their jobs, their marriages, their reputations, and paid great prices.” Before these women “who are my age, which is eighty, are no longer with us, I would like that they be sought out and their voices be recorded.”

Draper also notes the ways in which their collection has supported scholarship by researchers and students, but that there is an untapped market for this history in grade-school

education in the state. “I would like to encourage outreach into the community, particularly from the fifth to the twelfth grade, and develop curriculum and instruction models for the Georgia public and private schools, to encourage them to use these collections—particularly because so many of them are now online,” she said. In her view, it has never been easier to engage with the Georgia Women’s Movement Project, across learning level or purpose, and thus, the collection stands to remain relevant and can take its place within Georgia’s twentieth-century history.

### **5.5 Parting Thoughts on Building an Archives**

When I do historical work, I’m often reminded of the metaphor Stephen King describes in his memoir *On Writing*, that all writing is a form of telepathy. No matter when he sits down to write the words, I receive them—whether a year or thirty years later. There were moments engaging with the women whose voices and stories live on in the GWMP where such work felt like telepathy— that, from Beth Schapiro in 1995 to Jessie McCrary in 2023, with twenty-seven years in between, we are in tune. In her oral history recording, Shapiro expresses her excitement for the archival project:

I’m delighted that Georgia State’s doing this project. I can’t wait to hear or see the results of it. I think that a lot of good things happened here in the seventies and eighties. There were a lot of good people involved who’ve gone on to do other things, either within the movement or in the larger community, and I think it’s great that the stories will be captured so that maybe fifty years from now, when there’s a female governor of Georgia and the legislature is female dominated and half of the constitutional officers are women, people listen to these tapes and go, “What were these people talking about? What was the problem here?” [laughter] Maybe they’ll understand that things were significantly

different in the latter half of the twentieth century — that things are significantly different now than I hope that they'll be in the future.

As a scholar and a human being in 2023, I feel a host of complex emotions on the receiving end of the telepathy. How am I at once in-tune with the sentiments and experiences of the women I've spent months engaging with, while also feeling the weight and weariness of the years of social and political context in between us? Feminism feels like an essential movement, its goals having somehow regressed by 2023 when we consider the attacks from judicial and legislative groups at state and federal levels on the bodily and health autonomy of women, women-identifying, and trans people. Feminism feels both worth fighting for and long expired, replaced with something that necessarily addresses class and race as facets of oppression, and issues like education, poverty, incarceration, and police violence as critical to the movement (Kendall). How do I navigate understanding these women and their experiences on a visceral level alongside my frustrations with the limits of their actions (some of which were limited beyond what they could control)? How do (or would) they feel about feminism *now*? Indeed, how do I feel about it? My vacillating commitment to and ambivalence for feminism in its evolutions over the past 150 years informs my findings (and the questions I ask) and what I observe to be valuable and achievable in the present. I expect some of the narrators' intention was for me to sit with the past and present, perhaps including discomfort and uncertainty.

Part of my initial concept for this project was to ask some of them, the ones still living willing to speak with me, some of these questions. Based on the sage guidance of my committee, that endeavor lay too far outside the manageable scope for this project. Many of the GWMP Founding Mothers are in their eighties and nineties now, with health and memory ailments that made access to them even more limited and impossible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite



project and global pandemic limits, I had the honor of meeting Margaret Curtis in January 2023. I sat with her, her husband, and GSU archivist Morna Gerard in the Curtis's living room in Cobb County, Georgia, and chatted about the grandchildren, their family business, and the time Chattahoochee River flooded and damaged the entire first floor of the house. Her granddaughter had read or heard that having a pet was a highly effective way for older women to stay active, and now their young cat ruled their household, they laughed. Curtis had suffered a stroke the year before, and it affected her memory. When I asked, among the other chatter, about the women's movement and how much I had enjoyed learning about all her activities—with the People of Faith for ERA and writing hundreds of letters to the editor—her response was cloudy, uncertain. She noted how proud she was of the work she had done and its impact on her children and grandchildren, as more of an impression than a memory. She has earned that; she owes me nothing more. I left feeling immensely thankful for the labor of those who formed and contributed to the GWMP, where her story and experiences endure.

The Georgia Women's Movement Project (GWMP) archives remains both a place for historical interpretation and for engaging archival collections documenting activist movements in the decades after the key years of the ERA political battle. Such work is possible thanks to a robust partnership between GSU's special collections archivists and the women who continue to expand these community archives. The feminist shifts happening in archival practice, as well as the historical growth in community archives formation, are important overlays to fully understanding the rhetorical agency of the women who formed the GWMP.

"Feminist women in the mid-to-late twentieth century needs more attention," Jamie White-Farnham reminds us ("Unremarking"). Much work remains to understand this era of our history for the rhetorical agency of its actors, for which this project is one small contribution. By

narrating, via FRM and the voices of three key founding mothers, the formation of the GWMP and its oral history project, we gain insight into the rhetorical acts of remembrances enacted to historicize a movement. Feminist rhetorical microhistory allowed for a deep, close listen to Janet Paulk's highly intentional narrative as well as her role in many others' narratives. We see her propensity for historicizing events, even sometimes while she was still living through them, and her retrospectively speaking of key moments in her life that facilitated her worldview. As I have introduced in previous chapters, this retrospective way of speaking is characteristic of oral history and engages the idea that how one *feels* about experiences and events in their past can be just as important for understanding history as the factual documentation of events. In other words, the rhetorical act of oral history is concerned with the interpretation and contextualization of individual lived experiences. As I theorized in the first chapter, oral history is a valuable space for this kind of study, and for the application of FRM, because of the highly subjective, interpretive nature of the form as a primary source. The very subjectivity that has led to its critique as somehow less useful to historical record is a strength for scholars in the history of rhetoric and feminist scholars engaged in archival sources.

Additionally, as this chapter has engaged, the archival turn in both feminist theory and rhetoric and composition has opened considerable avenues for us to engage with historical sources, and their rhetorical means and nature, than ever before. This chapter suggests that given the expanded potential, we must consider the gaps and oversights that still plague archives, both in our methods and in what is collected and for whom. It comes down to this: because archives cannot be neutral, there will always be bias, voices missing, questions not asked, and experiences not captured. Recognizing this and choosing to listen, to push, and to question, provides us space for new knowledge, to better understand the rhetorical agency present in archival collections—

and just how rhetorical the selection of materials and memories for the historical record can be. The premise of this study has been to better understand, via a methodology that might help us better engage with archival texts, feminism in its evolving and complex forms.

## 6 AT THE WATER'S EDGE: IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Across this project, I have centered the voices of twelve women to narrate the events and the *meaning* of those events and experiences. I aimed both to complicate existing historical narratives and to illustrate how oral history is a rhetorical act both in means and method. As a means for positioning oneself in history, oral history is performative, and impossible to separate from memory. As a method for collecting and interpreting history, oral history is based in personal and communal experiences that allow for more voices to speak from the depths of the past—and thus is more equitable and feminist, though not without fault. As a source, “archived oral histories can contribute to our understanding of the shifting and contested meanings of gender equality and women’s rights over the course of the twentieth century,” as Ruth Percy notes (313). Indeed, as the Georgia Women’s Movement Project (GWMP) narrators and I have shown across this study, their perspective and experience of the events of the Equal Rights Amendment battle, in a major city in the U.S. South adds important complexity to a historical period they were deeply concerned would not be accurately interpreted without their voices.

The historical and personal weight of the narratives that are part of the GWMP oral history collection became, through their recording, “monuments to the personal acts of making history” (Rogers 182). As Kim Lacy Rogers observed in her analysis of collecting oral histories of civil rights activists in New Orleans, “they defined and understood their personal experience as history itself. Their stories became works of art that validated or invalidated the years that had intervened between act and memory” (182). Across this project, I have centered the intention and exigency of the collection’s creators and those subjects whose stories are preserved therein. The more I listened, the clearer my observation that in the act of recording an oral history, the narrators were defining themselves within history. They *understood their personal experience as*

*history itself and* were very aware of the pattern of erasure of women's experiences in history up to their present. Thus, recording an oral history was a conscious part of redressing that, an act of defiance even one step further than the collection of written material that would become part of the larger Georgia Women's Movement archives.

As this research has shown, it is impossible in any engagement with the past but especially in recording an oral history, to disregard the influence of current realities in which we stand. Michael Frisch recognizes this in his analysis of oral histories about the Great Depression in the 1930s. He notes how "contemporary pressures and sensitivities encourage people to screen their memories in a selective, protective, and above all didactic fashion" (12). He notes how individual experiences set against structural failures seemed to form a "self-validating message and a culturally validating legacy," that "the 'real' history ha[d] thus been doubly filtered by time and subsequent experience before it reaches [the tape recorder]" (12). Returning to this essay a decade after having first read it, I was struck by Frisch's suggestion that oral history interviews, then, can be studied for far more than what they reveal about historical events; they can be studied "for insights into the cultural and historical processes" that form history itself (12). In other words, we can study oral history as a rhetorical act as there is to learn from the medium both about individuals' experience of historic events and how we understand and contextualize things that we experience across lifetimes.

This project centered the relationship between the remembrance and meaning of historical events as narrated by regular people and suggests that, via feminist rhetorical microhistory and other possible methodological approaches, we can continue complicating the rhetorical agency of women past and present. With their actions during the movement, and in their words two decades later, the narrators of the GWMP oral history project had specific

rhetorical goals, which the chapters of this project outline: 1) they sought to “set the record straight” by discussing their activities and experiences of trying to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in Georgia; 2) they recorded oral history as a rhetorical act of resistance against historical and archival narrative that would either misinterpret or exclude them; and 3) they extended their activism work in the 1990s to build an archives where they could achieve and store for posterity the previous goals.

Their efforts are part of a larger commitment “to ‘research by, about, and for women,’ [toward] the concept that women’s experiences could be legitimated by listening to their stories” and is one component of the “ongoing project of feminist scholarship” (Abrams 81). Historian Judith M. Bennett is a contemporary of many of the women included in the GWMP and has remained confident since the days of 1970s women’s movement activism that “history provides feminist activists and theorists with long-term perspectives essential to building a better long-term future” (4). As I illustrated in the previous chapter, the “Founding Mothers” shared this goal of a better long-term future, based on understanding and learning from the past and continuing to advocate for a more equitable feminist future.

Lucy Draper and Janet Paulk (and the rest of the Founding Mothers to varying degrees) had very specific ideas about how important it was to collect and remember their and others’ experience in recognition that they participated in a historic movement that would be mischaracterized. Their motivation and determination, precisely because of how they had been mischaracterized in history and in how third-wave feminists responded to their work, illustrates the continued importance of collective archives of activist movements as a direct response *to* and critique *of* the way history comports itself as a singular narrative, based on the stories told by “the winners.” Their prescience is important resistance because the media tells the stories of

victors, and while they failed, their failure was not simply or categorically a *loss*, as I have shown.

The GWMP ends up being revolutionary not only because of how it was collected and who participated in it (though it was not as revolutionary as it could have been in the limited Black voices, and exclusion of queer women) but because of its reach, and the ability it provides to encourage empathy with the women remembered in it across time. Their relative privilege within historical time was also critical to their victorious work *collecting* their lived experiences during a significant moment in feminist history. As the narratives shared throughout this study show, the GWMP women understood the meaning of their work immediately upon wrapping the work of ERA feminism (and in many cases pivoting to aligned work), *and* those sentiments had intensified in the decades afterward as they lived to see the consequences of being mischaracterized only one generation later. This is a notable collective experience, as many groups who would also see their legacies and actions play out as time progressed lacked the relative privilege and thus were not as visible or able to capture the national attention as white, middle-class women were in the 1970s and 1980s (and subsequently). Despite that, the media dictates what is publicly remembered, and they were not remembered well, as evidenced by third-wave response. These elements comprise a sort of historical kairotic moment that led to the formation of the Georgia Women's Movement Project and leave me with many more questions for projects yet to come.

### **6.1 Considerations for future study and limits to this study**

Even with this project's considerable length, there are whole themes I engaged in a section of a chapter that merit further and larger study. For example, I did not have sufficient room in this project to thoroughly engage the history of 1990s feminism and the influences and

distinctions compared to the GWMP generation. “What is different about the *archived* collections in a project such as this is the distance afforded to the listener or reader,” Ruth Percy reminds us in her work on an oral history collection of activist women ostensibly from the “first wave” who felt deeply conflicted about the term “feminism” (318). “In effect, we can use them to write the history of two different periods, the one being asked about and the one in which the interviews were conducted, with the benefit of hindsight and greater awareness of bias that distance can bring” (318). The distinctions across eras of feminist movements remains a rich location for further work, and the oral and written histories contained in the GWMP archives are valuable source material for a lengthier analysis.

Percy’s statement on hindsight and biases also illustrates the tension that researcher subjectivity presents when applying any feminist rhetorical practice, but especially FRM. From my position in 2023, I have an awareness of the faults that proved fatal to the organizing power of white women interested solely in the issue of equality for women at the expense of so many other social justice problems “feminism” comprises today. The trappings of class and race in the U.S. South impeded their ability for long-term success; on top of that, the “family values” perspectives informed by a heavily evangelical Christian cultural context, and the entrenched “good ol’ boys” culture of the state legislature further inhibited their efforts. It is easy to sit in the present and judge the past, to judge actors in history by the standards we hold today. To resist this and to instead listen deeply for what we might learn and understand about social justice movements and activism is the harder and more rewarding project. These influences had massive impact on how women’s movements have been able to succeed and fail in the South and each of these merit further consideration in future projects. Feminist rhetorical microhistory is one useful



methodology for engaging the additional complexities and reinterpretations still untold in the history and rhetorical understanding of feminist movements.

Another consideration that leads to further study is my choice in this project to limit the corpus voices to “Founding Mothers” associated with the GWMP archives and oral history collections. The full chorus of voices in the oral history collection (not to mention those in the Activist Women collection also housed at Georgia State University Archives and Special Collections) would illuminate additional experiences of the women’s movement and interpretations of those experiences over time. Lynn Abrams’s work in “Talking about feminism: Reconciling fragmented narratives with the feminist research frame” provides fruitful consideration for expanding the research begun in this study toward such questions. She writes about interviewing women with varying relationships to the second wave feminism they lived through in the United Kingdom, and specifically how a question that came late in her list (and late in the interview) seemed to derail the momentum of the narrator, often leading to disjointed and “fragmented” answers. These responses caught her by surprise, as up to that point the interview subjects had “told life stories that easily fit a feminist frame of female advancement and independent choice,” yet “so many of [her] narrators flounder[ed] when asked to recall the advent of feminism in Britain” (88). As she notes, the “intersubjectivities” in the interview might help explain the disjoint: “These women knew I was a senior female academic researching women’s history; some knew me personally and may have ascribed to me certain feminist beliefs or presumptions about what constitutes feminism” (88). Paired with the proclivity, especially among women, she notes, for narrators to hope to please their interviewers (also observed by Heather Brook Adams), and it is clear the influence the interviewer has. That question occupied only a small portion of the present study, since many GWMP subjects held an in-community

identity and had known and worked with one another in multiple capacities during their time advocating for the ERA and in other concurrent and subsequent efforts. Because the subjects narrating this study were either founders or heavily involved/identified with feminism in the women's movement in Georgia, I did not prioritize the subjects' relationship to the term feminism angle on the oral history collection. However, it is possible that for many of the interviews included in the collection that go beyond the founders, the assumed motives of the interviewer and the larger stated intentions of the oral history collection (to remember the women's movement in Georgia and historicize feminist activity) may have played a large role in *which* experiences narrators chose to center and discuss, and likely informed *how* they characterized those experiences. Just as Abrams notes the "presumptions" her interview subjects may have been bringing about "what constitutes feminism," (88) further research on this collection could investigate similar tendencies by narrators in the GWMP.

Another question worth further investigation is the relationship of relatively privileged women to archival collections, since even while they deemed their perspective marginalized in accounts of the women's movement, they established and held enough cultural capital to *form* an archival collection in partnership with a major state university. The editors and contributors to the recent *Unsettling Archival Research* remind us that archives have never been neutral locations for collecting the historical records but have long maintained dominance in selection, arrangement, and even interpretation. Archives "involve knowledge production, and hence, involve the literacies, images, and rhetorics of power" (Garcia et al. 7). Thus, "unsettling" the archives is both an ethos and practice, they note, and calls on those of us working in these locations to consider deeply not only the formation of archival collections but of the institutions that house them, institutions responsible for "wounds and hauntings" that inform the present (6).

We have an obligation to bear witness to the full weight institutional power has on its recorded documentation of our histories. The relative race and class privilege of the Founding Mothers afforded their community-based archives more potential from the start, and their decisions to partner with a large, well-established research university in a major metropolitan city ensured long-term funding and support, accessibility to many, and a perceived audience far beyond their in-community. These factors have made the collection and its impact more profound and sustainable and exist alongside institutional power that has long preferred the value system of white, male, European (colonizer), heteronormative education leaders. As I will discuss next, one of the limits of FRM has been the questions left on the table, as I share the narrative with the women of the GWMP, about the power structures they benefited from to have their experience of the women's movement included in archival record at the omission of many others who also lived through the movement and perhaps *did not* see as much relative success and advancement.

A limit to this study has been the narrow set of voices it privileges to discuss feminism as a concept and location for activism, including women's vastly different relationships to the term. Lynn Abrams highlights how the very difference in definition and relationship to the term feminism has implications for intergenerational research, including oral history. "Given the recent outpouring of research on feminist activism, which tends to privilege the voices of those who can clearly situate themselves within the organized movement, opening up a discussion about the meaning of feminism to those who watched it from the sidelines is both timely and important," she writes in "Talking about feminism" (81). She reveals that her mentioning wider activities related to second-wave feminism late in oral history interviews with women sometimes had the effect of shutting down life narratives that up until that question had been "coherent, self-realizing" narrations of their often implicitly feminist-informed experiences (82). While Abrams

as an oral history practitioner notes the importance of her positionality as a feminist researcher-scholar informing the way in which narrators interpreted her question, her ruminations point to a larger gap in scholarship: a full, complicated interpretation of feminism over time. In this work, I kept an intentionally close focus on the group of women positioning themselves via the rhetorical agency of oral history into a specific location and chapter within the history of women's movements and feminism.

There is far more work to be done to collect and engage with voices of many who identify as women but who have very different relationships to the concept and history of feminism. Further research includes focus on those who opposed many of the policies and platforms during the second wave movement, as well as those in the previous generations that dismissed feminism as too limiting to their cause (notably women who fought hard for women's labor protections as they cried "we are laborers too"—suggesting intersectionality far before the term was coined), and those for whom the term has long been exclusionary (Black women, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous women, as well as trans and nonbinary folk).

## **6.2 What can (and can't) we do with feminist rhetorical microhistory?**

Across the chapters of this study, I have highlighted the possibilities for understanding and knowledge if we engage in deep listening. This is not easy work, as Krista Ratcliffe and Lisa Blankenship have acknowledged via their theories of rhetorical listening and rhetorical empathy (respectively), and which has been confirmed by scholars applying those practices (Glenn and Ratcliffe; Ratcliffe and Jensen). The triad of microhistory, feminist archival methods, and feminist rhetorical theory helped me see "historical figures and events" in full complexity. These frameworks, which I synthesized to renegotiate the scholar-subject, subject-audience relationship, to further complicate historical narratives. Early in my listening, the narrators'

efforts to reimagine failure were striking, especially to reconsider what one “failed” goal still achieved in a larger context of the larger ERA historical narrative; this seemed to suggest FRM was working to complicate success and failure. Relying on practices from all three fields that FRM, I observed events and decisions in the women’s movement in Georgia that allowed for a restored complexity of what it was like for a group of women living through national events in a regionally specific and contingent context. As I listened, I also observed a pattern of stories that dismantles narratives that ascribe “heroism” as synonymous with “exceptional,” which results in many regular people involved in the work of social justice movements being falsely lionized as something more than “the rest of us,” to dangerous precedent. Sarah Schulman’s oral history collecting and historical interpretation of ACT UP HIV/AIDS activism in New York suggests this humanity, as well as what we might better understand about and achieve in today’s ongoing social justice movements. She notes:

“When we evaluate how we have spent our lives, we have to look at our cumulative impact, not at the moments of failure or bad faith. Assessing this history is not a game of call-out. Instead, it is an effort to really understand and make clear how the AIDS rebellion succeeded, and to face where it failed, in order to be more conscious and deliberate, and therefore effective, today” (36).

These interruptions are the ones I hope readers will take away from this work, long after they have finished reading. I also hope others will take up the methodology I have theorized, applying it to other archival collections, oral history collections, and historical contexts.

What else can we do with FRM?

I think, as Krista Ratcliffe suggests about rhetorical listening, we can listen with an undivided *logos*, “not simply for what we can agree with or challenge” but “with an ethical

responsibility for what we deem fair and just while questioning that which we deem fair and just” (25). A full, restored *logos* necessarily includes the listening half often neglected in favor of speaking, and within this “more inclusive *logos* lies potential for personal and social justice,” she suggests. It might even allow for invention that “brings difference together, for hearing differences as harmony or even as discordant notes.” Rhetorical listening provides opportunity for the listener’s agency as well, for their capacity and willingness to listen. Issues of personal and social justice, or fairness and justice and what those mean in our present and future realities, are important considerations for scholars and activists (and scholar-activists). To that end, I hope feminist rhetorical microhistory extends the proposed work of rhetorical listening, to historical and archival texts, and to those documenting social movements throughout time and place.

Feminist rhetorical microhistory allowed space for multiple, variable remembrances of the women’s movement in Georgia, and I have tried to apply it in these pages in a way that respects and demonstrates the language practices of the GWMP oral history narrators and the Founding Mothers. Royster’s call to action in her groundbreaking Afrofeminist approach to literary practices of Black women in the nineteenth century U.S., remains a centering call of the work I have done here: the agency apparent in the women’s stories she recovers in *Traces of a Stream* suggest that, “in order to be generative in our interpretations of contemporary language practices, we need analytical models of discourse that are flexible enough to see the variability of the participants and their worlds, to draw meaning from the shifting contours of rhetorical negotiation across and within material relationships, and to imagine the possibility of building bridges” (284). FRM is another possible model of discourse that may be applied to archival texts to elucidate such meaning from the “shifting contours” of memory and historiography.

By adding microhistory to feminist rhetorical practices that center openness and listening, empathy and suspension of judgement, feminist rhetorical microhistory invites further discovery and insight from the archival collections we engage in rhetorical history research. Both the attention to shifting scopic levels and the renegotiation of the scholar-subject relationship advance feminist rhetorical recovery work, identifying layers and highlighting gaps in our knowledge of what is going on in the specific time (or location) being examined. As I have noted, suspension of judgement during the practice of deep listening does not preclude critical engagement with the limitations, mistakes, and biases of the subjects we study using FRM; however, FRM provides us the time and patience to sit with discomfort and disagreement so that we can arrive at a fuller understanding of another's experience. Insight drawn from individuals whose biases and cultural contexts differ from our own is valuable, and possible when we do not gloss over or downplay those parts of their experience that we are critical of or even find abhorrent.

In many potential future studies by feminist rhetorical scholars engaging archival collections and voices from the past, racism and homophobia will be present. As Patricia Wilde suggests, and FRM embraces, the "troubling entanglements" (306) we encounter make the work that much more complex, compelling, and significant to understanding and working through our present social context. Further research in archival collections engaging FRM will continue to complicate the recovery work that is evolving within rhetorical, historical, and archival scholarship.

### **6.3 Connections to contemporary feminist activism and advocacy**

The exigencies that drove the GWMP Founding Mothers to document their work in the women's movement continued in the 1990s when they recorded their retrospective thoughts.

From our vantage point today, their work and the motivation behind it continue to be of utmost importance, and how much work we still have left validates their labor to leave behind such detailed, intentional record of the events they lived through and the actions they took (and didn't take) throughout their lifetimes.

Mentions of the "heartbeat bills" of the late 90s, which advocated for further legal limitations on how late into a pregnancy an abortion can be performed, feel quaint compared to our present reality, with the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022. "Laws can be changed, that's why we need the Equal Rights Amendment," Paulk said in her interview, even decades later, such legislation is believed by some to codify the bodily autonomy of women (and everyone else) as sex would become a protected class in the Constitution (Kelly). Paulk saw this as a continued critical issue for freedom and equality. We must "[keep] our gains from eroding. For example, women's rights to own their own bodies and have reproductive freedoms, we have to keep the fort up on that one, because the religious conservative element, including our present president, President George Bush, are trying to erode that liberty and that right," she said.

Dorothy Gibson-Ferry appeals to the existent poverty and continued lack of access experienced by so many women in the 1990s, echoing Black women's calls for a fully realized feminism that includes acknowledging and combatting the racist and classist structures that continue to impede so many (women, but also people). "I don't think [the women's movement is] over, at all, we have to keep on pushing toward better lives for a lot of women," Gibson-Ferry said. "There's always more to do and more goals to reach, and we need to figure out, as I say, the lives of some of the young women in this country, [are] just so mired in poverty and degradation. We need to think what we can do for women in those kinds of situations."



In my opening pages, I noted the thematic connections that arose from my close listening regarding the mobilization of women for the ERA in the wake of President Ronald Reagan's election and the resurgence of feminist activism after the 2016 election of President Donald Trump. The Women's March on Washington in January 2017 is largely seen as a reinvigoration of the ongoing women's movement (the GSU Archives and Special Collections includes this march within its current collections policy for the Activist Women archival collection, including oral history). "The day after the election for Ronald Reagan [...] the phone rang off the hook with people wanting to volunteer for ERA Georgia," Sue Millen recalled. She continues:

"You wanted to say, well, where were you guys about two years ago when we really needed you to get organized and stuff? But we were happy to have them, and we thought that that kind of momentum might actually help push us over, might be the best thing that happened because women suddenly who had supported ERA said, 'Wait a minute. It doesn't look like this is going to pass unless I personally do something.' And there is always that philosophy [of] 'Let somebody else do that. You know, I support it, but I don't have time for that,' and Ronald Reagan's election did bring in a while new slew of volunteers, and that was a positive [thing]. ... Women all across the state started being irate. They were irate. We formed eight local caucuses within the next two years [...] and in Georgia, that's saying a lot."

Millen saw this surge of interest and energy as part of what allowed them to form the Georgia Women's Political Caucus that would lead to so many of the successes achieved in the wake of the eventual failure of the ERA.

Similarly, Mary Long felt the women's movement was over with the start of the Reagan presidency, until she realized they had just changed tactic to affect change through different

means. “During his era, and just before, some of us became involved in a lot of other things and issues,” Long said. “If [we] couldn’t control the women’s issues, then we looked at ways of joining boards to make a difference in what went on. I joined all sorts of boards and served on County Commission boards. I would [hold] a number of appointments [made] by the Governor, which had never, ever, ever before been held by women. Sometimes I was the first African American and [first] woman to serve on many boards – everything from [...] the Governor’s Council on Children, to the Governor’s Board of Architecture.” There was a lot of concern for why women were in these groups. “Why should I NOT be there? They NEED women there.” Long recalled, quoting herself responding to their challenge.

When hard-earned rights were under threat, she saw how in fact the movement was not over; it had evolved but its exigencies remained. “We became active again ... I saw African Americans coming [out to take action] ... and we laugh about it, but it was not funny. But out of desperation we change our thinking and our roots, and change how we do business, and fear will do that for you,” Long noted.

During the Reagan presidency, Linda Kurtz found her activism returning full circle to the reproductive rights cause that had initiated her work in the women’s movement in college in the late 1960s; she was working as director for governmental affairs for Planned Parenthood in Atlanta. She was doing education and advocacy work at the grassroots level, the thing that felt for her like the key to understanding the reproductive rights battle and how to make progress toward impactful change. This work “was smack dab in the middle of Reagan’s constant assault on reproductive freedom. And it was like—I remember—we would come into the office in the morning and say to each other, ‘What kinds of devious things have they thought up -- [the night

before] to try to undermine women's reproductive freedom?' Because it was this kind of constant battles to just maintain what we had [achieved].”

Long, Millen, and Kurtz’s statements feel as prescient and applicable to 2016 when many assumed there was no way a misogynist, racist man with no apparent political experience could defeat a woman for the U.S. presidency. Many woke up in November 2016 to recognize that liberties long-ago fought for could erode and that collective action toward justice *requires continued vigilance of ordinary people*. The GWMP narrators understood this from their experience in the twentieth century, and their concern for the future drove the archives at the center of this study and is affirmed throughout the stories told across this study.

As we see civil and human rights for women, queer, and people of color being limited through legislation in and beyond the U.S. South and through the Supreme Court’s reversal of more than fifty years of precedent, the exigencies of the GWMP and other archival collections aimed at documenting social justice movements become important locations for scholarly research and activist work. As critical and feminist archival studies scholars have suggested, archives can be transformative spaces, rejecting dominant narratives by acknowledging their non-neutral status and engaging consciously with communities in the struggle for racial and social justice (Caswell et al. “Imagining”; Cifor et al., and Caswell et al. “Critical”). For scholars in rhetoric and composition, feminist rhetorical microhistory allows us to engage with aspects of its three informing disciplines at a critical intersection, where we can push the important recovery work of rhetorical history even further. Research that invites empathy and renegotiation between scholar and subject, subject and real/imagined audience, and acknowledges present social justice battles that continue to plague our communities and those we work in solidarity alongside ensures we are doing the “unsettling” work to continue to counter traditional structures

of recording history and the flattened narratives those structures reinforce. As I have shown in just one limited example of the power of community archives, scholarly and archival practice that engages our communities, that seeks restorative rhetorical and historical documentation, provides “space where communities are empowered to craft their own arguments about the past and the future” and are “instrumental in shaping the future” (Prince 63).

From our location in 2023 it is easy to question the value of past activists’ failures and oversights, when we have so much work still to do in correcting the inequities of the present. But as the women of the GWMP note, the social justice work requires diligence, constant vigilance, and coalition. There is much we can learn about how to do the work required of us today, scholarly and activist, community-driven and urgent, by listening to the voices of those who have tried, succeeded, and failed before us.

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