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The Quiet Feminism of Phi Mu, Mu Chapter: Archival Demonstrations
of a Sorority Creed

by

Marian Russell

Under the Direction of Lynée Lewis Gaillet, PhD

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

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the unprocessed archives of Phi Mu, Mu chapter at Brenau University. The chapter's roots reflect a quiet, positive feminism expressed through the rhetoric of the Phi Mu Creed. The growing number of chapters and rising recruitment rates have increased sororities' significance across the United States. However, sorority rhetoric has shifted from its traditional roots, as many campuses now emphasize "new woman" values. This thesis analyzes the "new-true woman" rhetoric in the Phi Mu Creed through archival study of its oldest chapter, treating the creed as a material rhetorical artifact. I apply a feminist lens grounded in critical imagination, rhetorical listening, and strategic contemplation of positionality. This research values the traditional elements of sorority history and rhetoric while advocating for positive change among future members by examining the enduring power of ritualistic messages.

INDEX WORDS: Sorority rhetoric, Quiet Feminism, Creeds, New True Woman Values

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2025

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of a Sorority Creed

by

Marian Russell

Committee Chair: Lynée Lewis Gaillet

Committee: Elizabeth Lopez

George Pullman

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

August 2025

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mom and sisters, Ava and Kyla, who have always supported my dreams and pushed me to reach the highest limits, even if they seem impossible. I would also like to dedicate this to my proud sisterhood, Phi Mu, Mu chapter, at Brenau University, and my sorority family, the Phabulous Pham. “We are pink and white, we are dynamite!”

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I would like to thank my committee chair, Lynée Gaillet, for what this project has become. Never could I imagine that I would be able to explore my passion in my discipline. Furthermore, I'd like to thank Dr. Lopez and Dr. Pullman for being encouraging guides who supported my ambitious project

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1 INTRODUCTION: THE MU CHAPTER ARCHIVE

“Thus keeping true to the meaning spirit and reality of Phi Mu”- The Phi Mu Creed.

A sorority’s Creed is a “uniting statement” used to open rituals and formal meetings (“About Us”). As forms of “epideictic rhetoric in action” (Hogg, *White Sororities* 44), creeds prompt members to reflect on core values before engaging in activities that shape their public image. Phi Mu’s Creed blends both “new” and “true” woman values, emphasizing traits like gentleness, mercy, honor, and courtesy. Feminist researchers Nancy Meyers and Kristy Crawley first created the term the new-true woman, blending ideals of true womanhood and the new woman: a womanhood which “serves the public as well as strives to perform meaningful work. Laboring within a domesticated workspace, she solidifies her connection to domesticity while engaging in meaningful work [in the public sphere]” (Crawley 2).

Home of the Phi Mu Creed is the Gainesville chapter at Brenau University, Mu. Mu Chapter at Brenau University is the oldest active Phi Mu chapter, with its history preserved in private archives housed in a small storage unit (“Greek Life”). These archives contain trophies, scrapbooks, and member-created drawings spanning 95 years. A 1930s scrapbook includes photographs, invitations to showers and campus events, and newspaper clippings of members’ accomplishments. This material reflects a chapter proud of its traditions and committed to the values expressed in the Phi Mu Creed.

To draw connections between the Phi Mu Creed and the scrapbook’s material rhetoric, I use strategic contemplation and critical imagination. These methods “enable and enhance the quality of thinking processes” and invite scholars to engage more fully in reflective, imaginative inquiry (Royster and Kirsch 1172). Strategic contemplation involves “engaging in a dialogue... with the women who are our rhetorical subjects... to understand their words, their visions, their priorities”

(346). Critical imagination, meanwhile, questions “what is there and not there, and [speculates] about what could be there instead” (321). Together, these strategies consider intellectual inferences and presentism to better understand the motives of these women and how their rhetoric shaped their presence both publicly and privately.

From my research findings, I approach these women as examples of quiet feminists—those who enacted change through everyday actions within a patriarchal society (Jung and Moon). The rhetoric of the Phi Mu Creed and related archival materials does not reflect overt feminism as traditionally defined; it avoids direct critiques of patriarchal systems. Yet these women recognized that “‘ongoing injustices require feminist rhetorical action’ in multiple arenas and in different forms” (Gaillet, “The Collectors” 37). They navigated both the domestic and public spheres, seeking to justify their presence beyond the home through campus and community involvement.

Today, the Phi Mu Creed is contested in light of its increasingly diverse sisterhood. This thesis profiles early members of Phi Mu’s Mu Chapter not merely as products of their time, but as agentic figures within the Southern Bible Belt and on a women’s college campus. Rhetorical artifacts, like the Phi Mu Creed and memorial objects like the scrapbook, function as tools for promoting women’s autonomy.

1.1 Background of the Organization

Phi Mu Fraternity was founded in 1852 at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, making it the second-oldest women’s fraternity in the United States, after Alpha Delta Pi. Its founders—Mary Ann DuPoint Lines, Mary Elizabeth Myrick, and Martha Bibb Hardaway Redding—were undergraduate students who first named the organization the Wesleyan Philomathean Society. Mary Ann DuPoint Lines, the society’s originator, roomed with ADPi founder Eugenia Tucker

Fitzgerald. Their close friendship was marked by competition, and DuPoint Lines sought to rival Fitzgerald's success by forming an exclusive society of her own ("Founding of the Philomathean Society...").

Remarkably, these founders were teenagers—Mary Elizabeth Myrick Daniel, the eldest, was only sixteen at the time (Myrick Daniels). Within their first year, the society's members drafted a constitution, designed an initiation ceremony, and adopted both secret and public mottos ("Founding of the Philomathean Society..."). To signify membership, they created a badge: a blue ribbon tied and worn over the heart. While this ribbon was eventually replaced with the iconic metal emblem featuring the quatrefoil, the symbol's meaning remains known only to members. The quatrefoil, resembling a four-petaled flower, bears the Phi Mu coat of arms, designed in 1904 by Wesleyan chapter members Annie Laurie Mallory Parker and Louise Monning Elliott ("About Us"). It features two lions supporting a red shield, along with the Latin motto *Les Soeurs Fideles*—"The Faithful Sisters."

These visual symbols represent the organization's founding values: love, honor, and truth. These ideals are most fully expressed in the Phi Mu Creed, considered the living embodiment of the sorority's mission. Adopted at the 1916 national convention, Mu Chapter alumna and socialist writer Grace Lumpkin wrote the Phi Mu Creed ("About Us"). It is as follows:

To lend to those less fortunate a helping hand,

To think of God as a protector and guide of us all,

To keep forever sacred the memory of those we have loved and lost,

To be to others what we would, they would be to us,

To keep our lives gentle, merciful and just,
 thus being true to the womanhood of love.

To walk in the way of honor, guarding the purity of our thoughts and deeds,
 Being steadfast in every duty, small or large,
 Believing that our given word is binding,
 Striving to esteem the inner man above culture, wealth or pedigree,
 Being honorable, courteous, tender,
 thus being true to the womanhood of honor.

To serve in the light of truth, avoiding egotism, narrowness and scorn,
 To give freely of our sympathies,
 To reverence God as our Maker, striving to serve Him in all things,
 To minister to the needy and unfortunate,
 To practice day by day love, honor, truth,
 Thus keeping true to the meaning, spirit and reality of Phi Mu. (“About Us.”)

Its language emphasizes sisterhood, moral character, and Christian-inflected ideals of womanhood. Each of the Creed’s 18 lines begins with an action verb or participial phrase—“to lend,” “to walk,” “reverencing”—that describes a mode of ethical and social conduct. Structured in three stanzas, the Creed reflects the motto’s key virtues—love, honor, and truth—through specific calls to action. Notable lines include: “To lend to those less fortunate a helping hand,”

“To walk in the way of honor, guarding the purity of our thoughts and deeds,” and “To reverence God as our maker, striving to serve Him in all things” (Phi Mu Fraternity, “About Us”).

These values are woven throughout the rhetoric of Phi Mu and can be seen in the archival materials of the Mu Chapter. Photographs and campus publications from the 1950s and 1960s show members in matching dresses and stylish bobs, actively participating in sorority life. Their representation of “ideal womanhood” at the time included excellence in beauty pageants, domestic life, and academic achievement within traditionally sanctioned fields. The Mu Chapter scrapbooks reinforce these ideals through baby shower invitations, wedding announcements, leadership recognitions, and honors for extracurricular involvement. In the later years of the scrapbook, Brenau and local newspapers praised the academic excellence of Phi Mu women who received the Dean’s list honor or those who explored male-dominated fields and extracurriculars, such as biology and swim respectively. These women served their communities in meaningful ways that reinforced their femininity as described in new-true womanhood, with one key example as the Y.W.C.A. charitable fashion show (see fig. 10). Through the unifying language of the Creed and these local practices, Phi Mu women pursued small-scale but meaningful change, creating a sisterhood that has endured across generations.

1.2 My Personal Experience

In 2020, my future big sister, Annabelle Lee, invited me to coffee. In sorority culture, a “big sister” is a collegiate member paired with a new member (“little”) to serve as a mentor and role model (Alyssa). This relationship often becomes the most formative bond within the chapter. With a wide smile, Annabelle handed me the sacred text many college women hope to receive: a signed bid from a National Panhellenic Sorority. Each chapter may extend only a

limited number of bids annually. Feeling chosen and accepted by my peers, I accepted without hesitation and joined a lifelong sisterhood.

Across the United States, Phi Mu is regarded as a prestigious sorority known for its deep history and tradition-centered rituals. Many sororities draw rhetorical power from these rituals; they create a sense of timeless belonging, connecting members to generations of women who came before them. During my active membership from 2020 to 2022, I regularly recited the Phi Mu Creed. In those moments, I felt a sacred bond stretching across time—an embodied connection to the women who once stood where I stood. I felt responsible for honoring these rituals and sustaining their sense of unity and legacy.

At the same time, I often felt inauthentic while reciting the Creed. I was an agnostic woman in a traditionally Christian organization, and I do not place courtesy or tenderness above other values I hold—like justice or directness in the face of disagreement. Still, I repeated the Creed, knowing that failure to memorize it before initiation could jeopardize my membership. I internalized the language, even when it didn't reflect my identity. As Will Penman notes, liturgical calls and responses can “[train] people to say yes... before they have a completely developed cognitive picture of [the text's] implications” (44). I gradually suppressed parts of myself to maintain my place in this community, presenting an idealized version of who I thought I needed to be.

I began to question my authenticity: Could I be a true Phi Mu woman if I didn't believe in God? Could I belong if I didn't always exemplify traits like gentleness or mercy, as the Creed demands (Phi Mu Fraternity, “About Us”)? And yet, I recited it in every meeting—loudly—just to look around and see my sisters doing the same. The shared words created a visceral sense of connection, regardless of belief. The power of the ritual didn't lie in agreement, but in unity.

This thesis emerges from that tension. It interrogates the rhetorical force of call-and-response practices—not just in sororities, but across organizations—and considers how they shape belonging, belief, and identity. The Phi Mu Creed, embedded in Mu Chapter history, reveals both the power and limits of these rituals. While many Phi Mu women continue to thrive in traditionally feminine spaces, others—past and present—have pushed against the narrow ideals of the “true woman” in the Creed. As the organization evolves, the Creed must also be reconsidered for its relevance in shaping a more inclusive sisterhood.

1.2.1 My Positionality

I was an active member of Phi Mu’s Mu Chapter at Brenau University from Spring 2020 to Spring 2022. Although the COVID-19 pandemic limited my experience of traditional sorority life, I participated fully in recruitment, ritual, and chapter activities, forging deep connections with my sisters. My sorority family remains one of my strongest support systems—I’ve since stood as a bridesmaid in several sisters’ weddings. My “twin” sister (a member who shares the same “big”) currently serves as an alumni coordinator and publicist for the Mu Chapter, a role that has greatly facilitated my access to Phi Mu’s private archives.

In *White Sororities and the Cultural Work of Belonging*, Hogg examines the immersive power of sorority life and how its rituals foster a lasting sense of identity and inclusion. Like researcher Charlotte Hogg, whose personal experience with Alpha Delta Pi informs her work on sorority rhetoric, I hold a close positionality to my subject. I, too, find that this immersion extends well beyond active membership. Years after graduation, I can feel a sense of connection when I meet another woman wearing the *Les Sœurs Fidèles* symbol, even if we attended different universities a decade apart.

This bond enhances my research. Because of my chapter affiliation, advisors have granted me privileged access to archival materials—including photographs, scrapbooks, and ceremonial objects—and I regularly consult current members for their insights. My identity as a Phi Mu alumna shapes my interpretation of the archives. Like the women who appear in these historical materials, I memorized the Creed, practiced the same rituals, and participated in the same sisterhood traditions. This lived experience allows me to more fully understand their rhetorical motivations, why they preserved particular moments, and how these artifacts reflect their values.

I approach these findings through a quiet feminist lens. The white, Christian women of the Mu Chapter did not engage in overt activism, but their daily practices subtly challenged norms by carving space for women's voices and agency within a patriarchal academic setting. Their ritual, rhetorical, and archival practices reflect a feminism rooted in continuity, belonging, and small but meaningful acts of resistance.

2 TRACING SISTERHOOD: FEMINIST METHODS AND LENSES

2.1 Literature Review

This research adopts a feminist lens that centers women within historical narratives—particularly those whose contributions have been overlooked or excluded. In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch propose two key methods for engaging feminist historical research: strategic contemplation and critical imagination. These practices urge scholars to move beyond surface-level documentation and instead speculate—ethically and rigorously—about the rhetorical intentions of women whose voices were not preserved in traditional records. As Royster and Kirsch write, this methodology “centers on being willing to go a step further to use a fuller spectrum of these critical resources in the scholarly production process” (1172). By applying these strategies, this project seeks to understand how Phi Mu women used ritual and material rhetoric to shape their presence in both public and private spheres.

2.1.1 *True v. New Woman*

To draw effective connections between the Phi Mu Creed and the material rhetoric of the Mu Chapter scrapbooks, I conducted a stylistic and ideological analysis of the Creed’s language. Composition scholar Kristy Crawley categorizes 20th century womanhood ideals under three types: the “new” woman, who pursued personal and professional ambition in the public sphere; the “true” woman, who remained devoted to the domestic sphere; and the “new true” woman, who sought a socially acceptable balance between these two poles.

Sorority women of the early 1900s—particularly those in white, upper-middle-class spaces—frequently navigated this “middle ground.” As Diana Turk observes, these women diverged from the Victorian ideal of “true womanhood,” which reinforced the doctrine of

separate spheres for men and women. Instead, sorority members “effectively redefined for themselves the feminine ideal, broadening it to include intellectual capacity along with the more socially accepted traits of morality and social grace” (Turk 35). These shifts were not radical rejections of femininity but rather strategic negotiations. To claim space in coeducational institutions, women had to justify their academic pursuits by maintaining elements of traditional womanhood.

Charlotte Hogg further identifies these continuities in sorority discourse, noting that ideals such as Republican motherhood, the cults of Domesticity, and true womanhood shaped cultural expectations for white, upper-class women well into the 20th century. These ideals included “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity,” which Hogg argues still subtly frame sorority life and ritual today (*White Sororities*. . . 56). The Phi Mu Creed reflects these inherited values through key phrases such as “to lend,” “being steadfast,” “to give,” “to reverence,” and “being courteous and tender.” These actions are not assertive or transformative; rather, they signal the continuation of a rhetoric rooted in duty, submission, and emotional labor.

Turk’s historical analysis provides further insight into the cultural values of early sorority life, particularly around the time the Creed was written and adopted. She explains that sorority women of the 1890s through 1910s were “as much shapers of their environments as products of middle- and upper-middle-class American society,” and that they “adopted a set of customs and concerns that placed a premium on appearance and sociability” (43). This duality, being both shaped by and shaping social norms, offers a useful framework for interpreting the Phi Mu Creed. Its author, Grace Lumpkin, balanced traditional ideals such as purity and honor with emerging values like community service and charitable outreach. Her rhetorical choices reflect a generation of women navigating new roles while tethered to established expectations.

This literature helps illuminate the ideological function of the Creed, not only as a document of moral guidance but also as a rhetorical artifact of its time. Through this lens, the scrapbooks of the Mu Chapter can be read as visual and material extensions of the Creed's values, capturing how women enacted, negotiated, and sometimes subtly reimaged idealized femininity in the mid-twentieth century.

2.1.2 Quiet Feminism

The Phi Mu women of the Mu Chapter in the 20th century may not fit modern definitions of feminism, but they embodied what scholars Jung and Moon term “quiet feminism”, best defined as, “an agentic, everyday feminist practice performed by self-identified feminists who maintain a low profile in sheltered environments under unreceptive social contexts toward feminism” (Jung and Moon). Contemporary discourse often frames feminism as a binary—you're either a feminist or a sexist—leaving little room for women who navigated gray areas. As Cifor and Wood point out, feminist archives frequently prioritize identity politics and radical movements, often overlooking quieter histories. However, excluding women who did not openly identify as feminist risks erasing valuable narratives and diminishing the diversity of women's rhetorical agency.

Though it's unclear whether these Phi Mu women saw themselves as feminists, their actions reflect feminist potential: pursuing education, claiming campus spaces, and holding leadership roles despite operating within the constraints of the Southern Bible Belt. In the 1930s, only half as many women as men earned college degrees (Hout and Janus). In the South, scholars argue that many women attended college not just for education but to, “make her more refined, to make her more of an object of desire for potential mates, and to reify upper-crust Southern society's social power and influence” (Wilson). Sororities and literary societies reinforced this

blend of refinement and academic achievement, promoting women as both morally upright and intellectually capable, thus promoting their femininity whilst tackling new spaces (Turk 34).

The women featured in Mu Chapter scrapbooks exercised agency by earning bachelor's degrees at a time when few women could. They also immersed themselves in extracurricular life—serving on sorority executive boards, joining Christian organizations, participating in beauty pageants, student government, and athletic teams. These spaces allowed women to explore roles beyond the domestic sphere and step into leadership positions.

One notable example of such negotiation appears in a 1950s Brenau student handbook, which records how students successfully petitioned for the right to wear jeans, slacks, pedal pushers, and shorts—“hip” fashions of the day (Wilson 154). These shifts suggest that Brenau women were moving from their genteel Southern roots toward a more modern model of womanhood. Even as they challenged social expectations, sorority rituals like the Phi Mu Creed remained largely unchanged throughout the 20th century.

2.1.3 History of the Creed and Sorority Ritual

Creeds have deep roots in religious rhetoric, tracing back to the Apostles' Creed in the 2nd century AD (“Creeds” 1). Designed to declare loyalty to a faith, creeds function similarly in sororities: they unite members under a shared narrative of devotion and tradition. As Hogg argues, sorority creeds are a form of epideictic rhetoric in action. They celebrate values and heritage for the sake of reinforcing community. Most sororities require members to memorize their creed and the meanings of their symbols for initiation. As Hogg notes, “the import of the system and its history were tantamount to full membership” (“Sorority Rhetorics...” 433); failure to recite the creed from memory could prevent a member from being initiated.

This emphasis on repetition and memorization preserves exclusivity but also fosters rhetorical transformation. Drawing on Will Penman, repeated call-and-response behaviors may create new values in members before they've fully reflected on those meanings. Without critical analysis, members may internalize the Creed's ideals simply through habitual recitation, "before they have a completely developed cognitive picture of its implications" (Penman 44).

Imitation is a powerful social tool, especially within organizations rooted in belonging. As Hogg observes in *White Sororities and the Cultural Work of Belonging*, "Sisters are family... and that inherent sameness erases difference. Sororities often invoke terms like diversity and individuality, but in practice, they center sameness through shared rituals and language" (34). The creed, as one of the most enduring traditions, fosters a unified identity that persists long after graduation.

2.1.4 Archival Practice in Feminist Research

Phi Mu is one of the largest and oldest National Panhellenic Conference sororities in the U.S. Its archives, therefore, offer insight into both change and continuity to show how core values persist even as the organization evolves. As Walker Smith notes, archives often reveal "how institutions continually change so that an organization may retain its legitimacy to make meaning in certain arenas of our lives" (3). Small shifts often sustain the status quo while giving the illusion of progress.

Research from *The College Student Affairs Journal* shows Phi Mu's public-facing rhetoric emphasizes tradition, social status, and conservation, while not recognizing values like self-direction, openness to change, and universalism—traits evident in 77% of other NPC sororities ("understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature") (Tull et al. 145). These omissions frame Phi Mu as less focused on individual

development and diversity. However, two years after this publication, Phi Mu created a DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) taskforce (“About Us: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”). With more social developments expected, it is difficult to predict the current trajectory of the group’s future rhetoric.

My curiosity about the rhetorical origins of the Creed—adopted nationally in 1916 and credited to Mu alumna Grace Lumpkin—motivated my archival research. Having memorized the Creed myself during initiation, I felt an affinity with its language but also questioned its ideals. Who was Lumpkin, and what rhetorical choices shaped her words?

Very little scholarship explores Lumpkin’s ideological background, though *Sisters and Rebels* by Jacqueline Dowd Hall provides crucial insight. Hall, who accessed the Brenau archives and interviewed Lumpkin, describes her as a woman “stranded in a middle place,” torn between her Southern Confederate heritage and her evolving identity as a modern, progressive thinker (365). I began to wonder: did other Phi Mu women, especially in the Old South, experience similar fragmentation?

Archival inquiry seemed to be the most promising path. Smith argues that archives can “deconstruct identities and rebuild communities” by challenging institutional myths (10). Though Smith focuses on religious institutions, the logic applies: like churches, sororities wield ritual, repetition, and tradition to construct authority across generations.

Initially, I was idealistic. I imagined finding a neat feminist narrative hidden in the dusty corners of local storage. But as Robert Connors reminds us, no one enters the archive entirely neutral: “seldom does anyone plunge cold into the Archive without something to look for” (54). My motivation was personal. I was still enchanted by the “rose-colored” vision of my alumni

experience and wanted to understand the Creed's legacy through the lens of belief, belonging, and rhetorical memory.

Yet archival work resists neat conclusions. As Wendy Hayden writes, it requires “embrac[ing] uncertainty and friction, expecting the unexpected find—or nothing at all” (40). Hayden also argues that historians should not cast themselves as rescuers of forgotten figures. Instead, we rescue archives themselves from neglect by circulating their narratives, especially those involving marginalized groups like women or the LGBTQ+ community. This resonated deeply with me: the Mu Chapter archives had never been studied academically. They sat, unprocessed, unpublished, and delicate, in a storage unit filled with stories still waiting to be heard.

In approaching this work, I align with Edward Schiappa's argument that the historian should strike a balance: neither “mere subjective interpreter” nor “objective observer” (104). Given my insider status, total objectivity is impossible, but I aim to let the archives speak for themselves rather than impose predetermined conclusions. I did not set out to find feminist “heroes,” but instead sought the closest approximation of truth these materials could offer.

What I found were trophies, hand-drawn posters, and scrapbooks dating back to the 1930s filled with invitations, flyers, photographs, and notes. Though I found no direct insight into Lumpkin herself, the archives provided a portrait of the women her rhetoric influenced. As Liz Rohan explains, scrapbook authors “piece together themes... that are thematically present in the archives but not declaratively stated” (205). The unnamed collector shaped a version of sorority life that emphasized beauty, morality, leadership, and social connection—but left space for interpretive work.

These were privileged white, Southern, Christian women, likely descended from Confederate families. They had access to education, sisterhood, and public presence on campus—advantages denied to many other women, especially women of color and working-class women. Historian Jeanne Boydston reminds us that this domestic ideal was often built “at the expense of other women, whose labor produced so many of the commodities and services of the perfectly domestic household.” This archival study, then, cannot speak for all women. It is grounded in specific, limited identities—those who had the resources to participate in and shape the institution of the Southern sorority.

2.1.5 Presentism Consideration

As I draw conclusions from this study, I recognize the ethical responsibility to avoid assumptions about the motives or beliefs of past Phi Mu women. My hope to find Phi Mu as a historic pinnacle of feminism, inclusion, and diversity after the adoption of the Creed ultimately went unfulfilled. Yet, as Royster and Kirsch remind us, feminist archival work “entails creating a space where we can see and hold contradictions without rushing to immediate closure, to neat resolutions, or to cozy hierarchies and binaries” (348). The women of Phi Mu operated within patriarchal structures, but they navigated those constraints in ways that empowered them—however quietly.

Charlotte Hogg argues that these early sorority members “had to be rhetorically nimble” (56). They lacked access to the public rhetorical tools traditionally afforded to men and instead cultivated influence through more socially acceptable, feminized means. Their rhetorical work often fell outside the dominant, heteronormative, white male frame of reference.

Jessica Enoch’s *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women’s Work* helps frame this navigation. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women adapted domestic ideals

to carve out semi-public spaces in which they could grow, learn, and lead. Enoch writes, “I attend to the implicit, subtle, yet powerful spatial rhetorics of the home and the workplace that influenced expectations for women to remain in or move beyond the domestic scene” (11). Phi Mu women at Brenau operated within these new spaces—engaging in theatre, academia, campus leadership, beauty pageants, and Christian organizations. These roles, documented in scrapbooks and campus publications, existed just outside the private sphere but remained palatable to the dominant, domestic culture.

This project practices what Cheryl Glenn calls performative feminist historiography: research that “does something” (69). My goal mirrors that of the early Phi Mu women: to foster belonging and meaning in public life by occupying and subtly reshaping the spaces available. Women’s access to higher education grew in the mid-19th century, particularly through women’s colleges and the legitimizing influence of disciplines like domestic science. Teaching, too, became a socially sanctioned profession that enabled more women to remain in academic environments (Enoch).

Importantly, the emergence of women’s fraternities in the same period reflects this dynamic. Sororities offered women a rhetorical framework to assimilate while subverting and to maintain outward conformity with traditional womanhood while building leadership skills, intellectual networks, and lifelong bonds. As Hogg points out, NPC sororities often straddle contradictory expectations: “On the one hand, [they] are all about heteronormativity... [yet] also center women’s relationships, experiences, values, and missions, leaving men out entirely” (*White Sororities*. . . 61). The Creed exemplifies this paradox. It is both a tool of conformity and a means of empowerment—a shared rhetorical act that binds members together in a collective identity while allowing some to bend the norms under its surface.

While the Creed alone does not fully capture the feminist possibilities of Phi Mu's past, it permeates every ritual and moment of sisterhood. It offers a window into how these women defined themselves, and how, in quiet, strategic ways, they stretched the boundaries of what womanhood could mean in their time.

2.2 Methods and Methodology

This research adopts a feminist, women-centered lens committed to social change and the recovery of overlooked moments in sorority history. Too often, historical narratives remain filtered through dominant male discourses, which shape public understanding through tradition and institutional power. In contrast, this thesis draws on my close positionality as a member of Phi Mu's Mu chapter and as a woman engaging with these texts, approaching the archives with both respect for their historical context and a desire to envision progress in the rhetoric of women's spaces.

Reconsidering this unrecognized archive focused on women "realizes feminist practice, one that may be subtle but that directly supports and leads to feminist scholarship dedicated to recovery and representation" (Gaillet et al., "The Collectors" 36). This project interprets the archives as a living manifestation of the Phi Mu Creed, demonstrating how rhetorical traditions can sustain and advance a woman-centered agenda.

By practicing rhetorical listening through a feminist lens, this research seeks to uncover silences, amplify the social practices of these women, and explore their potential to inform more inclusive, transformational understandings of sisterhood, identity, and belonging.

2.2.1 Qualitative Methods and Primary Research

This project relies on qualitative methods, including analysis of scrapbooks and a personal interview with Charlotte Hogg. While some statistical data supports general trends of

the time period, historical research beyond rhetoric, such as Charles Hooper Wilson's comprehensive dissertation on Brenau University, provides critical context. I frame this work through the lens of a feminist historiographer, applying key methodologies: critical imagination, strategic contemplation, and rhetorical listening. My close positionality within the Mu chapter of Phi Mu uniquely equips me to interpret these materials with insight and care.

As Janice Lauer notes, "[t]he writer's interpretive practices offer arguments and evidence... [however] these stories don't subjugate events, individuals, and their contributions, and whole groups to a grand narrative" (99). Ethical feminist research resists imposing oversimplified narratives onto historical figures. Instead, it situates them within their own contexts. Analyzing Grace Lumpkin, the author of the Creed, requires this kind of contextual sensitivity, as I speculate about her rhetorical intentions through her chosen values and language. Similarly, exploring how and why certain materials were collected in the archives can reveal what values Phi Mu upheld during specific historical moments.

My approach follows Edward Schiappa's call for a balance between the "objective" and "subjective" historian (104). Total objectivity is unlikely given my immersion in Phi Mu's culture, but that same positionality allows me to interpret the archives with depth, nuance, and respect for the traditions of the organization I know intimately.

For rhetorical analysis of the Phi Mu Creed, I use a close-reading approach that focuses on key terms and their connotations. I compare feminist definitions of key words to better understand how the Creed reflects or resists the "new" versus "true" woman binary in feminist theory. I also trace the broader tradition of Creeds in religious and sorority settings to contextualize the rhetorical function of Phi Mu's Creed.

One of my main sources of evidence is an interview I conducted with Charlotte Hogg, one of the few scholars focusing on sorority rhetoric. I structured my questions around key ideas from her book *White Sororities and the Cultural Work of Belonging*, aiming to expand on her discussion of close researcher positionality. While Hogg's published work provided a strong foundation, our conversation offered fresh insights and clarified areas not fully explored in print. As Nan Johnson notes, "our historical perspective on any aspect of the history of rhetoric is enhanced by depth of scholarly field" (Murphy 47), and this interview added crucial depth.

One major topic I asked Hogg about was her methodological approach. She explained, "I definitely used a feminist lens, and I also tried to incorporate whiteness. . . there has to be distinction, because if I said sororities, I think that would not be so fair to not include divine and Latina stories" (Hogg, "Sorority Research Collaboration"). This distinction is central to my own methodology as well. My study focuses on white womanhood and the specific rhetorical formation of white femininity within Phi Mu, Mu Chapter. Historically, the cult of domesticity targeted middle- and upper-class white women, encouraging traits such as "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" to keep them away from public and activist spaces (Caffrey). Hogg's reflections helped shape my own understanding of how sorority rhetoric reinforces these ideals while also creating a sense of empowerment and belonging.

Alongside the interview, the chapter's archival materials serve as a key site of analysis. I focus primarily on a large scrapbook dated from the 1930s to the 1960s. The earliest item is a 1937 "Showboat" performance invitation, and the latest entries extend into the 1960s—roughly 20 to 50 years after the national adoption of the Creed in 1916. The scrapbook illustrates how the rhetoric of the Creed influenced generations of Phi Mu women. It offers evidence of the Creed's

ongoing material impact, preserving a shared sense of sisterhood that transcended its original historical moment.

3 DEFINING THE IDEAL SORORITY WOMAN

To understand the impact and enduring purpose of the Phi Mu Creed, we must begin with its origins. Phi Mu's Mu Chapter at Brenau College was officially established on October 8, 1910 ("Greek Life"), and just six years later, the national organization adopted the Creed at its 1916 convention. Brenau Alumna Grace Lumpkin likely composed the Creed between 1911 and 1915, before serving as a Phi Mu war worker in France during World War I (Becque). Investigating Lumpkin's background and the cultural context of both Brenau's campus and the national Phi Mu leadership reveals the rhetorical influences shaping her writing.

Although the *Aglaia's* centennial issue states that the Creed remains "essentially the same as the original 1916 version" ("The Creed Centennial"), revisions have occurred. In 1934, for example, Ethelean Tyson Gaw added the lines "Thus being true to the womanhood of..." to the ends of the first two stanzas. These additions enhanced the lyrical rhythm for memorization and reinforced the Creed's core values: love, honor, and truth, all framed through the ideal of womanhood.

As this chapter explores, sorority Creeds function as rhetorical tools that shape and unify national identity. The Phi Mu Creed served to align sisters around shared values at a time when women on college campuses faced significant social scrutiny. Its rhetoric bridges the "True Woman" and "New Woman" paradigms in feminist studies, crafting an image of the ideal sorority woman that balanced tradition and progress. These contextual insights into the Creed's inception will guide the strategic contemplation and rhetorical analysis that follow connecting this to quiet feminist practice. The Creed, as Hogg aptly states, was "grounded in its time" ("Sorority Research Collaboration").

3.1 The Purpose of Sorority Creeds

Creeds originated in early Christian rhetoric and remain central to many denominations, especially Roman Catholic liturgy. These early Latin and Greek texts were designed to “emphasize the differences between the tenets of schismatic branches and to serve as formulations of belief when liturgical usage, as in the administration of baptism, requires a profession of faith” (“Creeds” 1). Statements like the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds clarified distinctions between churches and reinforced communal identity through repetition. Drawing from these Christian and classical roots, sororities and fraternities adopted their own Creeds to highlight core values for both prospective initiates and current members. These rhetorics unify chapters across the country by establishing a shared language and tradition.

Charlotte Hogg describes how reciting a national Creed instills a sense of belonging that stretches beyond the chapter house: “it was affirmed that our membership was more significant than joining a club: it was a way of being in the world together that reaches back to the founding. Generations of women as well as women at campuses across the country were singing the same songs” (*White Sororities*. . .44). In this way, Creeds forge a symbolic lineage—connecting past and present sisters across time and geography.

More than organizational identity, however, Creeds also represent “the ‘true’ and ‘ideal’ sorority woman” (Turk 35). As women entered the male-dominated public sphere of higher education, sorority leaders sought to combat stereotypes that “higher education rendered its female students ‘narrowly focused’ and ‘unwomanly’” (Turk 35). Sororities began adopting Creeds and symphonies to define the ideal member while reaffirming her traditional femininity. Written in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Creeds like Phi Mu’s blend values of both the “true woman” (domestic, pious, nurturing) and the “new woman” (intellectual, active, public-

facing). These rhetorics reassured families and members alike that a sorority woman remained feminine—even enhanced—through her affiliation. They offered women a way to navigate new roles while maintaining cultural legitimacy.

3.2 Grace Lumpkin: Author of the Creed

Grace Lumpkin, like her sisters Katharine DuPre and Elizabeth, attended the prestigious Baptist female seminary known then as Brenau College. Her unique positionality is evident in the tension between her embrace of both traditional and modern feminine roles. At Brenau, she played on the college's first basketball team and was known for her rebellious "skirmishes," yet she majored in the socially sanctioned field of domestic sciences (Hall 81, 77). While her field of study may seem at odds with the idea of a quiet feminist, the early 20th-century domestic sciences offered women a way to claim intellectual authority in the home. As Jessica Enoch explains, domestic science framed housework as presenting "complex problems that could only be solved by rigorous intellectual engagement and scientific experimentation" (Enoch 76).

Lumpkin earned a teaching certificate in 1911 and used it to support community education efforts—leading night classes for adult farm and mill workers and attending meetings of the early interracial cooperation movement (Robeson). Her activism during this period reveals a commitment to social reform, although expressed through channels acceptable for women of her time.

Practicing both strategic contemplation and critical imagination, this research identifies three primary influences on Lumpkin's authorship of the Phi Mu Creed: her family, the cultural environment at Brenau, and the broader values of Phi Mu and the National Panhellenic Conference.

3.2.1 Personal Influences

One of the strongest influences on Grace Lumpkin's early worldview was her father, William Lumpkin, a staunch believer in the Lost Cause ideology. The Lumpkin family, like many others in the postbellum South, framed their identity around the mythology of the Civil War. Grace Lumpkin joined the United Daughters of the Confederacy and regularly gave speeches in support of the Lost Cause: a movement that romanticized the Antebellum South while "collectively forgetting the horrors of slavery" (Janney). While William Lumpkin claimed to have played a significant role in the war, historical records do not indicate him anywhere close to action. However, archival evidence does place him "at the center of the local Klan's crimes," including a brutal attack on Abram Colby, a formerly enslaved man and 1868 Georgia House Representative for Greene County (Hall 21). Grace Lumpkin likely internalized many of her father's views.

At age 20, around the time she wrote the Phi Mu Creed, she participated in a Red Shirts parade as a "maid of honor," riding alongside "a Ku Klux band" and "four Negroes who voted the Democratic ticket in 1876" (Hall 55). Her proximity to these white supremacist displays casts a shadow over her early rhetoric. Although her later writings and actions show a turn toward racial equality, neither her actions during college nor the text of the Creed prioritize racial or cultural diversity.

Lumpkin's socioeconomic background also shaped her values. After the Civil War, her family, like many upper-class white Southerners, faced significant financial hardship. Her mother had to "scrape together enough money" to transfer her from the lesser-known College for Women in Columbia to the more reputable Brenau College (Hall 61). This was not unusual; the South's old-money families had been devastated by emancipation and Reconstruction.

Economist Leah Boustan explains, “Many people in the South, many white families, didn’t own any slaves at all, but 20 percent did. . . . For the largest slaveholding families, they lost on the order of 50, 60, 70 percent more wealth after the war than similarly wealthy families” (Boustan). The Lumpkin family would fall into the percent affected by the financial loss of slave laborers. Lumpkin’s exposure to that economic instability may have influenced the themes of charity and humility in the Phi Mu Creed—especially in lines like “To lend to those less fortunate a helping hand” and “Striving to esteem the inner man above culture, wealth, or pedigree.” These statements reflect a tension in Lumpkin’s identity: one grounded in privilege, but not without gestures toward economic social reform.

3.2.2 Brenau’s Influence

The rhetoric of Phi Mu’s Creed cannot be separated from the larger culture of Brenau College during Grace Lumpkin’s time. The university’s own official statement of values, The Brenau Creed, reflected a delicate balancing act between intellectual independence and traditional femininity. Written by President H.G. Pearce and published in the 1914 Brenau *Bubbles*, it asserted that “a woman’s mind and soul are just as feminine as her body and that her mental habiliment should be adapted to her feminine nature” (Hall 77). Faculty, including Pearce, claimed their goal was to help students become “independent of man,” yet they simultaneously reassured anxious parents that higher education would not threaten their daughters’ virtue or femininity (Hall 77). This concern for purity shaped Brenau’s climate: that same year, two female students were suspended simply for allowing male peers to speak to them through a dormitory window (Wilson 162).

This tension between intellectual freedom and social decorum extended into sorority life. Sororities like Phi Mu were expected to embody ideals of womanhood that reflected both progress and propriety—a duality the Phi Mu Creed encapsulates.

Lumpkin’s campus involvement also shaped her values and rhetorical commitments. In addition to Phi Mu, she was active in the Young Women’s Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.), an organization aligned with her religious upbringing and Brenau’s origins as the Georgia Baptist Female Seminary (Wilson 1). The Y.W.C.A. offered Lumpkin a space for spiritual and social growth, emphasizing what she later called “a broader and higher vision” of Christianity (Hall 85). By her fourth year, Lumpkin had become president of Brenau’s Y.W.C.A. chapter—a role that significantly influenced her worldview and writing.

Her sister, Katharine Lumpkin, joined the organization soon after and later described the radical shift she experienced under Grace’s leadership:

“There was no wrath of Jehovah here, or ‘sins of the fathers visited unto the third and fourth generation,’ no hint of a vengeful Deity. . . They portrayed God as a loving father and Jesus as a gentle teacher who refused to recognize social distinctions and whose example could be followed in this world. The infinite, God-given worth of each person; the Kingdom of God as a new social order. . . and I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.” (Hall 86)

This testimony speaks volumes about the rhetorical and ethical values Lumpkin brought to her leadership. Rather than reinforcing guilt or hierarchy amongst her peers, she centered a message of equality, social justice, and human worth: core principles echoed in the Phi Mu Creed itself.

However, this equality primarily serviced those with some inherited privilege: white, educated, middle- and upper-class women.

Lines such as “To lend to those less fortunate a helping hand” and “Striving to esteem the inner man above culture, wealth or pedigree” reflect not only her spiritual ideals but also her embrace of Christian social gospel rhetoric. The Creed’s reference to “reverence God as our Maker, striving to serve Him in all things” further affirms the Christian influence embedded in Lumpkin’s vision of womanhood and service.

3.2.3 National Influence

A 1912 issue of a national Phi Mu bulletin encouraged chapter presidents to embody qualities like honor, scholarship, and humility on their campuses (Monning). That same publication listed Grace Lumpkin as the Province President of the Virginia region, a role that required her to visit and oversee the organization of chapters across the state. Yet, due to unexplained reasons, the national Phi Mu president, Louise Monning Elliott, visited the chapters in Lumpkin’s stead. While she found the chapters “delightful but ultra conservative,” her comments on the Mu chapter at Brenau, Lumpkin’s home chapter, were more pointed.

Monning wrote:

It being known that our chapter there had a struggle to maintain a national spirit in the face of the local situation at Brenau, I spent several days with the girls there in an effort to devise some means by which this club-like rather than national tone could be overcome. ZTA, Alpha Delta Phi, and Alpha Chi Omega also have chapters there, and it would seem that matriculation pledging and all the complications it brings could be done away with—but there are half a dozen secondary nationals which do not care to conform to any manner of regulation—wherefore the present situation. Our chapter is anxious to

lead out from the local tone of things, and a means to this end is under consideration by our Council. The personnel of Brenau is very desirable, and if our girls can develop nationally in face of local conditions, so much the more credit will be their due.

(Monning 5–6)

Lumpkin likely responded to this critique by crafting a unifying national rhetoric: the Phi Mu Creed. Designed to promote shared values across geographically dispersed chapters, the Creed helped chapters like Mu move away from a purely local mindset. It provided a framework to align with national standards while reinforcing a strong organizational identity.

At the same time, the broader pressures of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) shaped the rhetorical decisions of many sororities. Founded in 1902, the NPC aims to “foster thriving sorority communities” and governs 26 national women’s fraternities, including Phi Mu (“Mission, Vision, and Values”). Notably, the NPC published its own Creed in 1916—the same year Phi Mu adopted its Creed. The NPC Creed emphasizes service and leadership, urging its members to promote “good scholarship” and “good health” while focusing on collective values over individual traits (“Creed of the National Panhellenic Conference”).

There is no direct evidence that the NPC and Phi Mu influenced each other’s Creeds. Still, the timing suggests a larger movement among women-led organizations to justify their existence on male-dominated campuses. By foregrounding service, purity, and community, these rhetorics worked to secure sororities a permanent place in higher education. Many other sororities adopted similar national Creeds around the same period: Alpha Phi in 1912, Alpha Chi Omega’s Symphony in 1914, Alpha Xi Delta’s Symphony in 1924, and Zeta Tau Alpha’s Creed in 1928 (“Who We Are”; “Symbols and Traditions”; “The Symphony of Alpha Xi Delta”; “About”).

These Creeds collectively shaped the image of the “ideal sorority woman,” who embodied both domestic virtue and the ambitions of the “New Woman” entering the public sphere. Zeta Tau Alpha, for instance, asked members to be “clean of heart and mind,” echoing Phi Mu’s call to “guard the purity of thoughts and deeds.” Meanwhile, more agentic traits appear in Alpha Xi Delta’s emphasis on “appreciation of real merit and worth, steadfastness of soul... and with humility meet success,” which closely mirrors Phi Mu’s charge to “walk in the way of honor... being steadfast in every duty small or large.”

These overlaps raise more questions than this thesis can fully address, but they reinforce a key point: these Creeds functioned as rhetorical tools to validate sorority life, codify a collective identity, and define a socially acceptable vision of modern womanhood. Through this shared rhetoric, national sororities aligned themselves with both progress and tradition—an identity at once palatable to external audiences and empowering for women inside their sisterhoods.

3.3 A Feminist Stylistic Analysis

The Phi Mu Creed is structured in three stanzas, each centered on a core value of the ideal Phi Mu woman: love, honor, and truth. Its lyrical, repetitive structure aids memorization, but it also works rhetorically to bind members through shared speech and identity. The Creed’s communal recitation embodies what Lisa Penman calls “responsive being,” a recognition that “people are intertwined with each other, both affecting and being affected” (Penman 42). In this way, the Creed is more than ritual, but it’s a performative act that shapes how members see themselves and one another: “it was a way of being in the world together that reaches back to the founding” (Hogg, *White Sororities*. . . 44).

Each of the first two stanzas ends with the identical phrase: “Thus being true to the womanhood of...” The final stanza alters the pattern slightly: “Thus keeping true...” This deliberate parallelism and subtle variation reinforces a sense of continuity while signaling culmination. Every line begins with either a present-tense verb or a “to be” clause, emphasizing not just what a Phi Mu believes but how she acts and is in the world.

Quintilian, in *The Institutes of Oratory*, describes such repetition and variation as part of rhetorical “emphasis.” Although he stops short of labeling repetition a formal figure of speech, he asks, “What pleasure can an orator hope to produce... unless he knows how to fix one point in the minds of the audience by repetition, and another by dwelling on it...?” (Quintilian 377). In this sense, the Creed enacts classical rhetorical techniques to “fix” key ideals—especially womanhood and service—in the hearts and minds of its members.

While the Creed may initially appear to list internal virtues, closer reading reveals that its values are largely relational. That is, it defines the ideal Phi Mu woman through her actions toward others: to give, to honor, to serve, to be steadfast. The focus is not on personal ambition or introspective selfhood, but on enacting character in a social context—a key concern in feminist rhetoric, especially within women’s organizations navigating public and private expectations. The following sections will analyze these values through a feminist rhetorical lens, attending to how the Creed both reinforces and subtly reimagines womanhood in its historical context.

3.3.1 True Woman Values

The Cult of True Womanhood emerged in the early 19th century, framing a woman’s duty to home and society as “a fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility” (Welter 152). According to Barbara Welter, the “true woman” was defined by four cardinal virtues: piety,

purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (152). This ideal placed women squarely in the private sphere, where they were expected to uphold moral virtue, maintain the household, and support their husbands—while remaining publicly silent.

As women began entering college campuses and, later, the workforce, these values came under threat. Particularly in the South, tensions rose around the figure of the college woman, who was seen as abandoning her proper domestic role. Sorority women often bore the brunt of these anxieties. Their very presence in higher education challenged traditional expectations, and communities feared that if women left the home, “society itself might collapse.” These young women had to perform a delicate balancing act, demonstrating that they could succeed in the public sphere without compromising their femininity.

This tension was especially palpable at Brenau College. As middle- or upper-class white women, Brenau students were socialized into True Womanhood from birth, and those ideals were “difficult to resist due to women’s social status and reputation tethered to domesticity” (Crawley 3–4). To preserve their and their families’ reputations, sorority members sought to merge traditional virtues with their new educational opportunities. Turk describes this effort as one of rhetorical finesse; they wished to embrace “the new sphere without sacrificing their identities as women” (Turk 40).

Out of this cultural negotiation emerged what some scholars call the “New True Woman”—a figure who fused independence and education with the outward markers of piety and purity (Crawley 2). The Phi Mu Creed, like many composed in the early 20th century, reflects this synthesis. While it gestures toward service, social engagement, and personal agency, it remains steeped in True Womanhood values. In its language of honor, purity, reverence, and

devotion, the Creed offers a blueprint for the ideal sorority woman: someone who participates in the world but always through the lens of traditional morality.

3.3.1.1 The Christian Woman

Christian themes are among the most explicit and pervasive elements in the Phi Mu Creed. Two lines reference a singular, monotheistic God directly: “To think of God as a guide and protector of us all” and “To reverence God as our maker, striving to serve Him in all things.” These lines emphasize submission to God’s authority and frame devotion as both a private and communal responsibility. In the early 20th-century American South, the “Bible Belt”, a pious Christian woman was considered the very model of respectability.

Within the framework of the Cult of Domesticity, religious piety was not simply a virtue; it was a central tenet of womanhood itself. As Caffrey explains, the ideal woman was “very religious and selfless,” a figure who “possessed a pure and passionless love like that of the biblical Eve,” and whose divine mission was “to work with God in pursuit of a world without sin.” True women were thus tasked with serving not only their families but also a higher spiritual calling. The repeated emphasis on service in the Creed aligns with this ideal, initially connoting spiritual and familial devotion. Over time, however, many Phi Mu chapters reinterpreted these lines to emphasize community service—a rhetorical shift that broadened the Creed’s application beyond religious or patriarchal frameworks.

More broadly, many values embedded in the Creed —such as charity, purity, humility, and moral example— mirror traditional Christian teachings. Even without overt scriptural reference, the Creed reinforces the ethos of the Christian “true woman,” whose worth was measured by her virtue, self-sacrifice, and role as a moral compass within both the home and society.

3.3.1.2 *The Pure Woman*

Reputation and purity shaped many of the lines in the Phi Mu Creed, such as “guarding the purity of our thoughts and deeds” and “being honorable, courteous, tender, thus being true to the womanhood of honor.” In the context of True Womanhood, to be honorable meant embodying respectability and representing one's family and community with grace and restraint. A “pure” woman was not just sexually chaste but also emotionally and socially disciplined. She avoided impropriety, immodesty, or even excessive self-promotion. Phi Mu’s national headquarters echoed these ideals in their 1912 bulletin, cautioning members against public notoriety of any kind (Monning). This expectation extended even to achievements, reflecting the humility embedded in the doctrine of purity: women were to be accomplished, but never boastful—visible, but never ostentatious.

3.3.1.3 *The Dutiful Woman*

Alluding to True Womanhood’s virtue of submissiveness, the Phi Mu Creed emphasizes service to others as central to a woman’s character. However, this submission is not framed in terms of obedience to a husband or father, as in traditional domestic ideology. Instead, it extends outward to the local community, emphasizing service to “the needy and unfortunate.” Lines such as “To lend to those less fortunate a helping hand,” “Being steadfast in every duty small or large,” and “To minister to the needy and unfortunate” construct an image of the Phi Mu woman as dutiful, humble, and responsible to others. This ethic of care is accompanied by a rhetoric of kindness, as seen in “To be to others what they would be to us,” “Being...courteous and tender,” and “to give freely of our sympathies.” Together, these lines reflect the selflessness expected of the True Woman—someone who performs emotional and moral labor without demanding recognition, embodying sacrifice as virtue.

3.3.2 *New True Woman Values*

Although the Creed is deeply rooted in True Womanhood, it also reveals critical differences that illustrate the emergence of a “New True” woman, as recent feminist scholarship describes (Crawley). The New True Woman reconciles domestic ideals with a growing acceptance of women’s participation in education and the workforce, justifying these roles by reinforcing domesticity alongside advocating for financial independence through “diverse occupations” (Crawley 6). Brenau’s emphasis on domestic sciences and teaching degrees during this period exemplifies this balance. Lumpkin herself enrolled in domestic sciences and earned a teaching certificate.

The Phi Mu Creed reflects this new woman, especially in the final stanza. Its most agentic line, “To serve in the light of truth, avoiding egotism, narrowness and scorn”, introduces a notion of truth absent from traditional True Womanhood rhetoric, leaving room for a more expansive, liberal interpretation. Does “truth” refer to honesty among sisters? Academic integrity? Justice, evoked in “to keep our lives gentle, merciful and just”, signals that Phi Mu women were not merely passive servants but active agents pursuing fairness and the greater good.

Truth also stands as the third pillar of Phi Mu’s motto: love, honor, truth. It embodies a core value, not just a phrase. In *The Aglaia*, sisters across chapters reflected on what “truth” means to them. Sylvia-Nicole Cecchi from Theta Gamma described it as “holding yourself and others accountable for their actions yet also demonstrating understanding and care. It also means appreciating that not everyone is like yourself” (“The Womanhood of Truth: Phi Mu’s Creed”). Melissa English of Beta Eta shared, “The truth I share with my sisters allows me to be completely myself.” These testimonies reveal truth less as objective fact and more as acceptance

of one's authentic identity and that of others. Unlike the traditional True Woman, who was not necessarily "true" to herself, the New True Woman embraces her individuality whilst maintaining some acceptable traits of white womanhood.

As noted earlier, although the Creed calls for service, it does not specify domestic duties. Instead, it asks women to serve publicly, such as in the community and on campus, and to be honorable examples to their sisters. These values move beyond traditional True Womanhood into the emerging ideal of the early 20th-century sorority woman: the "New True" woman.

4 REFLECTION OF THE CREED IN LOCAL MATERIAL RHETORIC

Within sororities, bylaws serve as guides for chapter governance, outlining its purpose, membership criteria, and members' duties (National Organization for Women 1). In 1912, Phi Mu's national council published new bylaws regulating chapters' public presence on campus. Officers and presidents were instructed "to insist that newspaper notoriety be avoided as far as possible without antagonizing the press... the governing officers should see to it that chapters withdraw as much as possible from social lime-lights" ("Secret Bulletin of Phi Mu," 13). Although the exact date of this bylaw's removal is unclear, the Mu chapter notably embraced public visibility starting in the late 1930s. They showcased positive achievements in campus journals and local newspapers, from academic honors to traditional feminine milestones like weddings. The chapter also archived private artifacts such as wedding and baby shower invitations, memorializing their connection to the home sphere.

The unprocessed Mu chapter archives include a large brown scrapbook with worn pages, its cover inscribed with "Mu Chapter of Phi Mu" in curled script (see fig. 1). The earliest dated entry is a 1937 performance of *Showboat*. The next dated materials begin in 1946 and continue through the mid-1960s, with consistent entries across decades.

This compilation reflects contemporary national movements and patterns. World War II drastically reduced female college enrollment and prompted many women faculty to resign nationwide (Wilson 32). With most men deployed, women filled critical roles in hospitals, the military, and the workforce. Post-war, many women seized this newfound autonomy to pursue higher education (Eisenmann). The "Silent" Generation represented in this scrapbook reflects a college woman pushing boundaries beyond the Creed's limited scope. While "[w]omen during this era worked more quietly... to effect change" (Wilson 32), they nonetheless ventured further

than their predecessors. Yet, the 1950s also saw a nationwide push to return to true womanhood: “With memories of a devastating economic depression and a world war casting shadows... political, economic, and social institutions endorsed this return to domesticity as patriotic and necessary” (Matelski 22–23). Women seeking education and employment stood in tension with the idealized 1950s housewife. Thus, Phi Mu women negotiated their public identity and personal success by simultaneously endorsing true womanhood values in their archival records.

The scrapbook’s contents reveal a balance of the “new” and “true” woman—women embodying traditional domestic ideals while using these values to access new spaces, celebrate accomplishments, and influence their communities. This quiet feminist practice expanded opportunities for women in Gainesville, GA. Mu chapter members discovered new ways to be true to themselves, embodying “truth” as described in the Phi Mu Creed. Unlike their predecessors, these women did not shy from the “social lime-lights” (Monning-Elliott), but proudly documented their achievements. Though the scrapbook contains personal photos and private invitations, it is dominated by newspaper and journal clippings, each sister’s name underlined and highlighted. The compiler clearly celebrated the positive “notoriety” their sisters had earned.

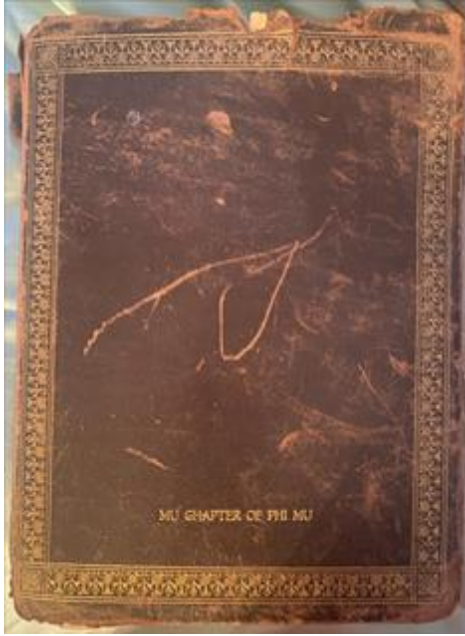


Figure 1 "Mu Chapter of Phi Mu" Scrapbook Cover, courtesy of Mu chapter

4.1 The Public Bride

In the early to mid-20th century, local Gainesville journals celebrated the home sphere by publicizing the weddings of many Phi Mu women. These announcements detailed the union of two locals from respected families, often tracing both paternal and maternal lineages to highlight their deep roots in the community. Typically, these were half-page spreads describing the ceremony, wedding party, educational and professional backgrounds of the couple, and extensive family histories (see fig. 2).

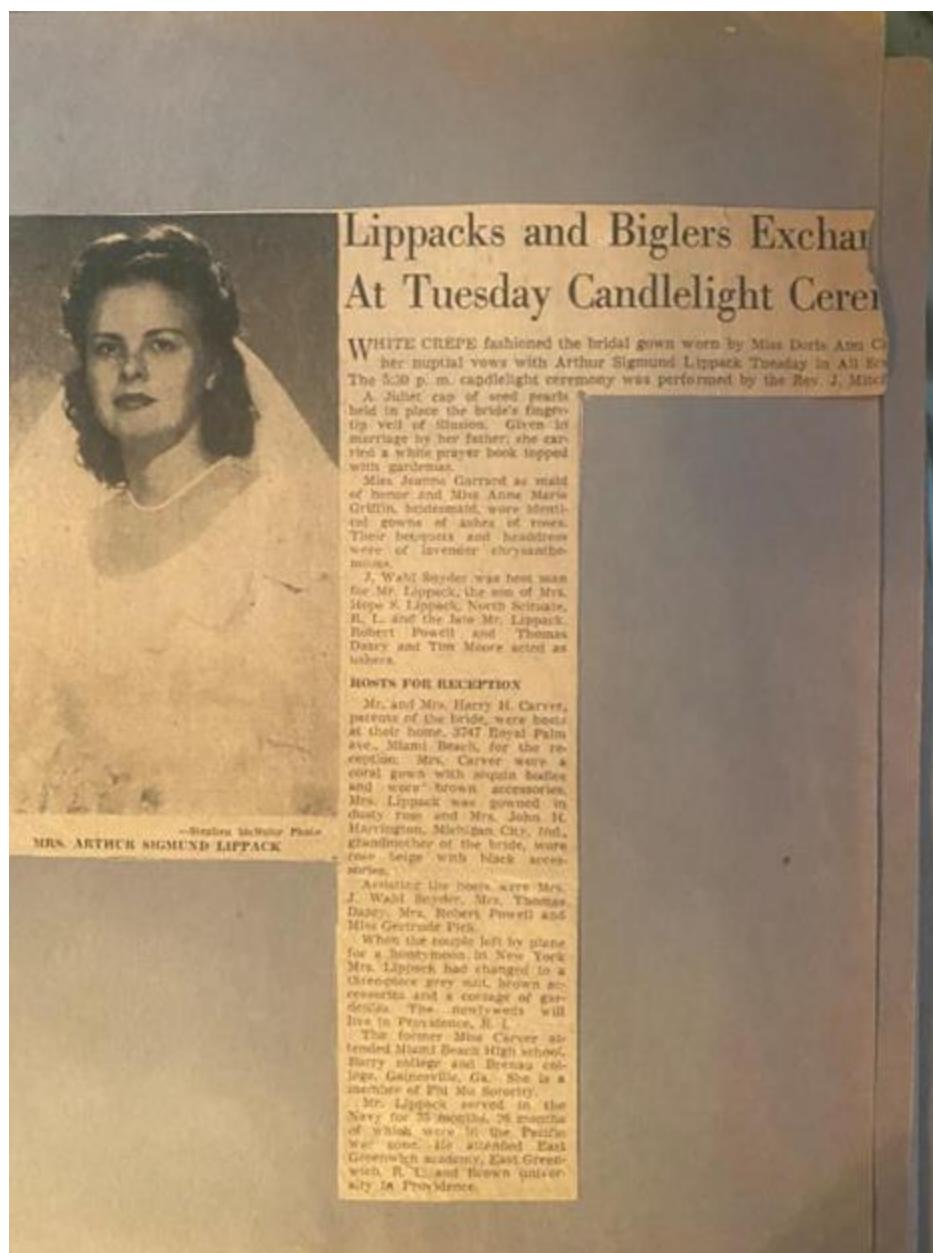


Figure 2 “Lippacks and Biglers Exchange Vows at Tuesday Candlelight Ceremony”, courtesy of Mu chapter

Visually, the announcements predominantly featured a close-up portrait of the bride; these were often large pictures, measuring 5–6 by 3 inches. Notably absent were photos of the groom or the ceremony itself; only the bride appeared, dressed either in her wedding gown or college graduation drape. These images emphasized the bride’s beauty and purity. Glamour shots

(see fig. 3 and fig. 4) used soft spotlights to accentuate the smoothness of her skin and highlight her darker features.



Figure 3 "Marriage Made Known" J.J. Page Wedding Announcement, courtesy of Mu chapter

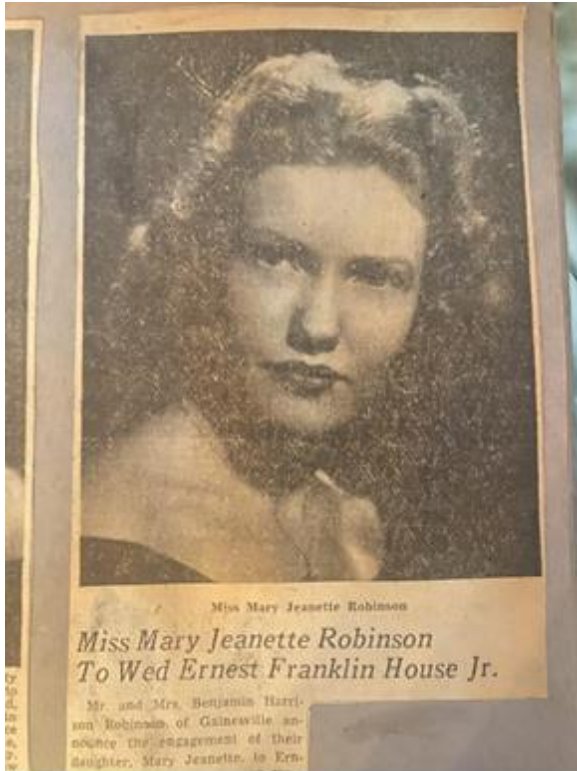


Figure 4 "Miss Mary Jeanette Robinson to Wed Ernest Franklin House Jr.", courtesy of Mu chapter

However, this glamorization contrasts with traditional true womanhood ideals, which favored a humble, “frail, waifish woman” aesthetic (Matelski 26). Rather than resembling modest housewives, these women mirrored early Hollywood stars by adhering to patriarchal, white, middle- and upper-class beauty standards of the era with pin curls, pale skin, full dark lips, and large eyes (23). They embodied the “new woman,” embracing cosmetics and modern fashion trends.

These portraits also convey an ethereal quality, bathing the brides in soft white light, evoking biblical imagery of angels or the Virgin Mary illuminated by divine beams. The attire covers the chest modestly, exposing only collarbones or shoulders beneath the off-shoulder

graduation drape. While modern in style, these women still presented themselves as proper ladies within their social class.

Featuring brides in graduation drapes publicly celebrated their intellectual accomplishments, positioning education as a central trait alongside traditional marital achievements. This deliberate coupling of wedding and academic success signals shifting values, blending home sphere ideals with women's personal ambitions. The brides were showcased not merely for beauty but as well-educated and career-oriented.

For example, Mary Jeanette Robinson's wedding announcement proudly states: "Miss Robinson is a graduate of Gainesville High School and attended Brenau College where she was a member of Phi Mu National Sorority, the Lorelei Club, the Glee Club, and on the staff of the Alchemist. She is at present Assistant Manager Sears-Roebuck Order Office in Gainesville" ("Miss Mary Jeanette Robinson To Wed Ernest Franklin House Jr."). This emphasis on her managerial role and extracurricular leadership highlights ambitions that transcend traditional true womanhood, which discouraged women from working outside the home. The announcement thus celebrates a new model of womanhood—one that embraces education, leadership, and career aspirations alongside marriage.

4.1.1 Connection to the Creed

These wedded women embodied key Phi Mu Creed lines such as "guarding the purity of our thoughts and deeds" and "being honorable, courteous, and tender" by committing to high-profile, socially esteemed marriages. Through these unions, Phi Mu women upheld their family reputations and demonstrated a legacy of honor. The images portray them as ladylike and sophisticated, suggesting they guarded their purity until marriage. Their soft expressions further reflect the tenderness the Creed emphasizes.

Yet, these wedding announcements also reveal women who were authentic to themselves and exercised personal autonomy. The women and their families used the announcements not only to mark marital status but also to celebrate achievements beyond the home and marriage. These public notices “interpret, use, and remake spaces according to [the woman’s] own exigencies” (Enoch 11), transforming a traditional format into a platform for acknowledging female accomplishment. In doing so, these women lived the Creed’s value of “truth” by honoring their individuality and contributed to evolving “honor” systems that celebrated personal growth alongside traditional virtues.

4.2 The Beauty Queen

Phi Mu women regularly participated in, and often won, the Miss Brenau beauty contest, a campus tradition first recorded in 1936. The contest drew on classical and continental aesthetics. As described in one yearbook, its style was inspired by ancient Greek myth and French fashion:

The memorable night of October 9, 1937, brought forth in full regalia the plurissimus pulchritudinis of the Brenau community—most prominent in the Freshman Quarters—Parisian fashions, Grecian headdress—apeissimo poise, and hidden beauty! Miracles were wrought in a few short hours—Venuses, Dianas, Junos, Minervas, all arose in a conclave as goddesses... Even Aeneas, perchance, moved his unerring eye from his ever-beloved Dido to note the consummate beauty collected on the platform. (Dyer)

In its early years, Freshman participants wore traditional white Grecian robes and ivy crowns, visually evoking mythic femininity. The competition awarded scholarships and was based on four categories: a written essay, an interview, a talent performance, and, most notably, the beauty contest. While beauty was central, it was one among several criteria for evaluation. The

competition often encouraged sorority pledging—quite literally promoting the benefits of “going Greek.”

By the 1940s, the pageant shifted from togas to modern evening gowns (see fig. 5), aligning more with mid-century fashion trends. Even contestants who didn’t win the title of Miss Brenau were designated that year’s “Brenau Beauties” (see fig. 6), receiving public recognition and inclusion in campus memory. The beauty contest reflected the traditional standards of attractiveness in a given time period.

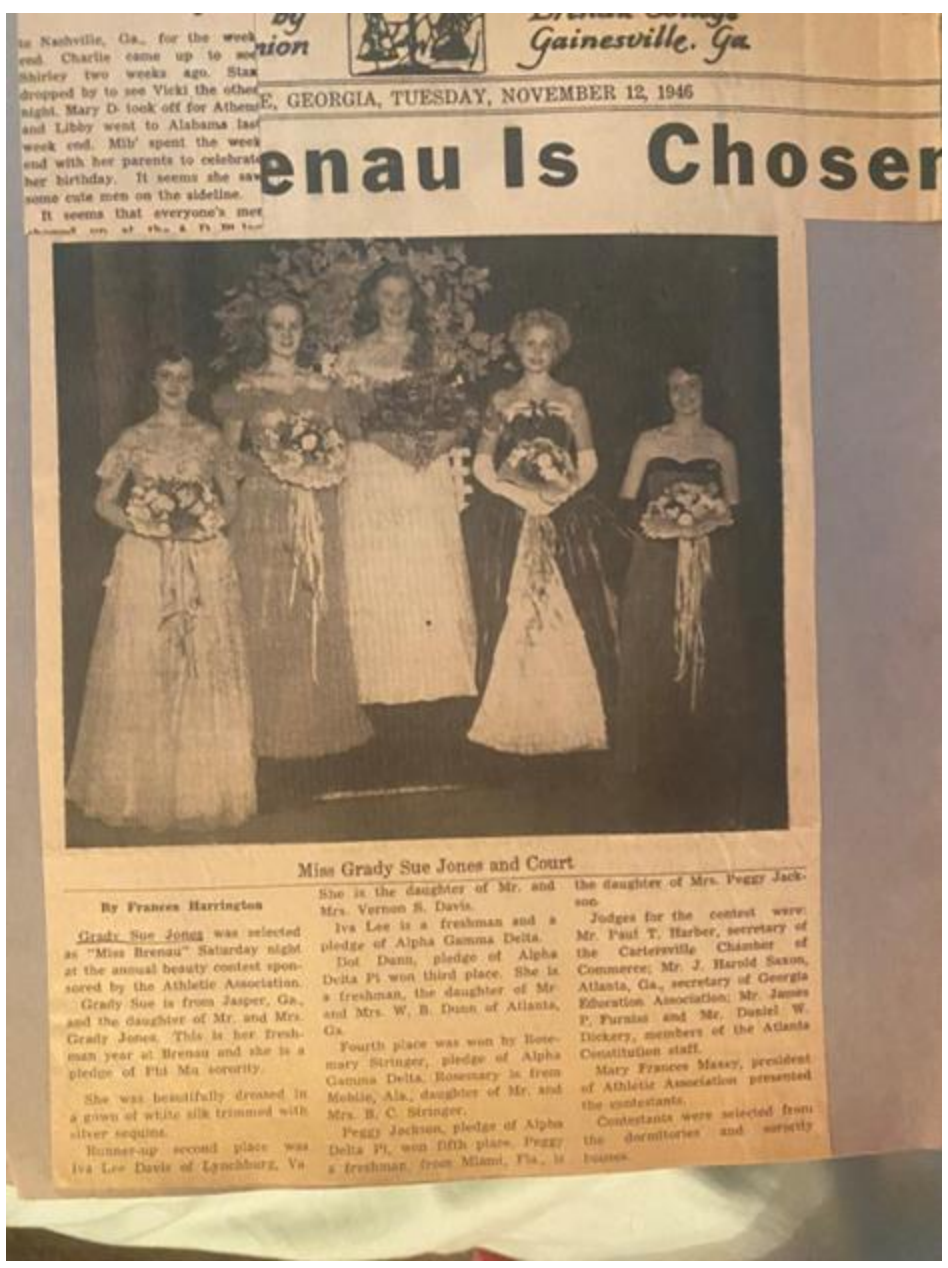


Figure 5 "Miss Brenau is Chosen" 12 Nov. 1946, courtesy of Mu chapter



Figure 6 "Brenau Beauties 1948", courtesy of Mu chapter

Phi Mu women had a consistent presence among the winners. Notable examples in the archive include Grady Sue Jones (1946), Robin Brabham (3rd place, 1950), and both Patti Palmour and Mary Neil Henderson (1953). These women, who fit the mid-century standards of beauty, were featured in both the campus journal and local Gainesville newspapers. Like wedding announcements, these features emphasized lineage by naming the participants' parents and hometowns, while also highlighting their extracurricular involvement and academic standing.

Though beauty contests may seem superficial by today's standards, the Miss Brenau competition functioned as a legitimate source of scholarship funding and public recognition.

Winning meant financial support for one's education and often provided social capital. Notably, the essay and interview components required participants to demonstrate intellect, rhetorical poise, and leadership.

Over the years, the pageant even drew celebrity attention. Judges included television actor Byron Cherry (*The Dukes of Hazzard*) and film star Rock Hudson (*Giant*, *Pillow Talk*) (Dyer). One winner even recalled the honor of introducing President Lyndon B. Johnson during his "poverty tour" of Appalachia in the 1960s. For women pursuing careers in the arts, education, or politics, the pageant offered not just glamour—but connections.

4.2.1 Connection to the Creed

Once again, female achievement in the Miss Brenau pageant was tied to legacy—not only personal, but familial and communal. Contestants' names were accompanied in print by those of their parents and hometowns, emphasizing lineage and regional pride. These women enacted honor not only through their polished performances onstage, but also in their public presentation. In photographs, they appear in regal, floor-length gowns, adorned with pearls, jeweled accessories, and the signature white gloves of genteel Southern womanhood. As freshman pledges still striving toward full initiation, these women bore heightened pressure to exemplify the ideal Phi Mu woman in both form and conduct, both for the public and for their sisters.

While some may argue that beauty contests contradict the Phi Mu ideal of "avoiding egotism," this reading neglects the representative nature of the participants. These women did not act solely for personal gain; they represented their sorority, their college, and their families. As the archival articles reveal, their success was shared and celebrated as collective pride. Their victories were not acts of vanity, but of visible stewardship by promoting their chapter's

reputation, embodying institutional values, and securing tangible rewards like tuition support and social capital. For many, the pageant opened doors to opportunities far beyond campus.

The Phi Mu Creed supports this layered view of achievement. Contestants were not simply chosen for surface-level beauty; they were expected to be well-rounded, capable, and accomplished. Their presence in the competition reflects core Creed values: “To walk in the way of honor,” “being honorable, courteous and tender,” and “being steadfast in every duty, small or large.” Success in the Miss Brenau pageant required dedication across multiple domains: intellectual, social, and aesthetic. It extended their influence beyond the home sphere and into civic and educational life, where they upheld Phi Mu values with poise and purpose.

4.3 The Mother and Wife

Invitations dominate the scrapbook from this era, ranging from private wedding invitations to baby shower and gender reveal announcements. Most are printed in elegant script and preserved in their original envelopes, maintaining the integrity of the printed or handwritten ink. The wedding invitations typically follow the traditional format: “The bride’s parents announce the marriage of their daughter to [eligible bachelor] on [insert date] at [insert location]” (see fig. 7). In contrast, the baby shower announcements are more personalized, often listing the newborn’s birthdate, weight, full name, and the names of both parents. One humorous letter mimics a newspaper headline, proclaiming: “Read all about it—Our new sensation—the cutest baby in all creation!” (see fig. 8).



Figure 7 "Mr. and Mrs. [REDACTED] request the honour of your presence at the marriage of their daughter [REDACTED]", courtesy of Mu chapter

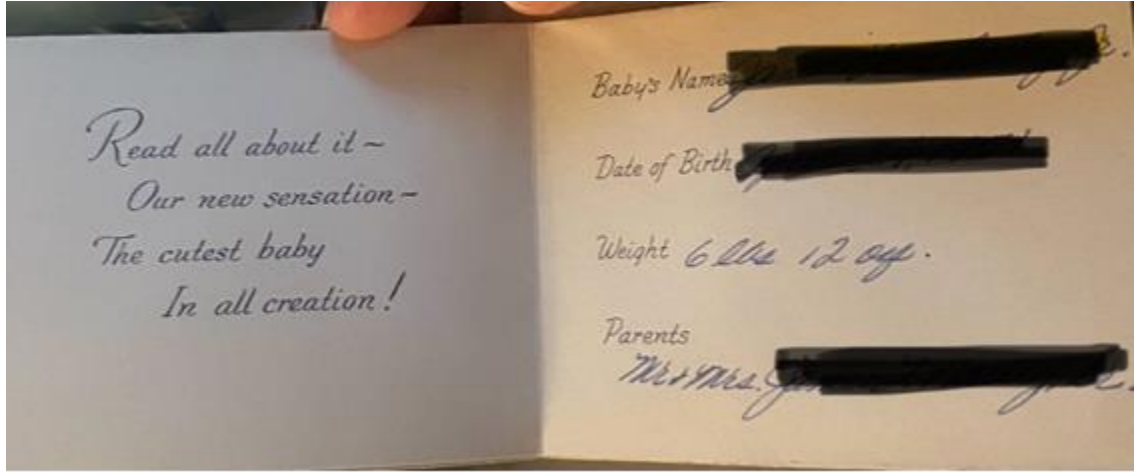


Figure 8 "Read all about it--", courtesy of Mu chapter

The careful preservation of these invitations suggests that the chapter still placed significant value on the domestic sphere, viewing marriage and childbearing as important milestones in a woman's life. Although the scrapbook features academic and extracurricular achievements, it does not record Phi Mu women's post-graduation successes in careers or public life, but only in marriage and motherhood. These traditional invitations omit details about the bride's or mother's current accomplishments, reinforcing the image of the ideal alumna as a dutiful and fulfilled housewife. Despite expanding their roles during college, many Phi Mu women appeared to return—willingly or by societal expectation—to the private realm after World War II.

4.3.1 Connection to the Creed

The Phi Mu Creed reflects the ideals of the domestic woman through its emphasis on tenderness, gentleness, courtesy, mercy, and “being steadfast in every duty, small or large.” These values validated the significance of the home sphere for many Phi Mu women. While some feminists might view this focus as contradictory for college-educated women in a time when higher education for women was rare, these sisters embraced their autonomy and dual identities with pride. They did not see domesticity and higher education as mutually exclusive, but supportive of one another. As a result, many Phi Mu women felt empowered to choose domestic life after graduation with their new skillset and background. The preservation of wedding and baby shower/gender reveal invitations in the chapter scrapbook speaks to this conviction; their careful inclusion reflects the deep reverence the compiler held for these personal milestones.

4.4 The Christian

The Y.W.C.A. remained central to Brenau's campus culture well after Grace Lumpkin revitalized the organization in the early 20th century. Its influence extended to younger students through the Junior Y, a division created for older teenage members. Archival newspaper articles highlight the group's frequent accomplishments and initiations, often listing Phi Mu members by name (see fig. 9). In one notable event, Y.W.C.A. officers—including several Phi Mus—modeled in a student-run fashion show to raise funds, charging a modest admission fee of 15 cents (see fig. 10). Across various articles, Phi Mu women appear frequently in bylines or as featured participants in Y.W.C.A. initiatives, showcasing how deeply they embraced Christian service as part of their public and sororal identity.



Figure 9 "New President and Cabinet of Y.W.C.A. Are Installed in Candlelight Service", courtesy of Mu chapter



Figure 10 "Junior Y To Sponsor Annual Style Show", courtesy of Mu chapter

4.4.1 Connection to the Creed

One of the most prominent values in the Phi Mu Creed is its foundation in Christian faith and service. Phi Mu women embraced their roles as both community servants and Christian exemplars, as reflected in the lines: “To lend to those less fortunate a helping hand” and “To reverence God as our maker, striving to serve Him in all things.” Their service was not just social; it was spiritual, guided by their relationship with God. While certain Christian doctrines, such as Complementarianism (Kassian), restrict women from holding authority in public or spiritual roles—often citing verses like 1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (NIV)—Y.W.C.A. Phi Mu women found purpose and fulfillment in their public-facing work. In doing so, they reinterpreted traditional gender expectations through a lens of faith, participating meaningfully in civic life without sacrificing their Christian identity.

4.5 The New Woman

As the scrapbook transitions into the 1950s, more newspaper articles begin to spotlight the individual accomplishments of Phi Mu women without relying on beauty pageants or weddings to justify their recognition. These clippings reveal a broader definition of female excellence. For instance, Miss Mickey Henderson received praise for her sophisticated artwork (see fig. 11.); six Phi Mus were among the 26 total students who made the Dean's List in 1950 (see fig. 12); seven Phi Mu members performed on the Aquacade synchronized swimming team (see fig. 13); Bebe Wells, who served as Phi Mu president in 1950–51, appeared in articles for her athleticism in boating (see fig. 14) and Ellen McKibbon held the role of feature editor for *The Alchemist* (see fig. 15). These public acknowledgments marked a shift toward valuing women's individual intellectual, artistic, and athletic achievements—distinct hallmarks of the emerging New Woman identity.



Figure 11 "Is A Gifted Sculpturer", courtesy of Mu chapter

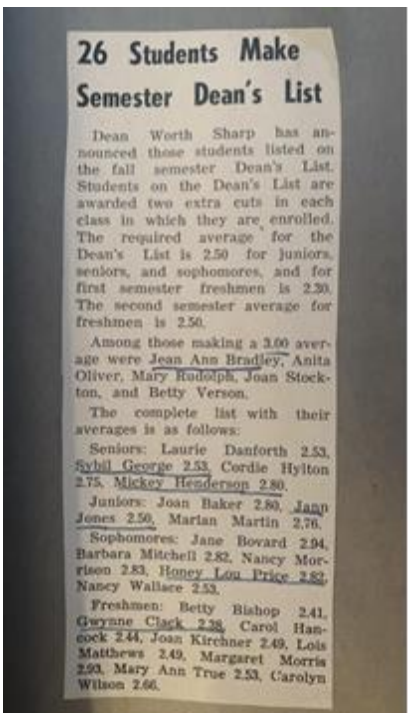


Figure 12 "26 Students Make Semester Dean's List", courtesy of Mu chapter



Figure 13 "Aquacade '50-'51", courtesy of Mu chapter



Figure 14 "Boating is a Sport", courtesy of Mu chapter



Figure 15 "The Alchemist", courtesy of Mu chapter

4.5.1 Connection to the Creed

These moments reflect the everyday truths these women lived. Their wide-ranging interests show how Phi Mu members felt empowered to enter new spaces including less traditionally feminine ones like boating, journalism, and competitive swimming. They embraced these roles and supported one another's unique goals. In doing so, they enacted their own form of justice by living fully and authentically in the public eye. Sisters' care and tenderness shine through in how they honored even unconventional achievements in these archives. This challenges the stereotype and stigma of sameness and conformity often associated with sororities today. These women truly "serve in the light of truth" and kept their lives "gentle, merciful and just", living out "love, honor, truth" in their relationships with one another and with themselves.

5 CONCLUSION

Feminist researchers have often overlooked sororities due to their conventional, conservative displays, “preferring instead to focus their attention on those in the past who pushed against gender barriers, such as... those who adopted explicitly activist or... feminist stances” (Turk 8). Traditionally, Phi Mu’s Mu chapter has reflected a feminine, elite, white, and conventionally attractive identity—women with limited social mobility in the mid-20th century. However, dismissing their history erases the complexity of their contributions to the evolving identity of the American college woman.

While media and scholarship frequently critique sororities for their exclusionary practices, few acknowledge the agency and empowerment members found within these groups, as these archives reveal. Modern critique must avoid presentism to better understand what “these women may have sought and gotten from their Greek-letter affiliation” (Turk 6) in an era when female autonomy was heavily restricted. These local archives reveal a nuanced identity: women who balanced traditional values with ambitions in the public sphere. Encouraged by the Phi Mu Creed to live “in the light of truth,” members quietly expanded the boundaries of acceptable womanhood.

The materials show countless examples of this quiet feminist practice. Young fiancées proudly announced weddings alongside their own professional and academic achievements. Beauty queens represented their communities with grace and intellect. Some women felt empowered to return to the home by choice after graduation. Y.W.C.A. officers publicly lived out their faith through service. Others pursued the arts, sciences, athletics, and academics while remaining visible, proud members of their sorority. These acts may not have overturned social

structures, but they strategically navigated and stretched them, embodying a form of resistance within traditional roles.

Phi Mu's Mu chapter women exemplified the "True-New Woman" rhetoric embedded in the Creed. Written with white, Southern, upper- and middle-class women in mind, the Creed served this demographic well throughout the 20th century, although with limitations.

5.1 Future Recommendations

While many Greek organizations have aspired toward inclusivity, "most continued to uphold their organizations' policies, even while they may have labored to do away with them" (Turk 162). Only under public pressure have sororities adopted essential reforms such as opening membership to women of different races and religions or incorporating DEI initiatives.

Future rhetorical research should critically examine the power and implications of call-and-response traditions, particularly restrictive Creeds, within sororities today. Although Phi Mu now welcomes women from diverse backgrounds, its Creed still reflects a narrow, historically exclusive definition of womanhood. Such language may alienate members who do not see themselves reflected in its ideals. Rhetorical scholars should challenge whether long-standing creeds like Phi Mu's truly serve a modern, pluralistic sisterhood.

This inquiry also extends beyond sororities. Many female organizations use conservative or non-explicitly feminist rhetoric, yet still enable empowerment. As Lynée Gaillet and colleagues have shown in "The Collectors: Quiet Acts of Feminist Praxis", histories that don't "fit" overt activist models still deserve attention. Scholars often curate collections that affirm a specific feminist arc, but the lives of women in Mu chapter remind us that quieter, domestic-facing stories also gave women access to agency, growth, and influence.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Charlotte Hogg Interview Questions

1. Reflecting on your book, *White Sororities and The Cultural Work of Belonging*, how would you define the lens you used towards researching your own sorority, ADPi?
2. How would you suggest I consider my own close positionality in my research?
3. Did you find a close positionality to be a strength or an overall weakness?
4. Sororities, as indicated in your own research, were created in White, Southern, Christian circles, and they are seen today as exclusive, privileged spaces. Do you believe some form of sorority exclusivity is inevitable, given their origins and the way sorority rhetorics are set up today?
5. Does losing the “exclusive” marker make a sorority less desirable to PNMs (potential new members)?
6. Phi Mu and ADPi have a similar history, both being based at Wesleyan College only a few months apart. Phi Mu’s motto is “love, honor, truth”, and the Creed relates key Phi Mu member characteristics to be “courteous”, “tender” and “gentle”. Based on your research into modern sororities, would you argue that the original values of these organizations have shifted over time, from the mid-1850s to today?
7. You could base your answer of this on your own experience with the ADPi creed, or sorority creeds more generally, but what rhetorical implications do you believe reciting a sorority creed regularly as a group does to the image of the organization?
8. How do you believe this may impact members who are required to participate in this ritual?

9. What should be implemented and considered when re-evaluating possibly exclusive rituals/sorority rhetorics?
10. How can one strike a healthy balance of being open to diverse student populations while still paying homage to a sororities' unique history and origins?
11. Are you continuing your research into sorority rhetoric, and how so?

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