

"WHO ARE YOU AND I...?": THE RHETORIC OF IDENTITY IN THE ALOHA EAGLES LETTERS

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ABSTRACT

In 1969, four years before the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision, Aloha Eagles, a Republican legislator in the North Dakota House of Representatives, proposed a House Bill 319 to legalize abortion in North Dakota. Throughout the legislative session, Eagles corresponded with many North Dakotans regarding the bill. This study asks how Eagles and her correspondents construct identities, such as mother, citizen, or medical professional, to support or oppose abortion. Using rhetorical and archival research methods to examine rhetorics of identity in 78 pairs of letters between Eagles and her correspondents, the study reveals that writers construct marital, professional, parental, religious, and civic identities literally, implicitly, and metaphorically as a form of rhetorical action. By articulating identities in these ways, writers contest the meanings of identity categories and attempt to shape who is sanctioned to speak on the issue of abortion.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Who are you and I to decide who may live and who should die?

-Mrs. Harold Lang in a letter to Aloha Eagles, February 11, 1969

For whatever else identity is, it is rhetorical.

-Dana Anderson, *Identity's Strategy*

In 1969, four years before the 1973 Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*, Aloha Eagles, a Republican member of the North Dakota House of Representatives proposed House Bill 319 to legalize abortion in North Dakota in cases of rape, incest, danger to the mother's health, or "the birth of the child with grave and permanent physical deformity or mental retardation" ("Amended HB 319"). In her 1969 letter to Eagles, Mrs. Harold Lang decries the proposed legislation by asking, "Who are you and I to decide who may live and who should die?" Lang's rhetorical question foregrounds issues of identity construction, as her statement slyly suggests her correspondent is willing to place herself in a "god" role, legislating matters of "life and death."

Lang was not the only North Dakotan who took up issues of identity when corresponding with Eagles about HB 319. Lang and others who wrote in opposition and support of the bill construct rhetorical identities for both themselves and Representative Eagles in order to frame a political position about legalizing abortion. The study of these strategies, which often include defining an identity for both the writer and correspondent, confirm Dana Anderson's assertion: "For whatever else identity is, it is rhetorical" (19).

Aloha Pearl Brown Eagles, the legislator who proposed HB 319, served in the ND House of Representatives. Eagles was born in Duluth, MN in 1916 and attended high school and college in MN, graduating from Hibbing Junior College. She married Donald Eagles and moved to Fargo in 1942. According to Eagles' letters, Donald worked as an administrator for Blue Cross Blue Shield. The couple had two sons. She was involved with many women's organizations such as the League of Women Voters and PEO, a Christian women's organization. Eagles was one of the first 20 women to be elected to the North Dakota State Legislature between 1932 and 1969 (Rathke 61). Eagles served in the House from 1967-

1984. According to letters she wrote to constituents, she intended to finish her tenure after only one term, but decided to run again after HB 319, her 1969 bill to legalize abortion, failed, so she could propose it again in the 1971 session. In her time as Representative, she was a proponent of the Equal Rights Amendment and is especially remembered for her 1969 and 1971 bills to legalize abortion in North Dakota. In 1976, she was awarded the University of North Dakota (UND) Law Woman's Award. She died on February 22, 1992. Almost 20 years before her death, in 1973, the same year she was named North Dakota Woman of the Year, she donated her collected papers, mostly correspondence, to UND where the archive opened for research in 1986 but sat untouched until an archivist pulled the papers for me to examine in the spring of 2010.

My work with the archive was set into motion when I stumbled upon the Eagles letters serendipitously after setting out on an online exploration of regional archives. Knowing that educational and governmental institutions often house large archives, I sought out the library websites for universities in the area. My initial, casual interest in seeing what archives were easily accessible to me led me to the website of UND's Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, which includes a category called "Women's Papers." The collection holds a variety of materials from notable women in North Dakota history. I read "Aloha Eagles Papers. 1916-1992; Member of the North Dakota House of Representatives from Fargo, 1966-1984. Authored bills in 1969 and 1971 to liberalize abortion laws in North Dakota" and was surprised and intrigued by mention of a bill that would have legalized abortion in ND four years before *Roe v Wade*. Under the existing North Dakota law at that time, implemented in 1877, a woman could be fined or imprisoned for even asking for an abortion (Eastman C-2). HB 319 was the final bill proposed by a female legislator to be considered during the 1969 legislative session. According to letters in Eagles' archive, HB 319 received a Do Pass vote of 11-7 in the House Social Welfare committee, and I was shocked to learn the bill, HB 319, failed by a vote of 52-42, only 10 votes. When Eagles proposed the bill again two years later, it was defeated by a much wider margin: 85-15.

My shock at the small margin of failure stemmed from my assumption, which I now know to be erroneous, that abortion in North Dakota had always been the same controversial issue it has been in recent years: The only abortion clinic in the state was the target of much backlash in the 1980s and 90s, and, currently, anti-choice groups continue to push for extreme legislation surrounding abortion procedures and women's clinics. The sensationalism of the following description from the finding aid hooked me: "Her bill elicited scorn from some North Dakotans, and she became the target of death threats and hate mail. State troopers were temporarily assigned to protect her." Although I am aware that there can always be extremists, something about the death threats seemed unexpected for a bill that failed by a mere ten votes. Further, I wondered if the threats and mail were similar to the 1980s debate surrounding Fargo's abortion clinic as discussed in *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* by Faye D. Ginsburg or similar to the harassment I receive while escorting patients at North Dakota's only abortion clinic. Driven by what Christina Mason Sutherland calls "presentism, a form of anachronism that treats our own contemporary values as normative" (28), I wanted to see what those threats and scorn looked and sounded like in 1969.

When I arrived at UND, the archivist expressed his surprise at the size of the archive. Apparently, he expected only a folder or two rather than an entire box of materials; he believed I was the first person to look at the collection. The state of the letters of the letters supported his suspicion; the letters of constituents were stapled to copies of Eagles' letters. I learned that if someone else had inspected the materials the staples likely would have been removed already. After looking through all of the folders labeled "Abortion" surrounding Eagle's initial proposition of the bill, I didn't find any threats; I didn't even find anything I would call hate mail, although it is quite possible that Eagles discarded some of her mail and that my understanding of hate mail in today's culture slightly skewed my perception of the mail she did include in her archive. The most hateful piece of mail included in the archives read: "Dig a hole and pull it in after you." Reports of a phone call intended

for Eagles received by her husband ran in the local paper around the time the bill was to be voted on in the House; the male caller made “abusive, but not threatening” comments on the phone, and stated he would “see” Eagles on Monday in the capital in Bismarck (“Abusive Phone Call to Fargo Solon has Capitol in Uproar”). Following the incident, the ND Highway Patrol stationed two officers in the House on the day of the vote. Judging from news reports, Eagles did not seem concerned about the call, saying “It was a crank call. Forget it” (“Abusive Phone Call to Fargo Solon has Capitol in Uproar”). She also declined a Highway Patrol escort to the capitol building on the Monday morning to which the caller referred.

Despite not gaining insight into the hate mail as I expected, what I did find were pages and pages of letters between Eagles and concerned North Dakota citizens—opponents, supporters, students, wives, men, doctors, and mothers. From those letters, the way writers construct and reconstruct, frame and reframe, various rhetorical identities, such as “citizen” or “mother,” for themselves and each other emerged as a topic for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this review of literature, I touch on rhetorical and sociolinguistic theories of identity and the closely related concept, ethos, as well as theories of autobiographical and epistolary studies. The goal of this literature review is to briefly examine identity and its rhetoricity. Although autobiographies offer a clear data set for examining individual identity construction, I argue that looking to other, more dialogic, genres affords opportunities to extend rhetorical theories of identity. In particular, topical letters exchanged among a variety of individuals capture the relational nature of identity through the discursive negotiation of rhetorical identity constructions of both self and others.

My study is situated within a tradition of historical feminist rhetorical research. Feminist historiography is often understood to fall along one of two lines: recovery and gendered analysis (Jarratt cited in Rawson 40, Schell and Rawson 10). Within the field of rhetoric, the origins of feminist historiography can be traced to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's 1989 text, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Volume I*, an examination of the rhetoric of women's rights activists, and the ensuing debate between Kohrs Campbell and Barbara Biesecker as it played out in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. Kohrs Campbell's book was primarily a work in recovery, and Biesecker, from a poststructuralist perspective, criticized Kohrs Campbell for an "affirmative action" approach to feminist rhetoric (Biesecker 340), instead, "press[ing] for a feminist intervention into the history of Rhetoric that persistently critiques its own practices of inclusion and exclusion by relativizing rather than universalizing what Aristotle identified as 'the available means of persuasion'" (350), to which Kohrs Campbell responded with accusations of Biesecker being yet another participant in the historical silencing of women.

In studies of rhetoric, identity is most commonly discussed in relation to what is perhaps the most frequently theorized and discussed of Aristotle's "available means of persuasion" (Biesecker 350), ethos, most commonly defined as character or credibility; however, it can also be defined as: "the inclusion of the speaker's character as an aspect of

discourse, the representation of that character in discourse, and the role of that character in persuasion" (Baumlin xvii). From the early definitions of ethos, feminist and other scholars have created more complex understandings. Rhetorical studies of identity call to mind the identity work feminists often engage in. Feminist theory in general addresses the problematic nature of essentialist views of gender by conceptualizing gender identity as a construction. For example, in her oft-cited essay, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminism," Linda Alcoff developed the concept of positionality, which "includes two points: first, ...the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but, second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where a meaning can be discovered (the meaning of femaleness)" (377-378). Positionality, then, allows one to say, "at one and the same time that gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical, or essential and yet still claim that gender is relevant because we are taking gender as position from which to act politically" (377). Or, as Denise Riley writes, "it is compatible to suggest that 'women' don't exist—while maintaining a politics of 'as if they existed'—since the world behaves as if they unambiguously did" (112).

Joanna Schmertz, in "Constructing Essences: Ethos and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism," critiques Alcoff's concept for its lack of attention to rhetoric, writing, "were she to recognize her solutions as rhetorical, she might bring a more explicit plan of action to feminist theory, while at the same time complicating the field of rhetoric in fruitful ways" (83). Schmertz is also critical of traditional conceptualization of ethos, described by Jarratt and Reynolds as "a concept most often attributed to Aristotle and defined as a set of instructions to a speaker about how to create the most convincing impression of himself before an audience" (39). To build a more rhetorical version of the positionality of gender developed through a combination of the traditional understandings of the concept and

feminist theorizing of it, Schmertz defines ethos "as neither manufactured nor fixed, neither tool nor character, but rather the stopping points at which the subject (re)negotiates her own essence to call upon whatever agency that essence enables" (86). Schmertz explains a writer's or speaker's ethos as a rhetorical construction but one that is tied to one's innate being or self. While that understanding problematizes traditional conceptualizations of ethos by connecting self and rhetorical performance, the reconfigured definition supports an essentialist view of identity, in this case, gender identity, because ethos, despite the speaker's freedom to shape it, remains tethered to one's pre-existing self. Ethos then becomes a rhetorical strategy, a rhetorical performance. What is omitted from Schmertz's definition is the cultural context (Miller and Bridwell-Bowles 11). The performance of self or construction of identity, no matter what it is called, is highly contextual and subject to the given socio-political context and writing situation.

Similar assertions about the relational nature of identity itself arise through sociolinguistic studies. Sociolinguists Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall define identity as: "the social positioning of self and other" (586). Drawing from a range of sub-fields within sociocultural linguistics, Bucholtz and Hall argue that identity "is constituted through social action, and especially through language" (588).

Within the field of writing studies, identity construction has most frequently been taken up in autobiographical studies. Studies of identity construction in autobiography have often focused on the way autobiographers create their identities through their texts, that the identity present in the autobiography is not necessarily pre-existing, but takes shape through the production of the autobiography. The identity may not be present prior to the writing of the story of her life. Therefore, for scholars like Paul Eakin, autobiography is a way for writers to create their identities. Eakin writes, "...narrative is not merely something we tell, listen to, read, or invent. It is an essential part of our sense of who we are" (viii). On the other hand, rhetorical scholars of autobiography examine the way identities conveyed in autobiography function to persuade others. One recent explication of the theory

of the rhetoric of identity is found in Dana Anderson's *Identity's Strategy: Rhetorical Selves in Conversion*. Drawing on Burke's concept of identification, Anderson defines the rhetorical strategy of identity as "the influencing of others through the articulation of our sense of *who we are*" (4). Anderson asserts that one way to view identity rhetorically entails seeing "[identity] as a kind of persuasive strategy, as a means of moving audiences toward certain beliefs or actions...identity matters less as something that one 'is' and more as something that one does in language; or, more exactly, identity matters as something that one does to an audience through the expression of who or what one is" (Anderson 4). He asserts that "identity—our sense of who a person is, or how one defines oneself—and character—our sense of how a person acts, or one's nature as a moral agent—are both powerful, and powerfully connected, terms in contemporary society" (93); however, they are not the same. Anderson's concept of identity as a rhetorical strategy offers a way to examine the deployment of identities as argument and agency. Perhaps due to the monologic nature of the genre of autobiography, the study of rhetorical identity in autobiography fails to capture the relational and dialogic quality of identity.

While most of the study of identity construction in writing to date has emerged in the area of autobiographical studies, the study of identity construction in autobiography can be extended to letters, which have relational and dialogic qualities and share similarities with autobiography. As Marjanne E. Gooze notes, "One of the emerging and enduring debates in theorizing women's autobiography... is how narrowly or broadly to construct the field of autobiographical texts" (cited in Smith and Watson 11). Some have argued a wide net should be cast to encompass many genres of writing, which could include letters, to resist the canon of male writing and autobiography. Letters seem a natural genre disruptor and boundary pusher because, as Liz Stanley asserts in "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," they "disturb binary distinctions: between speaking and writing and private and public, as well as between here and there, now and then, and presence and absence." (Stanley 209). Because of their amorphous genre boundaries, letters are in some

ways shadows of entire autobiographies. Although letters “are not one person speaking or writing about their life” (Stanley 202) as traditional autobiographies are, letters and entire correspondences often *include* at least one writer sharing her life and constructing her identity.

Historically, epistolary studies have focused on one letter writer and one side of a set of letters due to archiving practices and perceived historic importance of one of the letter writers. Because of this focus, collections of letters and correspondence, like the whole of women’s history, are often marked by gaps. As Stanley notes, “most published collections of letters, indeed most archived letters, will have originated as part of a correspondence, but with one side remaining: because of the presumed importance of one of the letter writers...or perhaps because of the content of these letters.” (210). Despite the tendency to retain only one side of a correspondence, Margaret Marshall describes a shift in archiving practices: “archival and manuscript collections of correspondence are almost always collections of incoming mail, but the value of keeping outgoing correspondence was recognized early in the nineteenth century” (136). Even after letter writers and archivists acknowledged the value of outgoing correspondence, many epistolary studies are often one-sided due to the loss or disregard of some letters, especially women’s. In the rare case that both sides of an exchange are intact, epistolary studies typically examine long-term correspondences between two individuals with emphasis on one side and one writer of the correspondence; however, in epistolary studies, distinction can be made between correspondence, an on-going long term communication between two individuals, and letters written “between different people and intended to be read as one-off letters to them” (Stanley 204). While an epistolarium or an extended correspondence may share more similarities with an autobiography than “one-off” letters, like those in the Eagles collection, placing equal emphasis on both sides of a letter exchange offers an opportunity to focus on the rhetoric of the letter exchange and its dialogic dimensions.

The dialogic nature of letters, the back and forth movement of letter writing, may prompt people to analogize them with conversations; however, these comparisons should be avoided because:

while there is turn taking in epistolary exchanges, this always entails temporal and spatial interruptions between the writing and the reading of a letter; there is not face work involved; writing is actually different from speaking; and anyway the content of each 'turn' takes a relatively stable form and is not nearly so available for ongoing qualification and revision as talk. (Stanley 213)

However, unlike autobiographies, letters are often topical and guided by the interaction and dialogue created by two or more individuals who are corresponding. As Stanley points out, letters "involve a performance of self by the writer, but one tempered by recognizing that the addressee is not just a mute audience for this, but also a '(writing) self in waiting'" (212). That recognition then affords letter writers the opportunity to construct a rhetorical identity most relevant to the immediate writing situation and particular correspondent. The ways in which both Eagles and her correspondents construct identities extend Anderson's notion of identity as a rhetorical strategy because, in addition to articulating their own identities, writers also construct the identities of their correspondents.

From feminist historiography to sociolinguistics to rhetorics of identity, studies of identity have yet to make use of archival research studies to draw together the potential for political letters (which are tied to feminist historiography's often political/civic subjects) to tell us something about identity as action. In their 2012 study of identity performance in online forums, Jeff Grabill and Stacey Pigg argue: "When rhetors do not have access to each others' prior reputations, or clear pictures of their cultural motivations, purposes, and reasons for communicating, identity building can become an important part of developing agency within a conversation" (116). In a set of political letters, writers have limited background information and reasons for correspondence. "One-off" letters among agents in a political situation are then a place to examine identity construction, and there appear to

be no published rhetorical studies of a set of letters that contains initial and response letters between one individual and a variety of different individuals. To fill in the gap in existing research, I study a unique data set: letters between one individual and her many correspondents. Looking at both sides of a letter exchange helps me understand the rhetoric of identity because the dialogic nature of the letters affords the opportunity to see how the identity was interpreted through consideration of the audience's responses to constructed identities.

Identity studies of narratives are moving from looking at how identities are created through writing to examining how writers shape their identities to persuade. Studies of rhetorics of identity examine how identity functions as action. Expanding the study of identity as action beyond autobiography into ways that written, rhetorical identities are used as action is necessary because letters share characteristics with autobiography and political letters, in particular, seek to be active documents.

Studying identity as rhetoric involves, according to Anderson, consideration of three questions: "how identities are 'made' in the texts that articulate them, what they are made of, and how they are persuasive" (Anderson 4). Extending from Anderson's questions, my study attempts to answer the following questions related to Aloha Eagles' letters: 1) How do Eagles and the other letter writers strategically construct identity? 2) How do the identity constructions shape who is allowed to speak for or against abortion? 3) What insight does the rhetoric of identity in letters offer to the broader area of rhetoric? To answer those questions, I studied 78 complete pairs of letters from the Aloha Eagles Papers using what Tarez Samra Graban describes as the emergent taxonomy method, which consists of four recursive steps and an organizational grid as its tool. Next I discuss the data set, method, and instrument in more detail.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

To investigate my research questions, I analyzed a set of letters from the Aloha Eagles papers, a 1.25 linear foot collection of materials dated from 1964-1973. The collection is housed in the Women's Papers archive in the Orin G. Libby Manuscript Collection at the Chester Fritz Library at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The letters are contained in folders 8, 9, and 10 of the Aloha Eagles Papers. Each folder, along with folders 11 and 12, bears the label "Abortion." Because I am interested in looking at pairs of letters between Eagles and those contacting her in regard to the bill, my data set includes only those pairs that include an initial letter and a response, and only those pairs initiated by a writer other than Eagles with the primary purpose of expressing support or opposition to HB 319. Although Eagles proposed a similar bill in 1971 legislative session, I limit my study to letters related to HB 319 written between January and March of 1969, the time between when Eagles proposed the bill until shortly after its defeat. The set includes 55 sets of letters between Eagles and bill supporters, and 23 exchanges between Eagles and bill opponents for a total of 78 sets of letters. From the folders 8-12 of the Eagles collection, I excluded 35 other sets of letters and 69 single letters where one side of the correspondence was missing from the collection, which excludes the entirety of folders 11 and 12. The excluded letters are: requests for or sharing of information on abortion or HB 319; letters arranging speaking engagements for Eagles on HB 319 or abortion; or letters addressing other bills. I excluded these letters because they are either unrelated to HB 319 or because they do not address the content and topic of abortion and the bill but, rather, attend to more administrative transactions related to the bill.

To study pairs of letters, I first needed to select a method appropriate for organizing and analyzing them. Because of its flexibility and adaptability, the method I selected derives from the emergent taxonomy method as outlined in Tarez Graban's essay, "Emergent Taxonomies: Using Tension and Forum to Organize Primary Texts" from the 2010 book, *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*. As the

title implies, Graban used the method primarily to organize an archive but also to research nearly a dozen boxes of materials of Helen Gougar, an American suffragist. Whereas Graban's challenges with her project were questions of both archival arrangement and access to the archived materials for research, my data set presents a different challenge—devising an approach to organize a set of data that includes many concise arguments among many different people. One distinguishing characteristic of Graban's method and instrument is "equal attention to the research trajectory and the inherent rhetorical nature of the collection," which allows consideration of the intended audience (216).

The flexibility and adaptability of the method and its instrument, the organizational grid, allow them to be applied to a variety of data sets for various purposes. I am not tasked with organizing texts within the archive; however, the emergent taxonomy method is useful because, as Graban notes, using a framework that emerges from the archive allows for the texts' rhetorical value to take precedence (208). This makes the emergent taxonomy method especially well suited for analyzing correspondence because the audience for each letter is a particular person with a particular set of beliefs and identities. Recognition of the audience then affords letter writers the opportunity to construct a rhetorical identity most relevant to the writing situation and correspondent, and the flexibility of the taxonomical grid tool offers a way to account for and record the performances of the initiators and responders. Additionally, working with a grid or chart offers a visual aspect that facilitates the discernment of the data from a set of this size.

The research tool Graban created is a two-column organizational chart with rows labeled: classification, text, source, record, genre(s), audience/characteristics, references to suffrage figures and events, and argument (214-215). In the first category, classification, Graban placed one of the "six strategic responses [taken by Gougar] to audience and situation" (213). The categories of text, source, and record include information such as the titles of speeches or articles, publication or location, and location within the archive. The genre row identifies the medium of the artifact, such as a public speech or newspaper

article, and the audience/characteristics describes the audience of the original text. The references box lists references Gougar “made to people, places, or the [suffrage] movement at large” (214). For example, in one speech Gougar alludes to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Argument, the final row in the grid, records relevant commonplace arguments surrounding suffrage as well as Gougar’s response to the commonplace. Although Graban selected the categories for the ease with which she could record information and “do extensive cross-referencing,” the categories can be adjusted to suit any given rhetorical, archival study, but “they don’t assume fixed or concrete categories” (216).

The original emergent taxonomy method, as described by Graban, consists of four steps. The first step is the development of research questions based on a “first-pass” description of the archive’s contents and determination of what type of evidence is necessary to answer those questions (Graban 217). The second step is the selection of what Graban calls “strategic responses”: “identifiable, flexible relationships that occur between the subject and the subject’s context” (217). For example, “provoking women of means out of ambivalence into action and reprimanding dominant movements for their faltering efforts towards suffrage” and “undermining arguments against suffrage by condescending to gendered stereotypes of regional women in order to overturn them” were two of the strategic responses used by Gougar (213). The relationships become the uppermost category on the grid. The third step is a selection of “organizational categories...that can be noted fairly quickly” (217). The fourth and final step is to apply “the grid to a representative sample of texts in the collection, in order to select a minicorpus that best demonstrates the organizational categories and, eventually, to rethink and revise those categories in light of new textual evidence” (218).

The method allows for more recursivity than the somewhat linear process that Graban describes might indicate. The difference in my data set—pairs of exchanged letters—and the data set around which Graban developed the method—political speeches—likely accounts for some of the variation in movement among the four steps of the process. Whereas Gougar

directed her speeches at one audience in response to commonplace arguments on suffrage, Eagles' and her correspondents' letters addressed individuals and tailored responses for each writer, necessitating accounting for more nuances in argument. However, I should note that the viewpoints of many of the individuals corresponding with Eagles are clearly rooted in the commonplaces surrounding abortion support and opposition—murder, population control, choice, to name a few. In the following section, I describe my use of the emergent taxonomy.

My first-pass description and reading of the letters between Eagles and voters made apparent that many of the letters in folders 8-12 were written to express support of or opposition to HB 319. More interestingly, identity surfaced as part of the arguments set forth by voters and Eagles within their correspondence. That is, in my first-pass of the documents, writers' naming and construction of identities emerged as a focus for discussions surrounding HB 319 and abortion. From that focus emerged my preliminary research questions, which I refined throughout the research process, about how writers constructed identity. I determined the evidence necessary to answer those questions was identifying the multitude of identities writers constructed.

Once I determined the questions arising from the texts and began to understand what evidence I was looking for after multiple readings of the letters, I moved on to determining what organizational categories would be most useful. The organizational categories on the grid were similar to Graban's: the record, which includes the location of the document in the archive, the name of the letter writer and the date of the letter; the characteristics of the audience, including any identifying occupational, religious, marital, parental information as well as stance on HB 319 and/or abortion; reference(s) to identity, including identifying literal, metaphoric, or implied identities; the argument made in support or opposition to abortion or the bill; and, finally, any other notable rhetorical strategies used by Eagles or her correspondent. As Graban suggests should happen, the categories went through some changes as I begin working more closely with the data. To accommodate the

set's dialogism, I expanded Graban's original grid from one column to two, one for the initial letter and one for Eagles' response. Next came the selection of "organizational categories from the strategic responses that bear on the question of audience, that can be marked discursively and linguistically, and that can be noted fairly quickly" (Graban 217). The organizational categories offered an initial analysis of how identity is used in the argument made by the initial letter writer and an analysis of Eagles' repurposing and reshaping of that argument. This initial analysis serves the purpose of developing organizational categories, which are an extension of the identity framework.

After I modified the organizational grid based on the previous steps, I began applying it to all pairs of letters in the document set, compared to the original method's application of the chart to only a sample of texts. From that application, I returned to what was, for Graban, the second step in the method: identifying "strategic responses" taken by her subject. As I developed the research questions and began determining what types of evidence would be necessary to answer them, it became clear that the writers developed or responded to identity construction in several ways: constructing identities for themselves, assigning identities to their correspondent, and accepting, denying, or reconstructing identities assigned to themselves by their correspondent.

Across the multiple ways writers constructed identities, three types of identity constructions emerged: implied identity, literal identity, and metaphoric identity, and those three types of identity constructions became uppermost category of what has become the final grid in the process. The final step in the research process was reapplication of the grid to all 78 pairs of letters in the data set in order to refine the emerging analysis of the rhetoric of identity. In the following section, I describe the letters, their content, and resulting analysis in more detail.

CHAPTER 4. DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA SET

Most of the initial letters and responses in the data set are quite short; some are several paragraphs long while others are one paragraph or only a couple sentences; however, even within the shortest letters, there are often multiple constructions of identity. As emerged from my reading, writers use three types of identity constructions: literal, implicit, and metaphoric. A literal construction is when a writer uses an identity term like "citizen" or "wife" or describes an action that refers to an identity. An implicit construction is one presented through an element of the letter like the letterhead or signature or through another subtle move such as pronoun choice. Metaphorical constructions are those that work through metaphor, as when a writer compares Eagles to Hitler. Of the 156 letters that compose the 78 pairs, there are literal, implicit, and metaphoric constructions of identity in 78, 146, and 52 letters, respectively. Next, I explain each of those types of constructions in more detail.

Literal Identity Construction

One of the ways writers make identities is literally. When I suggest that there are 78 letters with a literal construction of identity, I mean that writers explicitly claim for themselves or assign to their correspondent identity through the use of a term or action that is connected to an identity. Eagles builds literal identity in 33 letters, and her correspondents use literal identity constructions in 45 letters to Eagles. The initiators of the letters, Eagles' correspondents use literal identity constructions in regards to themselves and Eagles. Eagles, in turn, constructs identity for herself, often in response to the way her identity has been constructed by her correspondent, and also uses a literal identity construction to establish shared categories of identity with her correspondent to find common ground with opponents or situate herself and supporters within a larger supportive community.

Writers construct literal identities in several ways. First, letter writers name specific identities, such as mother, Christian, or doctor, for themselves and their correspondent.

Second, writers describe situations that connote a certain identity; I have categorized those constructions as literal, too. For instance, one correspondent, rather than naming herself as a former urban dweller mentions “having lived in two metropolitan cities, Tokyo and Washington, D.C.” Certainly, the difference between claiming a specific term as an identity and making a reference to an activity performed by one who possesses a particular identity is notable. Yet, the two constructions serve similar purposes. In the initial example here, there is not a common, easily identifiable term for “one who has previously lived in an urban area”; therefore, the writer describes the related activity instead.

Writers may also take this approach for rhetorical reasons as Eagles does when she writes to a pastor who opposed the bill, stating: “If you believe as I do in a merciful Jesus,...” Although she does not use the word “Christian,” stating the action that signifies a Christian identity, belief in Jesus, serves almost the same purpose as naming the identity directly. Here, Eagles likely chose to describe the action of her and her correspondents’ belief to denaturalize his Christian identity. Denaturalization draws attention to “the ways in which identity is crafted, fragmented, problematic, or false” (Bucholtz and Hall 602). Because she is corresponding with a pastor whose understanding of Christianity is likely slightly different than her own, Eagles demonstrates an understanding of the difference and, instead of saying “we’re both Christians,” defines what it means to be a Christian at its most fundamental level, and claims that identity but with one addition, “merciful.” Eagles’ adjective choice, “merciful,” calls up mercy as a Christian belief and implies that, if the pastor were truly Christian, he would also believe in a “merciful Jesus,” a Jesus who would be sympathetic to women. The underlying tone of her response is biting; she takes a dig at her correspondent, implying he has twisted an essential trait of Christ, and, therefore, one of a Christian: merciful. Eagles calls out what she views as the correspondent’s inauthentic claim to the identity of Christian.

Literal identities, then, are constructed in multiple ways. In the first, the writer names a particular identity, such as mother, for either herself or her correspondent. The

second way is through describing a situation or action to signify an identity. Eagles and her correspondents use both approaches, and, with both approaches, the categories of identities that arise include citizenship, profession, religion, gender, marital status, and parental status. Because many of the constructions are intertwined, I have ordered them this way to help tease apart the analysis.

Literal Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Because the letters hope to engage an elected official regarding political issues, the writers often construct themselves as aware and engaged citizens, called to action by their civic duty. For example, one of the opponents constructs himself as a member of the general public, as opposed to a representing an organization or legislative body, by stating he is “an ordinary citizen.” He elaborates on that identity by stating he “stands alone” and does not “represent any affluent numbers group, or a CHURCH, or any group.” Claiming the identity of “an ordinary citizen” in juxtaposition with groups whose interest in the bill is informed by political or religious reasons and supported by resources intends to lead the reader to infer that his character, in comparison, is honest and uncompromised by special monetary interests as he implies groups might be. Yet another letter from a couple that opposes the bill closes with: “Two Concerned Citizens.”

Opponents see themselves as fulfilling their duty as citizens by engaging in the political process to attempt to prevent legislation and construct rhetorical identities as citizens to do so. Through claiming literal identity as citizens, opponents implicitly contrast themselves with two entities: Eagles’ as a legislator and organized groups with vested interest in the passage or failure of the legislations. Writers construct their identities as citizens to highlight their difference from Eagles, who is to be representing them and their perspectives. Speaking as citizens asserts that they are engaging in the democratic process and implies that Eagles may be acting outside of the bounds of the political process as these writers seem to hint that Eagles is concerned with groups lobbying around the bill, such as population control advocates, churches, and medical organizations. The literal construction

of their own identities then functions to point out the ways Eagles may not be acting in appropriate or ethical ways given her identities and roles as a legislator and wife of a medical insurance administrator. Writers use their identities to implore Eagles to rethink her stance on the bill, to persuade her to withdraw the bill. Opponents' claiming of a citizen identity by opponents is used in multiple ways to shape the character of the writer, the audience, and other entities involved in the legislation.

In addition to civic duty, fervent support of reproductive rights prompts writers to contact Eagles. In doing so, being a newly engaged citizen becomes a relevant identity to construct. As one bill supporter writes, "I have never written a letter to my congressman, representative or any thing like that before. But...to some cases, I must write!" While she does not explicitly name an identity, her claim of previous action, or inaction rather, constructs her as a formerly disengaged citizen who supports the legalization of abortion so strongly that she was drawn to write in support of the bill. Combined with her construction of herself as a "young mother," she also demonstrates that she does not churn out extreme letters to legislators once a day. Here, the exigency of the situation compels the writer to look to her past experience and shape it into a story and identity relevant to the situation. As Eakin writes, "... our experience seems to come to us already marked and structured; sometimes...,we mark it consciously and deliberately ourselves; and sometimes, more formally, we cast it into autobiography" (170). In this instance, the experience of not having written to a legislator was likely not marked or structured until the opposite was true and the writer chose to convey that experience and identity in this snippet of a life narrative.

The identity of an engaged citizen is created to demonstrate commitment to being a voice of the general public, to express exigency for writing in the face of such an important issue, and to create a common set of values between writers. Overall, the rhetorical identity of a citizen is constructed to persuade Eagles that she is acting in or out of accord, from the perspective of supporters and opponents, respectively, with her role as a legislator.

Literal Professional Identity

Professional knowledge, too, motivates citizens to contact Eagles and construct professional identities in their correspondence. Letter writers with occupations they determine relevant to the issue of abortion frequently employed their identity as professionals to explicitly assert authority for their stance on abortion and related legislation. Although supporters in medical professions are more likely to use this strategic identity construction, several opponents do as well. For example, Earl Allen, an opponent of HB 319, explicitly states his occupations as an economist and a statistician, who, by nature of his professional identity understands that numbers can be manipulated to support any cause, a move he implies pro-choice advocates engage in: "As a statistician and economist I can vouch for the fact that we can support any such thing as this with the minutest evidence." He constructs his professional identity to assert that it grants him particular knowledge of facts and truth. Combining this identity construction with his accusation of misrepresentation by abortion supporters permits Allen to emphasize his own moral character. However tied together his identity and character are, they are not synonymous; his claim of a professional identity is, as Anderson says of David Brock's autobiographical identity, "a tool for accomplishing special ethos effects" (110). While individuals often construct professional identities to assert authority in a particular area of expertise, Allen uses this identity to claim superiority in moral makeup over abortion supporters.

Among other professional identities constructed are those related to medicine or social services. Doctors, nurses, and social workers frequently mentioned their line of work because it gives them a particular understanding of abortion and related issues. For example, one correspondent identifies herself as a nurse and describes working at large city hospital where women arrived in poor condition due to "incomplete abortions." Yet another supporter constructs himself as a pediatrician and city health officer who reads widely in ob-gyn research and news. In these cases, writers construct their rhetorical identities to draw from a pool of professional experiences, which informed their stance to support liberalization

of abortion legislation. Offering up a range of identities informed by experiences gives to Eagles, perhaps, a broader range of reasons for her legislation than she personally brings to the table.

From a range of professions, writers gained a particular insight or knowledge relevant to the issue of abortion. Identity constructions surrounding professions are constructed to bring a quality of ethos and authority.

Literal Religious Identity

While many supporters view abortion as a medical issue and construct their identities as medical professionals to demonstrate their support, opponents of HB 319 frequently frame abortion and, therefore, the bill as a religious issue and subsequently construct their religious identity to support their stance against HB 319. One opponent, for example, closed her letter with "Trying to be a Christian," indicating that her Christian identity obligates her to express her opinion on the proposal of HB 319. Anderson argues that identity serves as the basis from which a writer guides the reader to insight about the writer's character (105). In this case, the closing constructs the writer as Christian in order to present her character as moral and, much like Eagles did in the previously discussed exchange with the pastor, implies that she is straining to do so and that Eagles, in relation, is not acting as a Christian should.

Supporters of the bill, understanding the opposition's stance, also constructed themselves as religious, although with less frequency than opponents. Only three supporters literally construct themselves as religious, as opposed to about half of the bill's detractors who do. For instance, one supporter contrasts her religious identity with those of opponents, writing she knows "church people" will contact Eagles in opposition, so "Despite the fact that I go to church regularly and teach Sunday School, I see this as a necessary legal change." The writer constructs herself as religious supporter and a bill supporter to point out the two identities are not mutually exclusive, as they may be assumed to be given the context of a debate that is often claimed to hinge on religious teachings.

In the face of opposition that draws heavily from religious doctrines which equate abortion with murder, Eagles explicitly constructs a religious identity for herself in several ways. She states she is "a Presbyterian" in seven letters. In three of those letters, letters in response to nuns or other women presenting a religious identity, she goes on to say that "I, too, am a woman of deep religious conviction." Eagles' preceding statement simultaneously constructs the correspondents and Eagles as women; she uses it in four letters to female opponents. She constructs her religious identity primarily in response to opponents who view being a Christian, an abortion supporter, and a female as incompatible identities. In doing so, Eagles uses her identity construction to question the ideologies assumed to be connected to a religious identity.

Literal Gender/Sex

Gender as a rhetorical identity is constructed in several ways for a range of purposes. Just as some view being pro-choice and being Christian as irreconcilable identities, gender identity is sometimes seen as conflicting with the support of abortion legislation. For example, writers construct Eagles as a woman. One opponent identifies Eagles as a woman, writing that Eagles' "as a woman and a mother" as the author of an abortion bill "seems justly unfair" implying that one cannot be a woman, mother, and abortion supporter without also being a hypocrite. From the opponent's perspective, Eagles seeks to rob her fellow women of the opportunity to become mothers, implying that motherhood is an opportunity available to and desired by all women. Thus, for some opponents, motherhood is an identity that appears to be inseparable from and contrary to the identity of woman.

Still other writers construct their own individual gender identity. For example, one opponent explicitly asserts her gender by stating: "This is one woman who is very much opposed to your abortion bill," responding to publicized reports that Eagles' was receiving supportive mail from women. The writer differentiates herself from the collective identity of "women." Differentiation "depends on the suppression of similarities that might undermine

the construction of difference” (Bucholtz and Hall 600). In some ways, the writer’s distinction serves to question the notion of universal woman—a goal of contemporary feminists like Denise Riley who emphasizes “the inherent shakiness of the designation ‘women’” (98). Riley notes that “to be named as a woman can be the precondition for some kinds of solidarity. Political rhetorics which orchestrate an identity of ‘women’ or ‘mothers’ may generate refusals from their ostensible targets” (99). Claiming an identity in opposition to the majority of women writing to Eagles up until that moment, the writer seeks to interrupt the collective identity of women, an identity that erases differences.

On the other hand, collective gender identity is also constructed by a small group of women. Writers use gender as a collective rhetorical identity to signify unity as when a small group of supporters co-wrote a letter, saying: “we are a few women...,” presumably to demonstrate their solidarity.

Eagles constructs the gender of her correspondents in ways similar to those used by her constituents. For instance, to build a shared, gendered identity of “woman” with supporters, she uses phrases such as “we women” or “all of us women.” In those cases, she seeks to persuade the writers that the efforts of liberalizing reproductive healthcare laws are the charge of women. In addition to constructing collective gender identity with other women, Eagles also constructs herself as “a woman” in some letters and refers to her “sex” in yet another letter. Because she believes the liberalization of abortion laws depends on women banding together in support, she constructs herself among that group to model and reflect the agency she hopes to offer other women.

Eagles also uses gender as a point of agency for a male supporter when she constructs him as a male ally in the fight for the bill. To the first male supporter of HB 319 outside of the medical professions, Eagles writes: “...you are the only man to write in favor of my bill.... Why?” Through that phrase, Eagles constructs the writer as an expert on the male perspective to encourage him and to solicit advice on how she might counter male opposition. Identifying the writer by his male identity seeks to construct him as an expert

on the male perspective. She writes: "It's a very personal question but I would be very interested in knowing what in particular motivated you to favor it and to write...I'm looking for any suggestions which may counteract male opposition." Eagles does this to persuade the writer to share his insight on how she can reach out to other men to gain them as allies in the fight for abortion legislation

Literal Parental Status

Parental status is another identity writers claim as a rhetorical strategy. More specifically, motherhood is used as particular identity with authority to speak on the topic of abortion; none of the male writers indicate they are fathers. Mother is a powerful construct and one of few paths to power that has historically been available to many women. Most people constructing this identity also identify the number of children they had. Of the individuals who wrote in opposition, three identify themselves as mothers of multiple (5, 6, and 11) children. Claiming the identity of mothers of what might be considered a large number of children causes Eagles to also read these women as religious. Supporters who construct themselves as mothers are more likely to share details about their children, rather than only the number. Supporters tell the number of children they have and share some information about their children For example, one tells of her "retarded child" while another shares that her two sons are enrolled in university.

In addition to their own motherhood, several writers commented on Eagles' parental identity, constructing her as mother. As mentioned previously, one opponent identifies Eagles as a mother and points to that identity and Eagles' simultaneous authoring of an abortion bill as hypocritical, indicating that to be a good mother one must unequivocally support procreation. Thus, her identity as a mother and her support of abortion legislation indicate something about her character.

To counter this view, Eagles asserts her identity as a mother by stating she was "a woman blessed with two perfectly normal pregnancies" who, therefore, wants to advocate for women who were not so "blessed." Eagles questions the god term of "mother," carefully

parsing the identity of “mother” with all its ideological underpinnings from the identity of woman in order to take on the role of advocate for women who may not want or cannot claim that identity. Through constructing her identity as a mother and advocate, Eagles contests the opposition’s definition of mother (and woman) solely as a role of reproduction. Her identity is used to interrupt the ideologies assumed to accompany the identity of mother.

Literal Marital Status

While Eagles’ role as mother is often constructed to attempt to cast her as a hypocrite, marital statuses are employed as literal identity constructions to demonstrate a personal gain or lack thereof in the legalization of abortion. For example, one supporter constructs herself as a “divorced woman of forty” when asserting she would not benefit personally from HB 319. She constructs her identity as a “divorced woman of forty” to demonstrate that her support for liberalized abortion is not self-interested, which has the effect of showcasing her as selfless individual.

In contrast, one opponent constructs Eagles as a wife, specifically as the wife of a medical professional who stands to gain economically from the legalization of abortion presumably due to the economic dependency wives are assumed to have on their husbands. Her identity as a wife, specifically of an insurance administrator, has implications for her character.

In response, Eagles refers to her husband and his occupation, statements that construct her as a wife; however, she simultaneously asserts her professional and economic independence from him, opposing the definition of “wife” as constructed by her correspondent and many cultural and social expectations of the time.

Implicit Identity Construction

The second way writers construct identities is implicitly. Implicit identity constructions, identities not directly asserted by letter writers, are those constructed through titles, letterheads, signatures, and so on. Implicit constructions of identity are

present in each of Eagles' 75 letters and in 71 of her correspondents' letters. Categories similar to those found in literal identity constructions arise through the second manner of making identities used by Eagles and other letter writers make identities.

More so than other identity constructions in the letters, implied identity markers are related to genre and social conventions. For example, women often identify themselves as "Mrs." followed by their husbands' first and last name. When a woman does not use a title, she implies she is single or independent or both. The implied identities are visually discernible through markers such as letterheads more so than other two types of identity constructions. Using a letterhead allows the writer to assert her- or himself as a professional without stating an occupation explicitly. For example, several clergy members wrote to Eagles on their parishes' letterheads, and many doctors used their practices' letterhead. Similarly, listing any degrees in the signature block connotes professionalism and authority. One example is a nun who signed her name, Sister Aloysius, with her R.N. and M.S.W. degrees followed by her title as Director of a school of nursing in North Dakota. When the identity may have no seeming overt relevance or when it might create contention, implicitly constructing identity tempers tension. However, implicit identity can also serve as ethos of sorts. Eagles' signature block appears as "Aloha Eagles, State Representative, District 21" on each of her letters. In a legislature and time where women were marked by their gender and marital status, Eagles must work in as many ways as possible to assert her professional identity.

Similar to literal identity constructions, marital status, religion, and profession are the most common implicit identity constructions. Additionally, individuality arises as an implicit identity construction. In addition to constructing her own identity implicitly, Eagles constructs her correspondents' identities through salutations in two areas: marital status and religion. These two categories are the most common because the use of titles is common in the genre of letters. Because religion plays heavily into the arguments that people make against abortion legislation, Eagles frequently calls on her opponents' identities

as religious people. Many of the opponents who are religious claim that as their primary identity through signatures, combined with an argument about life beginning at conception, commonly accepted to be a religious argument.

Implicit Marital Status

Opponents construct their marital status in a variety of ways. Five married couples wrote and co-signed opposition letters and used the first person plural pronoun “we” in the bodies of their letters. Going along with convention for married women of the time period, ten writers signed their letters with “Mrs.” as their title. One writer referred to his wife, “Mrs. Linder,” in a religious tract he sent and signed along with his letter, indicating he was married, too.

Opponents writing to Eagles took various approaches to addressing her. One writer used “Aloha Eagles,” while seven oppositional letters address her by using the title, “Mrs.” with some combination of her first and last names. Likewise, seven letters use the title “Representative,” or the abbreviation “Rep” with her name. The remaining eight letters address Eagles with both her professional and marital title.

Implicit Religious Identity

Similar to the way addressing Eagles by her marital and professional title simultaneously constructs two identities for her, implicit constructions by religious clergy construct both professional and religious identity with only a one word title; however, the religious and professional aspects both deserve attention. Three opponents who wrote included the title “Sister” before their names, a religious identity that coexists as a professional identity and gender identity as well. Writers are able to construct themselves as devoutly religious in one word, which may downplay that identity. Their arguments against abortion likely stem from their belief system, and a religious identity is likely a primary identity for them. However, if writers are at all familiar with Eagles’ identity as a Christian—and many seem to be—highlighting the role of religion in their stance on abortion is not desirable because a religious identity and belief system which opposes abortion is one

Eagles is likely to dismiss or call out because her own supportive position on abortion arises from her Christian identity. Due to this, implicitly constructing a religious identity may allow the writer to own their Christianity while focusing on other motivations for opposing liberalized abortion laws.

When responding to opponents who used religious titles, Eagles addresses each letter to a nun with "Sister" and one letter to with "Pastor," even though the writer did not use that title. Because much of the disagreement between Eagles and opponents hinges on disagreement about when life begins, flattening opponent identities to one-dimensional makes the oppositions' perspective easier to explain and dismiss. The identification of a person as only religious allows the person's stance on the issue of abortion to be attributed to her or his belief in the idea that life begins at conception. Pointing to the incompatibility of differing perspectives on that principle allows Eagles to downplay any other more complex reasons for opposing abortion, which she seems to do by responding either primarily or exclusively to religious arguments when they are present without acknowledging other reason, like the legal and medical reasons mentioned previously.

Implicit Professional Identity

Beyond the use of religious titles, two of the three nuns list R.N. degrees in their signature block, and one of those nuns, Sister M. Aloysius, in addition to listing her R.N. also lists an M.S.N. degree and her title, "Director, School of Nursing" for the Sisters of Saint Francis School of Nursing as stated on the letterhead. The third nun included St. John's Hospital as her address in closing of her telegram, implying that she, too, works in the medical field as a nurse.

Other medical professionals, particularly pediatricians, writing to Eagles on their practice letterhead, most commonly construct professional identity implicitly. These implicit identity constructions via letterheads allow the writers to assert professional authority on the medical issue of abortion.

Because Eagles always ended her letters with a consistent signature block, implicit identity constructions occur more frequently than literal or metaphoric ones. That signature block reiterates her identity as a professional. Specifically, the title "State Representative" highlights her identity as a politician and representative of North Dakota citizens. For Eagles, implicit professional construction is particularly important when serving in an institution where her gender places her in the minority. Because men comprised a large majority of the legislature in the 1969 legislative session, as they continue to today, the heavy gender imbalance in a historically male institution causes Eagles and other female legislators to be always already read as women and, therefore, as outsiders.

Implicit Citizenship and Patriotism

While correspondents construct identities as citizens literally, as mentioned in the previous section, Eagles uses citizenship as a rhetorical identity through pronoun usage to construct common identities with correspondents, both opponents and proponents. For example, she refers to "our country" in response to opponents, signifying the identities of U.S. citizens to draw the commonality of between herself and the correspondent. She employs the identity of citizen to argue for freedom, freedom of choice, specifically, a value presumably shared among all citizens.

Metaphoric Identity Construction

The last type of identity construction is metaphoric identity wherein writers create an identity through descriptive language. However, unlike literal and implicit identities, which are used by writers to create representations of both Eagles and themselves, it is primarily Eagles' identities that get made and remade metaphorically, although Eagles' makes multiple references to "suffragette action" to women supporters. The various metaphoric identities are made longitudinally and cumulatively. Eagles constructs her identity metaphorically in 19 letters while 33 letters to Eagles contain metaphoric identity constructions.

In *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphors are not only words but action, and “our [metaphoric] concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people” (1). In the metaphoric identity constructions in these letters, the perception of and relation to other people is extreme and heightened. In the metaphoric identity constructions, a polarization and vilification, not only of Eagles, but also of people with alternate viewpoints on reproductive rights, emerges.

Opponents call on metaphors such as “playing God,” “Hitler” and “murderer” to demonize Eagles. On the other hand, the frequent examples of metaphor and figurative language from supporters paint a picture of Eagles as a courageous hero; over and over throughout the letters, bill proponents thank Eagles for her courage, as well as for her wisdom and effort.

In letters to both opponents and supporters, Eagles refers to the “abuse” she experienced throughout the legislative session due to HB 319 show Eagles constructing herself identity as a victim in the face of opponents’ abuse. Interestingly, and perhaps paradoxically, as the legislative session progresses, Eagles begins to construct herself as a wounded warrior. After the legislature voted down HB 319, Eagles refers to her “bloody defeat”; the “battle” she fought in the legislature; “balm for [her] wounds,” and, finally, as “laying the ground work for [her] next assault.”

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Literal, implicit, and metaphoric identities in the Aloha Eagles letters are constructed for a range of reasons, not solely to establish character or authority. As Anderson argues, character, a concept often called *ethos* in the field of rhetoric, and identity are intricately related. Rhetorics of identity are often employed to argue something about character; “A person’s expression of identity can and often does lead us to infer something of that person’s character from it” (Anderson 93). While writers’ construction of identities in some of the letters resembles *ethos*—claiming a particular identity to establish character and credibility—identities are also claimed for other rhetorical reasons and sometimes as a way for writers to enter the conversation. As Grabill and Pigg found, “the rhetorical agency these identity performances enable is particularly interesting because the performances are not based on claims to expert status” (115), although they may be; however, in order for an identity to be read as an argument of authority or character, each party must have the same understanding of what any particular identity signifies.

Continued attention to the study of identity in dialogic genres is warranted for several reasons important to the field of rhetoric. Anderson claims “...failing to account for identity and *ethos* as distinct forms of persuasive self-presentation means failing to fully appreciate the complexities—the strategies, the risks—of making oneself rhetorical” (Anderson 91). Separating identity and *ethos* through examination of dialogic interactions highlights that identity and character cannot be subsumed into one category of *ethos*.

What maybe more significant are the ways in which identity is used as rhetorical strategy in other ways, particularly as a form of rhetorical action. In this view, “identity matters less as something that one ‘is’ and more as something that one does in language; or, more exactly, identity matters as something that one does to an audience through the expression of who or what one is” (Anderson 4).

If identity is a form of rhetorical action, what do the flashes of rhetorical identity construction indicate about the larger area of rhetoric? In rhetorical theory, persuasion is

often thought to be necessary only for those in disagreement on an issue; however, identities are used in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons intended to be persuasive with both opponents and supporters of HB 319. Opponents construct identities in attempts to persuade Eagles to change her mind and vice versa; however, even those writers who are in agreement with Eagles, those who are supporters, work to persuade. That is, supporters seek to persuade Eagles through their use of identity. In the Eagles papers, supporter after supporter uses identity to persuade Eagles of the necessity of her bill on a legislative issue on which she was barraged with loud opposition.

In the letter exchanges between Eagles and ND voters, rhetorics of identity work toward persuasiveness by attempting to delimit who is sanctioned or barred from speaking in support or opposition of abortion. As Bucholtz and Hall state: "agency may be ascribed through the perceptions and representations of others or assigned through ideologies and social structures" (607). The construction of identities by Eagles and her correspondents work to shape and reshape larger ideologies and political and social systems. For example, Eagles and other writers construct the identity of mother to both access the legislative conversation and draw from or restructure understanding of what it means to be a mother. Because the letters often contain little more than an assertion of identity, pairs of letters highlight the "way in which the person of the rhetor becomes itself a means of persuasion" (Anderson 95). Continued study of identity in dialogic genres like correspondence, drawing from studies of autobiography and sociolinguistics, will bring rhetoric to bear on feminist theories like Alcoff's positionality and Riley's discussion of the category of "woman" and, further, offers insight into the rhetorical nature of identity.

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