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Embodied Literacies of Sexuality and Gender of College Students

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Abstract: Internalized discourses of identity impact identity development, which in turn affects how one represents themselves in relation to their identity. This embodiment of language is a form of literacy and for those with minoritized identities of sexuality and gender, language can serve to validate or invalidate identities. We use grounded theory to consider reflections of college students with minoritized identities of sexuality and gender on identity formation through their lives in relation to language and labels used by others, ascribed to themselves, and ultimately used as embodied literacies of identity. Findings illustrate how participants internalized, embodied, and utilized cultural texts as processes of embodied literacy to develop and express their identities in relation to sexuality and gender. We present a call to action for educators and youth socializers to provide inclusive environments in which minoritized identities of sexuality and gender are represented explicitly and authentically as paths towards a broadened notion of literacy.

Keywords: gender, sexuality and sexual orientation, embodiment, LGBTQ, identity

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Introduction[1]

Literacy research has experienced a shift towards alternative forms of practice since new technology and ways of knowing inspired researchers to explore multiliteracies (e.g., The New London Group, 1996). In this shift, multiliteracy scholars have explored literacy as a communication practice beyond the written word with print serving as only one form of literacy (Perry, 2012). Through this research, embodied literacy has emerged as a way of knowing, communicating, and navigating interactions using bodies and artifacts as forms of representation in the world (Enriquez et al., 2016).

At the same time, research on the experiences of youth with minoritized identities of sexuality and gender (MIoSG; Vaccaro et al., 2015) continues to reveal the effects of identity omission in the spaces these youth occupy (e.g., school, home, and community contexts; Vaccaro et al., 2012). However, the ways that individuals with MIoSG utilize processes of embodied literacy as identity representation have been mostly absent from the literature. This relationship between literacy practices and identity is different from the literate identity often discussed in literacy-based research, which is typically centered around labels that suggest students are struggling or deficient in their literacy skills (e.g., Hikida, 2018). Embodied literacy and the identity aspects discussed here pertain to the formation of MIoSG and the navigation of personal, educational, and sociopolitical contexts in and with MIoSG (Compton-Lilly et al., 2016). It should also be noted that since this study is situated at the intersections of literacy and identity, we acknowledge that the term reading can carry multiple meanings across these bodies of research. In our study, we use the term reading to refer to the identity-related assumptions others make of individuals with MIoSG.

Literacy-based research on MIoSG remains largely centered around K-12 practices such as representation in literature (Batchelor et al., 2018; Buchanan et al., 2020; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016) and queering curriculum (Miller, 2015; Page, 2017). While these areas of research speak to inclusion in educational contexts, the broader concept of MIoSG formation as a literacy experience remains to be explored. In addition, research focused on gender and sexuality increasingly recognizes the complexity of these identities. Miller (2020) speaks to gender complexity by putting forth a pedagogy of refusal which consists of "the embodiment of refusing to be boxed in, or to accept historical and social constructions of spaces, binaries, ideas, genders, bodies, or identities, and is always open to the indeterminate" (p. 240). Miller's pedagogy of refusal merges with ongoing conversations on what constitutes literacy (Perry, 2012; Wargo, 2015) to further expand notions of literacy to include embodied literacy practices of MIoSG.

The complexities of gender and sexuality lend themselves to being realized, reformed, and revised through embodied literacies of identity. Missing from the current body of literacy research is the connection between concepts of embodied literacy and formation of MIoSG. We address this gap in the literature by using constructivist grounded theory to consider the current experiences of college students, including retrospective descriptions of their youth, in relation to embodied literacy and discourses of MIoSG, and how these experiences afford participants the ability to develop their identity through embodied literacy practices.

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[1] As part of our research process we purposefully asked participants to share their pronouns. In our writing, we honor each participant's pronouns as indicated, including those who use multiple pronouns.

Theoretical Framework

Our study used constructivist grounded theory as its theoretical and analytic framework (Charmaz, 2014). In our study, constructivism functions as our theoretical framework and grounded theory as our analytic framework.

As a theoretical framework, constructivism emphasizes that human beings create all forms of knowledge—including that derived from empirical research—via their interactions with the world and with one other (Crotty, 1998/2015). In contrast to objectivist or positivist stances, constructivism highlights the positional, contextual, and temporal dimensions of truth (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). That is, human beings learn through doing and being in relationship with others, and as they learn, the truths that they construct evolve. Constructivism is uniquely well-suited to qualitative research, which often seeks to understand how people experience and understand the world. It is also well-suited to grounded theory, a common form of qualitative research which seeks to understand social or organizational processes through a structured approach to data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Within this overall analytic approach, constructivist grounded theory provides a framework for both empirical rigor and flexibility based on evolving understanding of the process. In other words, constructivist grounded theorists both investigate the knowledge production of research participants and also are themselves engaged in a form of constructivist learning.

We describe the methodological and analytical processes of grounded theory in greater detail in our methods section below, but one significant difference between constructivist forms of grounded theory and its methodological relatives is its use of sensitizing constructs, which help to document the researcher's understanding before, during, and after the completion of a study (Charmaz, 2014). In this case, we utilize our literature section to review sensitizing constructs related to the concept of embodied literacy, the social and political dimensions of embodied literacy, the identity development of MIoSG persons, and the relationship between language and identity. This review traces the intellectual foundations of our constructivist grounded theory study as we sought to produce new knowledge via the structured analysis of participant accounts.

Literature Review

As stated in the introduction, literacy and identity carry various meanings. In this section, we offer a brief overview of the literature which outlines how we operationalize literacy and identity in our research. In addition, we introduce the importance of language as it relates to embodied literacy and identity formation, which is further explored in the findings and discussion sections.

Embodied Literacy

Since The New London Group (1996) published their foundational piece on multimodal literacy, literacy scholars have delved into the various ways in which individuals can receive and express meaning through forms beyond the written word on a printed page. One of these non-traditional forms of literacy is embodied literacy. Enriquez et al. (2016) defines embodied literacy as the "processes and change inherent in bodies as they navigate disciplinary practices, respond and participate in discourse communities, read and represent selves in texts and artifacts, and live with circulating texts, bodies, and objects" (p. 4). In addition, embodied literacy research expands "perspectives on literacy that recognize the social and political" (Enriquez et al., 2016, p. 4). In these ways, embodied literacy serves as a way through which individuals can both read and

write their identities into the world. Similar to the transactional theory of literacy (Rosenblatt, 1978), where meaning is made not in the text and not in the reader, but in the space between, embodied literacy resembles this transactional process of literacy. A reciprocal relationship between body and reader creates a dynamic flow of meaning-making through which individuals write and rewrite their identities as forms of embodied literacy. In addition, through reading and writing identities into the world through practices of embodied literacy, individuals utilize and develop physical manifestations of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) often relegated only to print literature. These physical manifestations of literate beings through embodied literacies of identity serve as reciprocal centers through which individuals make and remake their identities into existence. Literacy researchers must attend to the ways in which bodies become literate spaces and interact with the social texts of the world in transformative encounters (Sherbine, 2019).

Literacy-focused research on embodied literacy centers around classroom practices and physical manifestations of literate identities. Hughes-Decatur (2011) posits that "we are disciplined by discursive mechanisms in popular and educational culture to police and standardise our bodies, while we are simultaneously learning how to read bodies as normal or deficient visual texts" (p. 73). Enriquez (2011) describes how two eighth-grade students embodied the literate identity of being struggling readers. Their physical representations of this identity revealed grief and exclusion, yet they continued to demonstrate embodied performances aligned with successful readers to realign their literate identities. Bodies are literate spaces. The

"These physical manifestations of literate beings through embodied literacies of identity serve as reciprocal centers through which individuals make and remake their identities into existence."

interactions between the body and the discourse of classrooms are just as much literacy events as interactions between students and printed texts. The locations of these interactions are where children make sense of language and self (Johnston, 2004).

Jones (2013) focuses on a classroom context in questioning how "literacies in the body, then, get 'taught' and acquired through other bodies in literacy classrooms?" (p. 526). Jones also invites us to "make sense of and reimagine the literacies that enable us to make sense of bodies" (p. 526), defining these "literacies in the body" (p. 526). While pedagogical considerations of embodied literacies are emerging in the literature, so too are social and political manifestations of how bodies internalize literacy practices.

Embodied literacy intersects with social semiotics when the definition of social texts is considered. In social semiotics, "signs are seen as constantly newly made, out of the interest of the (socially and culturally formed and positioned) individual sign-maker" (Kress & Mavers, 2005, p. 190). When positioned within a framework of embodied literacy, the body becomes both the sign and the sign-maker. The body becomes the origin of both meaning and interpretation of meaning. The signs of the body are formed through embodied literacy to become texts of identity. In using Enriquez et al.'s (2016) definition of embodied literacy, texts of identity are the ways in which the body is used as a text to represent knowledge and identity. For example, in our study, the clothes participants wear or the way they choose to position themselves in certain contexts communicates their identity in relation to MIoSG. These representations of identity as embodied texts are generated from the experiences, knowledge, and

values of the participant as sign-maker, as we explicate in the subsequent sections of this paper. As Kress and Mavers (2005) state, "Representation is never neutral: that which is represented in the sign, or in sign-complexes, realizes the interests, the perspectives, the positions and values of those who make signs" (p. 190). Signs are made from, and in response to, social knowledge, and therefore become social texts. Here, text is defined as a form of communication beyond just the written word. In this way, bodies are texts and their signs are part of a social dialogue in response to the social texts around them. Embodied literacies make use of "culturally available material" (Kress & Maver, 2005, p. 190) to create something that is an extension of current cultural meaning; a transformation of meaning that is "new, specific and creative in a non-trivial sense" (Kress & Maver, 2005, p.190).

Embodied Literacy as Social and Political

Pennycook (2017) describes language as, "embodied, embedded and distributed across people, places and time" (p. 276). Literacy, being the various ways in which we communicate with each other and our world, is entwined with concepts of language. These languages and literacy practices are shaped by cultural norms and repetitions to create normed paths of representation and meaning. Pennycook defines these as "practices - those repeated social and material acts that have gained sufficient stability over time to reproduce themselves" (p. 277). It is these practices that create paths of normed meaning. Ahmed (2006) presents these practices as paths that "depend on the repetition of norms and conventions" (p. 16). In considering embodied literacies of MIoSG, we turn to Ahmed's concept of "desire paths" (p. 19). When individuals internalize language as a form of embodied literacies, the individual embarks on paths not reified by time and culture. Ahmed refers to these new paths as deviations and connects the term to the use of "deviant" as a pejorative term used to describe

those who identify as queer. In this way, the act of embodying literacies of MIoSG serves as a social and political statement in response to normed paths of identity.

In addition, Compton-Lilly et al. (2016) recognize identity formation and negotiation in children as beginning before adolescence, intertwined with identity markers including gender and sexual orientation, and an "issue of social justice for young children from communities that have been historically underserved in schools" (p. 118). These intersectional networks of identity negotiation (Compton-Lilly et al., 2016) speak to the complicated process of identity formation in youth with MIoSG as they navigate educational, social, and political networks.

Identity Formation for MIoSG

For decades, social science scholars have attempted to map the identity trajectories of individuals with MIoSG. In this section, we offer a brief historical overview of that literature. One of the earliest scholars to study homosexual identity development as non-pathological was Vivienne Cass in 1979. Like Cass, many psychological scholars have developed stages or phases that individuals supposedly moved through (e.g., self-awareness, self-hatred, acceptance, coming out, pride, activism, identity integration) across the lifespan (D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998; Fassinger & Miller, 1997). Many of these early models were based upon studies with white participants and assumed that coming out was a requisite step to achieving a healthy identity. Although these models implicitly connected identity stages to socio-political contexts, more recent scholars have been explicit about the deep connections between environmental contexts and understandings of a sexual and/or gender self. The most recent identity models thus foreground social forces that impact the ways people with MIoSG make meaning of themselves within the

context of an oppressive (e.g., heterosexist, homophobic, cissexist, genderist) world (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bilodeau, 2009; Dillon et al., 2011; Vaccaro et al., 2015). A few social science identity studies have approached connections to literacy, without claiming it as such. For instance, Wagaman (2016) used individual interviews and participant constructed identity maps from fifteen LGBTQ individuals to document their identity meaning making and sense of agency. In another study, Wargo (2017) analyzed social media images from three LGBTQ participants and described findings from these virtual data sources as "contemporary configurations of LGBTQ youth identity" (p. 563). Both studies focused on images instead of words but offer interesting insight into the contemporary ways scholars are attempting to understand the embodied literacy practices and identities of individuals with MIoSG.

Language & Identity

The language a person hears used about them becomes the language they use about themselves. This language then shapes the spaces in which a person believes they belong and how they belong in such spaces. This process pulls from the traditional literacy concept of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) as it affords individuals opportunities to explore and create an embodied literacy of identity. The language young people are exposed to can affect their ability to self-identify within the LGBTQ+ community and find a sense of acceptance for themselves. Without exposure to language which describes MIoSG, young people might feel something is wrong with them or that they do not belong to particular communities. If individuals are unable to see themselves (Bishop, 1990) in the social texts (Kress & Mavers, 2005) of their world, they might be

> **"The languages a person hears used about them becomes the language they use about themselves."**

unable to communicate with others about who they are and how they want to be perceived. These embodied literacies of identity are the foundation from which individuals both read and write their existence into the world. A lack of language might result in an inability to read and write oneself into being. This has the potential to adversely affect mental health, leading to feelings of isolation, depression, and suicide ideation and/or attempts (Robinson & Espilage, 2012).

This study examines how identity development through embodied literacy might look for college students with MIoSG by using their reflections on current and previous experiences in educational, community, and family contexts. In addition, we consider how the implicit and explicit discourses of these spaces shaped participant identities and self-image.

Methods

Data for this piece originates from a large constructivist grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2014) focused on college students with MIoSG majoring in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM). Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that draws upon constructivist paradigms to honor the complex ways that experience is constructed in the context of complex and ever-changing social realities (Charmaz, 2014). "Simply stated, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible, guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories [and draw conclusions] from the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). In accordance with constructivist grounded theory, we utilized a variety of analytic strategies including purposeful and theoretical sampling, iterative collection and analyses processes, and constant comparative analysis (CCA)

methods (Charmaz, 2014). These analytic procedures are described below.

The overarching research question for the study was: How do students with MIoSG majoring in STEM experience and navigate campus learning environments and their disciplines/fields? To answer this question, we asked participants how they developed and made meaning of their MIoSG identities. Although the overall study research question included a focus on STEM, student identity discourses far transcended STEM majors and fields. Moreover, participants talked about their gender and sexuality well beyond the present collegiate context. Their discourses included lifelong journeys of making meaning of their sexuality and/or gender. As such, through the grounded theory, CCA, and theorizing processes (Charmaz, 2014), we uncovered rich data about how college students with MIoSG developed their identity through embodied literacy practices throughout their young lives.

Setting & Sample

Data were collected at three public and one private universities in the United States. Due to the personal nature of questions about MIoSG, we invited participants to select a mode of interview that they were most comfortable with (e.g., in person, online, phone). This decision limited this project to four collection sites where we obtained IRB approval as well as campuses within driving distance of the research team (i.e., southeastern and northeastern U.S.).

Grounded theorists use purposeful and theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014) to identify a diverse pool of students to answer a research question. We sent recruitment materials to STEM academic departments and campus LGBTQ centers and posted flyers around the four campuses. Recruitment materials noted how we were "recruiting participants for an interview study exploring the experiences of people who identify as LGBTQIA+ in STEM (Science, Engineering, Technology, Math) fields." Eligibility criteria included:

> Any student majoring in a STEM field whose gender and/or sexual identity is minoritized within American society. Having a minoritized gender and/or sexual identity (MIoSG) means that at least one of the following two statements accurately describes you:
>
> 1) you do not identify as a cisgender woman or man; or
>
> 2) you do not identify as heterosexual.

All volunteers who met these criteria were accepted to participate in the study.

A final sample of 56 participants included five graduate students and 51 undergraduates. On a demographic form, we asked students to use their own words to report their gender and sexual identities. Participants self-reported their gender identities as: man (24), woman (18), cisgender (14), transgender (7), genderqueer (6), non-binary (5), female (4), male (2), and agender (1). Participants listed their sexual identities as: gay (22), bisexual (18), pansexual (11), lesbian (7), asexual (4), queer (4), questioning (3), gray-asexual (2), dyke (1), gynophile (1), homoromantic (1), panromantic (1), straight (1), and woman-loving-woman (1). These numbers do not total 56 because some students used multiple terms to describe themselves. The racial demographics of our sample mirrored the predominantly white institutions where data were collected and included: Latinx (4), Black (4), Asian American (2), Arab/North African (1), bi/multiracial (2), Native American (2), South Asian (1), and White (45) students. Participant majors/fields included engineering (29), computer science (9), biology (5), nutrition and dietetics (4), environmental science (2), marine science (2),

neuroscience (2), kinesiology (1), mathematics (1), and natural resources (1).

Data Collection

As is common for grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014), we used semi-structured, audio-recorded individual interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). On average, interviews lasted 60-75 minutes, with some lasting slightly more or less time, depending on the length of participant answers. Semi-structured interview protocols afford scholars the opportunity to replicate the norms of a conversation while ensuring that all participants are asked about the same set of topics. Our interview protocol began with questions about participants' backgrounds and identities (e.g., "Tell me about yourself." and "You indicated you identified as [Gender/Sexuality] on the demographic form. Would you please tell me a bit about what that means to you?"). We also asked questions such as: "How does your gender/sexuality shape your experiences? How have the ideas of being out, reading, or passing shaped your experiences relative to your gender/sexuality?" We concluded each interview by asking participants to provide any additional information that they felt we should know about their gender and sexuality. Although our overarching study was focused on STEM collegiate environments (and additional protocol questions focused on STEM), participants reflected more broadly on lifelong experiences with gender and sexuality. Through rich retrospective participant narratives, data for this paper emerged. As indicated in the findings, participants shared how language and discourse affected their self-development through practices of embodied literacy.

Data Analysis

Consistent with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), we used the ongoing and iterative CCA process. This CCA process included intentional memoing (Charmaz, 2014) between and after interviews. Each member of the research team drafted memos to document our analytic thinking, which included ideas about: emergent codes, possible categories, connections between categories, and evolving theoretical ideas. Specifically, our CCA included constantly comparing memos, data points, emerging codes, and categories with the literature and emergent theoretical ideas. By the twenty-fifth interview, we began to hear consistency in student responses (Charmaz, 2014; Jones et al., 2014). In line with CCA, we completed 31 additional interviews to refine selective categories, illuminate connections between the categories, and achieve categorical and theoretical saturation which happens when "gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 213).

In CCA, researchers start by assigning initial codes to sort data into manageable segments. We assigned 100 initial emergent codes to the interview and memo data. The purpose of initial codes is to sort and organize data into manageable segments. Some of the initial codes for this project included: gender meaning/experiences, gender outness/reading/passing, sexuality meaning/experiences, sexuality outness/reading/passing, silence/letting people assume, and sex versus gender. Due to this study's connection with literacy and how the term reading is traditionally used in literacy research, we recognize the need to clarify that we use the term reading here to describe how one's identity is interpreted by others (e.g., how they are read). Grounded theory selective codes are then used to synthesize initial codes into larger meanings grounded in participant narratives. Selective codes in this project included: identity (gender/sexuality) and intersections of multiple identities/multiple identities.

Finally, grounded theory focused codes help to identify important segments of data, called

categories, that require theorizing. As such, we concluded our analytic process by using theoretical sampling to "delineate the properties of our categories" and "identify variation" among and within our categories (Charmaz, 2014, p. 212). Charmaz (2014) explains that theorizing "entails practical activities of engaging the world and constructing abstract understandings about and within it" (p. 233) and involves "seeing possibilities, establishing connections" (p. 244). Our CCA led us to see how college students with MIoSG form their sexual and gender identities by establishing connections to the language and labels used by others, ascribed to themselves, and ultimately used as an embodied literacy of identity. Specifically, we theorized MIoSG identities in the context of internalized discourses of identity and the notion that embodiment of language is a form of literacy (Enriquez et al., 2016; Hughes-Decatur, 2011; Jones, 2013).

We used multiple qualitative strategies to ensure trustworthiness and credibility: discrepant case analysis, member checking, expert reviews, and scholar reflexivity on identity and power (Jones et al., 2014). We used discrepant case analysis to ensure that all voices were included and that overarching theorizing about the data accurately described all of our diverse participants. Discrepant cases allowed us to develop the rich, complex, and inclusive categories presented in this paper. Early in the analytic process, we member checked with participants electronically and through 60-minute focus groups where we shared emergent findings and invited feedback. We also invited LGBTQ+ and literacy experts to review our conclusions for trustworthiness and credibility. In this project, we used reflexivity about our social identities, positionality, power relationships, and pre-understandings to address relational competence (Jones et al., 2014). Five of the six authors of this paper self-identify as people with minoritized sexual identities. Those MIoSG likely had some influence on the sizable response to our call for participants as well

as the level of depth shared by students. In terms of power, we ensured that none of the interviewers had a direct power-laden campus relationship with students (e.g., professor, advisor, supervisor).

Findings

In this section, we present three overarching findings that illustrate how participants used language as an act of embodied literacy in relation to their MIoSG. These findings outline how participants took up the language used around and about them, internalized this language as part of their internal identity, and then used this language to write their identity into existence, creating a circular path of literacy through language, embodiment, and creation.

Language In: Finding Language

Several participants illuminated how the language to which they were exposed to throughout their life affected their path to self-identifying in the LGBTQ+ community. Cole, a transgender bisexual man, describes how his self-ascribed identity changed as a result of hearing new language:

> I'm born as a female but don't feel like it since I was a kid. . . but I didn't know about transgender before, like until I got here because I thought I might be a lesbian or something. But, like, when I heard about the term then, like I try to do research on it, and I found out I might be one, so. . . And I think, um, I would like to be a male more, instead of a lesbian because I don't like it, actually.

Kennedy, who is genderqueer, asexual, and homoromantic, explains how she felt an identity, but could not label it:

> Asexual is something that kind of, I always knew but didn't know at the same time, as a label. I knew it to myself because I knew that,

like, I was never really interested in other people sexually at all.

Flint, a cisgender gay man, also describes how knowing the language of his identity helped him find his space in the LGBTQ+ community:

> I know when I was younger and I didn't really know what gay was or anything about the LGBT community, I used to be questioning about my gender, I was like was I supposed to be like female or like I sometimes even wished I was just like a woman because it would just be easier for people to go along with my sexuality I guess. And then I guess after a while, once I started learning more about what everything is and all the different terms, and that it's okay no matter what, then I was just kind of like in that case I guess I would still consider myself a man who likes men.

In these three preceding examples, participants describe how the presence or absence of language affected their ability to locate themselves in the LGBTQ+ community through labels. Labels, while counter to some concepts of queering identity, can ultimately help individuals find community and affinity spaces (Miller, 2016), as Flint described above.

Some participants shared how they remained unaware of the labels that might be affixed to their identity until they were older. Gloria, a pansexual woman, described how it was not until high school that she found the right language for her internal identity:

> For a while, I thought that I was bisexual and that that was fine, and everything was okay. Then in high school I got exposed to more,

mostly through the Internet, exposed to people coming out as different genders. They're this, but they're also this weird thing. Just a lot of mismatching. There was a point where I just realized, wow, I'm still very attracted to them. They're very attractive and whatever. I don't think that I would have an issue being with someone like that. So, I feel like the transition from bisexual to pansexual was just an obvious choice because it's just more open to more options, I guess.

And Skyler, a transgender asexual, bisexual, and pansexual woman, explains that even with family support, she was not able to make sense of how she felt until she was able to do her own research:

> I have a good support system; my family all supports me and all. But it's just kind of like, I never really understood why I felt the way that I did until I was old enough to do my own research and finally understand why I was the way I was. And then my whole childhood kind of made sense. I feel like that explained who I was as a person because of it.

"Participants describe how the presence or absence of language affected their ability to locate themselves in the LGBTQ+ community through labels."

All of these examples point to the importance of inclusive school, community, and family environments in which educators and other youth socializers are trained in the language of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as advocacy practices in which minoritized sexualities and genders are openly discussed and named. Connected back to the foundational literacy concepts of Bishop (1990), omission of language from experiences of adolescence can affect the ways in which individuals orient themselves to the world and their own identities. The naming of MIoSG creates a vocabulary

of identity through which young people with MIoSG can begin to build a literate identity of self.

Language Internalized: Embodied Literacies of Identity

The language, labels, and literacies used around and about us create the foundations for embodied literacies of identity. They provide the vocabulary and comprehension from which an individual can begin to write their own story into the world. But the next question becomes: What does it mean to "be" in relation to embodied literacy? Further, what does it mean to have a MIoSG in relation to embodied literacy? Bodies serve as literate vessels through which individuals experience the world. In these vessels, individuals orient themselves, both their external and internal selves, towards and away from objects in the world (Ahmed, 2006). These orientations towards others and themselves are impacted by the literacies of the world and the language and labels used, or not used, about various identities.

The embodiment of an identity can manifest itself in a variety of ways. It could be in how one dresses, language one uses, or how one wears their hair. It can also be in how one perceives the way a certain identity should be embodied through physical markers. These are the words and phrases of the body which are used to communicate with the outside world. Caroline, a cisgender gay woman, illustrates this when asked what is means to be a woman by sharing, "It means that I have a vagina. I have boobs and I embrace my vagina and boobs. I think that women can be all different types. For me, I. . .I don't know. I just. . .vagina, boobs." Bri, a cisgender bisexual woman, also communicated a standard ideal of an identity, "Long hair. Boobs. Wow, is that like my definition of what a woman looks like? Long hair and boobs. Wow, what an interesting concept. Yeah." But when asked to consider where that perception came from, Bri attributed it back to conditioning: "I don't know. Okay, I definitely do know. Being raised and referring to Steven as boy or Maddie as girl, and things like that, just follow you. . .Conditioning."

Outside influences, including educational, community, and family contexts, can influence how an individual perceives the ways in which a certain identity should be embodied according to the markers of that community or belief. Jordan, a gay man, provides an example of this in relation to his previous religious experiences:

> To me, my gender is just like who I identify as and like how I am. . . I was in a Bible study and it was kind of funny. I kind of stopped going after a while. It was great for a few but one session they were talking about how men behave or how men are supposed to behave biblically, and I was kind of . . . I just stopped going after that because I had a lot of conflicting ideas of what being a man is. To me, it's just someone who chooses to identify as a man, either presenting or non-presenting, and their idea of an ideal man was a very butch and brave and strong and a lead person, where I was thinking, "Well, a man can also be sensitive and caring and that doesn't make them weak or a traitor, it just makes them a different type of person."

This quote provides evidence of how the socio-political context of religion (Vaccaro et al., 2015), and specifically religious texts, were internalized by Jordan for many years and shaped how he related to gender and himself. Sam, who is non-binary and pansexual, shared how their family influenced the ways in which they perceived how to embody an identity. In addition, while not explored in the limited space of this paper, Sam brings in the concept of intersecting identities of MIoSG and disability:

I was born female but I don't feel . . . this is something that it took me a while to realize and I think a lot of it happens to be because my parents don't either understand it or agree with it. Basically, as a kid I was always a tomboy and I consider myself a tomboy and like my sisters and my parents were like, "Oh, it'll go, oh, it'll go away. It'll go away." I was like, graduated from high school. It's still the same thing. "Oh, it'll go away." It still hasn't gone away and I don't think it ever will because I do not wear dresses, I do not wear skirts, I do not own them. I wear guys clothes because I hate how tight . . . part of it is I have sensory processing disorder, so the feel of things also bothers me.

Jack, a gay man, explains that while his academic major (biology) has trained him to categorize and compartmentalize, he struggles to do that with his own identity as a man:

> I'm not exactly sure what I would consider being a man, but I definitely do not consider it what society says I have to be. I guess what I consider it being is whatever anybody else thinks they want a man to be. I guess just the freedom to be who I am, honestly. I don't, I'm usually really good with categories and like putting myself into boxes, but with that one, I can't put myself in a box. With my major [biology], I'm trained to put things in specific areas and to do precise calculations and precise predictions, but with this thing, with really what it means to be a man to me, I can't do that, actually.

In this quote, Jack highlights the unique intersections between MIoSG, STEM, and embodied literacy through the juxtaposition of STEM's tendency to categorize, calculate, and predict and Jack's conception of gender and how he relates to his gender identity.

Purposeful and explicit use of language by others can serve as a validating form of embodied literacy. Jamie, Aspen, and Kennedy, quoted below, demonstrate how explicit use of language by others serves as a way in which others communicate back to an individual that they have been read in line with, or not in line with, their internal identity. Jamie, who is transgender, genderqueer, "genderfluid between androgyn, agender, fuck-it-autism-is-my-gender," asexual, and panromantic, illustrates this validation when discussing an interaction with a colleague at their workplace:

> So, when I mentioned to her that I was non-binary, she immediately asked what my pronouns were. I'm like, "Yes! It's they." And she used them pretty consistently. It spread a little bit from there if people heard it [they] asked, "What?" I'm like, "I'm non-binary. I use they. 'Officemate' is completely correct." . . . Plus, they started using some of my phrasings that I would say I was the only non-man, instead of misgendering myself, or I would talk about my B'nei Mitzvah, instead of my Bat Mitzvah. Hebrew is gendered, which is really annoying.

When others do not use the chosen name or pronoun an individual puts forth, it can be a form of illiteracy on their part, and received as a form of invalidating someone's identity, and thus their literate being. In addition to the physical embodiment of identity as a form of literacy, the language one chooses for themselves and about themselves serves as a form of embodiment of identity as literacy. When someone chooses labels for themselves in the form of chosen names and pronouns, and communicates these labels with others, they exercise a form of embodied

literacy. Aspen, who is non-binary and grey-asexual, highlights this experience:

> Whenever they slip up and say she/her, I'm like yeah, I'm still a girl in your mind. They wouldn't ever think about it like that. But that's how I think of it. Like all my, not even only my trans friends but like, like just my cis friends in general. They know I use they/them, and they use they/them for me, but then in their minds they don't like that they can't see me outside of being a girl because of how I look, if that makes sense.

Aspen continues to explain how this experience and lack of validation through language can lead to a place of defeat:

> I just say I'm queer because that's so much easier. Like people pretty much just get what you mean. I'll be like, "I'm queer, I'm gay." Like that. It's just so much easier to say that then "I'm asexual."

How one communicates their identity to the world through language can also change over time to reflect fluidity in sexuality and gender. In addition to language, participants communicate who they see themselves as and how they want to be seen through physical representations of identity. This combination of language and embodiment writes the story of identity as one moves through the world. Kennedy illustrates this in relation to gender:

> It's kind of hard to really pinpoint my gender all the time. Because a lot of times, for me, I feel sort of masculine and feminine at the same time, so it's kind of like, sort of my gender, but sometimes I feel just feminine, sometimes I feel just masculine, and I want to be like, I want to dress a different way, be

called a different name sometimes, and different pronouns.

In this example, Kennedy explains how clothing, names, and pronouns all serve to support identity and fluidity of gender. These demonstrations of self are a form of language put out into the world by those with MIoSG.

Jesse, who is genderqueer, agender, and bisexual, describes not only fluidity in how they identify, but also a primary focus on just being themselves without a huge focus on language or labels:

> The exact label I use is not incredibly important to me. I'll sometimes say gender queer, or agender is another one I really like. But the identity that is most important to me is that I can really remove myself from, oh, I don't have to fit either mold that is present in traditional society.

Jesse goes on to share how the push to use labels to self-identify can seem more important to those around them than to themselves:

> I remember at one point I posted a picture [online], and someone asked, "Are you a man or a woman?" And I said, "Oh, I identify as gender queer." And they're like, "Okay, so which one?" And I find I get this kind of vibe that's uncomfortable for me, at least from some people on the internet that's like, "Oh, you have to choose one or the other." And that is a little, that's a little strange.

Kane, a cisgender gay man, echoes this sentiment of not being as focused on labels to describe his identity:

> In the long run, at least for me, it really doesn't matter whether or not I'm defined as a man or somebody else. I just define that as

a man because that's just the best that I can describe myself to other people.

The examples from Jesse and Kane provide evidence for how language can be taken up, or not taken up, by those with MIoSG as forms of expression. However, the choice to label oneself comes with knowledge of available labels, which is developed through exposure to affirming and inclusive language as evidenced in the first findings section.

Struggles with Internalizing/Embodying Identity and Using Language

While labels and language are useful in communicating identity with others and serve as embodiments of literacy, some participants struggled to find their identity amidst societal norms of gender and sexuality. However, the barrage of communication from society can create confusion in oneself. Asha, a bisexual, pansexual, and queer woman, describes this experience:

> I used to be really feminine all growing up, and stuff,. . . In [my STEM internship abroad], I started dressing a little bit more masculine or switching day-to-day and acting a little bit more masculine than I normally would, but I do still identify as a woman. It's just . . . I got raised in a very hetero-normative environment, so right now I'm just trying to figure out how to be a woman without having to conform to all those stereotypes that go along with it, which is still a little tough.

Luna, a female aligned, femme, bisexual, and woman-loving-woman, echoes this experience in recognizing how she internalized the literacy of heteronormativity:

When I identified as bisexual, this was very complicated with me because I felt both . . . Now that I identify as a lesbian, I realized that what I was experiencing was likely internalized. What's the word for it? Internalized heteronormativity. I was thinking, because I am a woman I have to be in some shape or form available to men, more or less. If I am a woman, then this is what this entails.

Physical and emotional environments constantly exhibit forms of literacy through representations of what it is to be an identity.

Further, labels and language can serve to restrict identities and stifle authentic embodied literacies of sexuality and gender. Stella, who is female, woman, trans woman, girl, trans girl, lesbian, sapphic, and technically bisexual, points out how labels have the potential to create discomfort in moments of authentic attraction:

> I think sexuality as a label is weird. The way it exists, because I think primarily human sexuality is based on appearance. Then when labels get . . . like when gender identity being specific things gets into it, it gets complicated. That's why you have . . . I don't know. You get into uncomfortable situations when your sexuality dictates that you're attracted to someone, but then someone else's gender identity conflicts with that then you get confused.

As demonstrated in this section, the ways in which one comes to be is influenced by the ways one knows to be. Embodied literacies of identity are developed through exposure to language, labels, and social texts

> **"The choice to label oneself comes with knowledge of available labels, which is developed through exposure to affirming and inclusive language."**

of identity. These experiences are internalized through processes of embodied literacy and used to "respond and participate in discourse communities" (Enriquez et al., 2006, p. 4). The next step in the reciprocal nature of embodied literacy is to then put this internalized identity into the world and write oneself into the social narrative.

Language Out: Identity as Literacy

Ahmed (2006) states, "If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence; of how we inhabit spaces as well as 'who' or 'what' we inhabit spaces with" (p. 1). The language and labels an individual hear in their environment becomes embodied in their identities. These literacies shape how a person self-identifies and provide the language with which a person can relate and connect with communities of others.

Passing or Reading

As previously defined, the term reading is used to describe how in relation to MIoSG, the term read often relates to the genders and sexualities people assume about and ascribe to one's identity. This is interesting when considering identity representations as acts of literacy. When one embodies their identity as a form of literacy, as described in the previous section, then uses that embodied sense of identity as a language through which they communicate themselves to the world, that identity is then open for interpretation by others using acts of literacy. This transactional nature of literacy (Rosenblatt, 1978) and meaning making is similar to that of an author, a book, and a reader.

Ophelia, who is a lesbian, questioning, cisgender woman, demonstrates that some may be read in a way that matches the identity they intend to communicate, "I'm very clearly a girl to everyone. I mean, no one's ever mistaken me for anything else."

However, others might get read incorrectly because their embodiment and communication of their sexuality or gender identity remains invisible, or even assumed, at times. Jamie shares their experience with this:

> The heteronormative gaze, I'm not dating anybody, so I'm probably straight, unless told otherwise, until stated otherwise. . . . I'm not actually straight, so you know they're wrong, but unless I tell people otherwise, they tend to assume that I'm straight, but single.

Some see being mis-read as a protection against discriminatory practices of homophobic or transphobic persons. Titus, a straight male, shares how being read as straight affords him a certain level of protection:

> I feel like it's easier for me and my girlfriend to go out and hold hands and stuff because I pass pretty well. It just looks like a normal, heterosexual thing. So, I feel like that experience won't lead us to bad things when other things, bad things happen to other couples, which is lame, but . . .

At the same time, Titus goes on to express frustration with being read as straight:

> I feel like I shouldn't have to come out as straight, but I don't want to come out twice. I feel like when people see me, they just see me as straight, not gay or something.

The reciprocal nature of literacy and communication is evident in the ways Titus and Jamie experience being read as they communicate their identities to the world. Embodied literacies help to form an internal sense of identity, and now the performance of that identity becomes literacy itself. Through this process, an individual is physically stepping into a

space of meaning making between text and reader (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Performing Identity Through Embodiment

While communicating identity through language and labels is one form of embodied literacy, one can also communicate identity through physical appearance, behaviors, voice, etc. The process of reading identity through physical manifestations of embodied literacies was discussed above, but here the focus shifts to how the participants used their understanding of gender and sexuality to perform their identities as an act of embodied literacy. In these ways, participants are using literacy skills to communicate to others the ways in which they identify in relation to their gender and/or sexuality.

One of the participants, Luna, identifies as female aligned/femme on the demographic form. When asked what this means to her, she shared: "It feels like you in and of yourself are doing some sort of performance art of being a woman." When prompted to describe how being read shapes Luna's relationship in relation to her gender, she shared:

> No matter I flag as being out as bisexual or even recently as a lesbian, things become largely dictated by how the people see you. It's like, to what degree does my identity shape me when other people do not read me [correctly]? This again intersects, not to always bring you back to like, oh but I'm still an Arab, but also somehow it becomes inauthentic not to be stereotypical.

In this, Luna refers to her intersecting identities of gender, sexuality, and religion, and questions the authenticity of performance and non-performance. In her experience, she questions how the ways in which others read her affects who she is thought to be, and how stereotypical embodiments of MIoSG might serve to affirm her identity through others'

eyes. This brings to mind how literacy is inseparable from power and serves as a method through which individuals connect with their world (Freire, 2001).

Another participant, Jack, illustrates how he shifted his embodied literacy practices to communicate different aspects of his identity in different contexts:

> That kind of goes back to me trying to alter my voice when I'm in the classroom setting. I feel like I try to be more of what society says a man should be in a class or a professional setting. I just try, because I guess I just don't want anybody to look down on me like I have been looked down on before. So, I go back to the ways that I have acted before where I've gotten better results. But when I'm with my boyfriend or when I'm with my best friends, I definitely am more quote unquote flamboyant, and I definitely let down my reservations about who I am, and who I want to be.

Jack also shares how this impacts him, and his desire to not have to perform an identity in this way:

> I definitely do change a little bit of that depending on who I'm with, and I wish that I didn't do that. I want to one day get to just being me regardless of where I'm at. Like I said earlier, I'm just trying my best to work on that because I shouldn't have to do that. Nobody should have to do that.

This example by Jack connects the practice of embodied literacies of MIoSG with the concept of code-switching in literacy contexts or switching between dialects or language in a given context. These participants draw from multiple sets of internalized linguistic codes to represent themselves through embodied literacies of MIoSG.

Embodied literacies of identity afford individuals the language through which to communicate themselves with the world around them. This literate practice enables authoring of self-stories into social texts and lived spaces. As demonstrated through participant quotes, embodied literacy becomes a reciprocal process through which individuals internalize, embody, and utilize identity through the language and labels of their worlds. In this final step, performing identity as literacy, participants contributed to discourses of identity using their bodies as language. From this, others can now internalize the language and labels created by participants to continue the cycle of embodied literacies as part of identity creation.

Discussion & Implications

This study contributes to the field of literacy research in three ways. First, this study contributes to the ongoing discussion in the research community on what counts as literacy (Perry, 2012). Second, it connects the ideas of embodied literacy with MIoSG topics. The field of LGBTQ+ research is growing exponentially, especially in connection with queer identity development and mental health concerns (Robinson & Espilage, 2012). Finally, this study brings forth the ways in which language affects identity development in individuals with MIoSG. These areas of focus come from a combined background of literacy studies and identity formation for those with MIoSG.

Expanded Notions of Literacy

Arguments over what constitutes as literacy continue to be had across the field and in the extant literature. This paper contributes to this ongoing discussion by pushing the boundaries of traditional concepts of

> **"The language and labels used around and about a person are internalized into their identity and then put back out into the world as a written form of oneself."**

literacy and combines social literacy practices with multiliteracy and critical literacy (Perry, 2012). The findings we present here move literacy into the realm of edgework through an emphasis on embodied literacies of identity in a historically marginalized group of people. As mentioned previously, our findings also bring forward Freire's (2001) idea of literacy as the relationship between learners and their world. According to Freire, literacy is inseparable from power and power relationships. Here we present the ways in which individuals with MIoSG use literacy to interact with and enact their own power amongst the power relationships they encounter. These literacy practices enabled participants to read their world and write themselves into the social texts that surround them.

In sharing the experiences of the participants in this study as literacy events, we call upon Wargo's (2015) concept of elastic literacies which "take into account the types of practices that emerge from relational social ties and interactions with human and nonhuman actors across an array of environments" (p. 51). Elastic literacies account for the varied ways in which participants implement literacy skills beyond the written word to navigate their world and communicate across space and self (Wargo, 2015).

Embodied Literacies of MIoSG

As the participants illustrated, the body represents identity in many ways. Jack specifically illustrated this in how he shifted his identity representations in different contexts. This embodiment of identity comes in many forms which may include the way one dresses, how one speaks, the color and cut of their hair, or types of jewelry worn. In the same way individuals internalize and enact identities from

literature (Bishop, 1990), representations of MIoSG are learned as forms of literacy from lived experiences. The language and labels used around and about a person are internalized into their identity and then put back out into the world as a written form of oneself.

Embodied literacy makes sense when we think about the spatiality of sexuality and gender identity (Ahmed, 2006). For individuals with MIoSG, the body becomes increasingly important as the center from which sexuality and gender can be shared or hidden from the world. Participants embodied the language and labels encountered in their lifetime and used these to write their own identities into being. Cole described how learning new language changed how he labeled his identity. When language was missing or not yet encountered, some participants, such as Skyler, felt confusion or uncertainty about their own identity in relation to sexuality or gender. This lack of language in relation to identity is similar to how a writer might not be able to communicate ideas from their mind onto paper for others to read and understand without knowing the language required to complete this transfer of meaning. Meaning exists in the space between language and body, much as it does in the space between text and reader (Rosenblatt, 1978).

> **"A student cannot develop a literacy of MIoSG without opportunities to encounter identities outside of their own through social texts."**

Bishop (1990) highlighted the importance of providing mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for young readers to see themselves and others in literature. Individuals with MIoSG need these same mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to see themselves and discover the possibilities of identities not yet considered. The embodiment of literacy as part of identity development is similar to the ways in which young children develop knowledge about themselves and others, along with empathy, through the reading of physical texts. In embodied literacy, the texts come from the world around an individual and meaning is made through the internalization and re-presentation of these social texts.

Limitations

Although we attempted to mitigate many of the challenges associated with our study, there are some areas where different choices could have strengthened our work. First, this study was focused on college STEM majors. As is evidenced in our findings, participant narratives often began in pre-college (e.g., family, K-12 school) contexts that far transcended their current STEM majors. Participant responses to our gender and sexual identity questions organically began with earlier life experiences. Grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014) honor emergent themes and semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2011) afforded study flexibility beyond our collegiate STEM focus. As such, the interviewers had the opportunity to ask probing questions about lifelong identity journeys. Nonetheless, had our study been initially framed as a retrospective life history, student identity narratives may have been even more robust. Future studies should consider more longitudinal and/or life history approaches to studying the literacy of identity.

In addition, framing the study to directly investigate embodied literacies of identity under current literacy theoretical lenses (e.g., Kleekamp, 2020) may have yielded outcomes that more specifically addressed the physical manifestations of MIoSG as acts of embodied literacy. While the retrospectives of the participants provided rich examples of how their

identities were formed through embodied literacy in relation to language and performance, future studies should focus on observed physical embodiments of MIoSG in combination with participant reflections.

Implications for Educators and Youth Socializers

The findings outlined in this study speak to the importance of representation and visibility for queer youth in educational, community, and family contexts. When the potential for identities is not realized until high school, or ever, as described by some participants, this has the potential to limit the self-acceptance youth feel about themselves (Miller, 2016). An internal dissonance of identity might result in lowered self-esteem and the potential for increased mental health concerns (Miller, 2012).

For educators, this means advocating for representation and visibility in school programs, environments, and materials (Vaccaro et al., 2012). Queer inclusive curriculum that de-centers the heteronormative and hegemonic narratives prevalent in classroom spaces can help support the ability of young people to recognize and develop empathy for themselves and others. Representation through language and labels in classrooms is not just for those with MIoSG. Representation and visibility matter for all students. As Miller (2012) shares, "When a person cannot be readily understood or identified, there may be a psychological need to minimize, hurt, or make the person disappear altogether" (p. 107). An individual cannot embody an identity through social texts without those texts being present in their environment and life. A student cannot develop a literacy of MIoSG without opportunities to encounter identities outside of their own through social texts. Further, to establish inclusive educational spaces, educators themselves need to be allies and activists for students with MIoSG. An examination of the current literature on LGBTQ+ topics in teacher education calls for increased LGBTQ+ topic inclusion

in teacher education programs (Batchelor et al., 2018; Dykes & Delport, 2018; Kearns et al., 2014; Sadowski, 2010; Vaccaro et al., 2012). Preservice teachers are found to either be unaware of LGTBQ+ topics and experiences (Batchelor et al., 2018; Dykes & Delport, 2018; Kearns et al., 2014, Sadowki, 2010) or hold misconceptions about the progress of intersectional identities and movements (Shelton & Barnes, 2016). This results in preservice teachers becoming practicing teachers without adequate knowledge of LGBTQ+ allyship and advocacy.

In addition, teachers often avoid directly naming LGBTQ student identities, relying on terms such as "all students" when discussing LGBTQ allyship and support of queer identifying students (Smith, 2018). Thus, perpetuating the invisibility and omission of language which might otherwise validate MIoSG and provide the language through which individuals can embody their identity as literacy. This omission of specific language does not "invoke responsibility to confront policies and practices that contribute to LGBTQ students' exclusion" (Smith, 2018, p. 1). Heterosexual and cisgender teachers need to challenge institutional heteronormativity and cis privilege through the use of specific and inclusive language. As Anderson et al. (2015) so eloquently close with at the end of their study on the intersections of identity and embodied literacy, "It is only in refusing to speak ourselves into being that we silence our own stories and, perhaps, those of countless others" (p. 184).

Families and community members must also be educated on the language and labels associated with MIoSG (Vaccaro et al., 2012). Several participants shared how limitations or assumptions in family spaces and dynamics stifled their ability to develop the embodied literacy needed to internalize and communicate their identity. Children and adolescents spend the majority of their time at home. It's in these spaces that language becomes reified

through repetition and embedment into the experiences of childhood. This study affirms prior works that explicate how the language families use to talk about MIoSG topics as well as the words they use to express support (or lack thereof) can have vast implications for the self-esteem, identity development and overall wellbeing of youth with MIoSG (Mena & Vaccaro, 2013; Vaccaro et al., 2012). In one qualitative study of 24 GLBQ youth, Mena and Vaccaro found that family members conveyed four types of identity messages to youth: "sucks for you; you can't be gay; we don't want to know; and we accept you, but. . ." These responses ranged from overt rejection of MIoSG identities, to disbelief, to avoidance, and tempered acceptance. This study offers an array of examples of language used by family members towards MIoSG, such as "icky and dirty" or "freak", that then became internalized and embodied language that they used to describe themselves (Mena & Vaccaro, 2013).

Conclusion

The findings presented from this group of participants illustrates the reciprocal process of environmental language, internalization of language, and use of language as practices of embodied literacy. The language and labels participants encountered, or did not encounter, in their lifetime directly impacted their self-identity and use of language and labels to represent their identity to others. In this way, the data from the participants demonstrates how language around, and about oneself, becomes the language with which an individual can write their own identity into existence (Blackburn, 2014).

In referring to classroom-based concepts of literacy, Enrique (2014) states that "determining what it means to be a reader means considering how that identity is lived and experienced with one's entire being" (p. 119). While we did not directly discuss classroom-based literacies in this paper, we align ourselves with the concept that definitions of literacy are constantly expanding beyond classroom walls. In examining embodied literacy in relation to MIoSG, we push beyond how one reads or writes the written word to how one reads and writes themselves into being in the world. This broader examination of literacy empowers those with MIoSG to recognize the constant making and remaking of self as authorship and purposeful creation of meaning. It also serves as a call to action for educators and youth socializers to consider the language used in relation to MIoSG and how this language can serve as the genesis for identity formation through acts of embodied literacy.

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