



SIUE's Ferguson Invents Demographic Instrument to Prevent Inaccuracies in Sexual Identity Information Gathered During Research

by Kalli Collins

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EDWARDSVILLE - When conducting surveys, researchers ask respondents for identifiable data such as age, race, and sex. This information rarely caters to nonmonosexuals, sometimes out of unconscious preference for gender, or heterosexual and homosexual, binary. This is about to change, thanks to an instrument developed by Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Aidan Ferguson, PhD, [assistant professor in the Department of Social Work](#).



As principal instigator, Ferguson is collaborating with colleagues Jennifer Erwin, PhD and Lane Forsman, PhD, assistant professors in the Department of Social Work. The project, *Enhancing Sexual Identity Classification using the Ferguson Sexual Identity Classification Instrument (FSICI): A Proof of Concept Study*, will pilot test an instrument that aims to provide a tool which will better capture accurate sexual identity information in research and in other areas where demographic information is obtained. The instrument is named for Ferguson as its inventor.

It is a skip-logic, tree-based device that takes the participant from the very broad in sexual identity classification to the very narrow, and allows the assertion of a secondary identity, while also providing definitions of identities along the way. The instrument also asks if there are identities not represented and asks participants to provide information about any of those identities in order for the instrument to be continually updated. Its overall purpose is to help researchers collect sexual identity data that is more representative of the participant and allow participants to assert more accurate representations of who they are.

“For this study, we are asking faculty, staff, and students to take the FSICI and provide feedback on the instrument,” said Ferguson. “Feedback will be used to improve the instrument before further, more in-depth, testing.”

For someone who identifies as nonmonosexual, Ferguson, as motivation for the present study, was concerned that nonmonosexual populations—or groups that fall outside the heterosexual/homosexual binary, such as bisexual, asexual, and pansexual—are not accurately or robustly represented in research.

“This often means that research published does not consider the unique experiences, needs, and/or voices of these populations, leading to research results that may be inaccurate or underinformed for these populations,” Ferguson said. “As this is a demographic instrument, our hope is that researchers will begin to use this instrument to gain a more accurate understanding of the populations they are studying. Eventually, we would like to modify the instrument for use in clinical and educational settings, as well as create a similar instrument to assess gender identity.”

Ferguson hopes to complete the project this year but plans to continue testing and refining it for as long as it is useful. This is because language and representation are an ever-expanding area in regard to sexual identity, making constant updates a necessity.

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