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ENHANCING SEXUAL IDENTITY SPECIFICITY IN RESEARCH: TEST OF CONCEPT STUDY OF THE FERGUSON SEXUAL IDENTITY CLASSIFICATION INSTRUMENT (FSICI)

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Abstract

Introduction: Nonmonosexual individuals (i.e., those who diverge from the binary, such as pansexual, asexual, heteroflexible, etc.) continue to experience more direct and indirect harm than their heterosexual and homosexual counterparts. To gain insight into these disparities and why they persist, a more nuanced understanding of nonmonosexual individuals and their experiences is needed. Methods: Recognizing the lack of accurate representation of sexual identities in research, we developed the Ferguson Sexual Identity Classification Instrument (FSICI), a demography instrument which aims to provide respectful and comprehensive sexual identity options to better ensure the inclusion and accurate representation of nonmonosexual voices in research and beyond. A total of 169 participants completed the Qualtrics based instrument, which included follow-up questions. Results: This paper describes a preliminary concept study, which demonstrates participant endorsement of the FSICI. Conclusion and Policy Implications: While further research is needed to validate its use in larger projects, our findings suggest the FSICI holds promise as a valuable demographic tool for researchers seeking to better account for the sexual identities of participants and constituents and may ultimately contribute to more accurate, applicable, and advantageous research and policy outcomes.

Keywords

Sexual Identity, Demography, Nonmonosexuality, Sexual Identity Classification

Introduction

Nonmonosex individuals have been found to experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, self-harming behavior, substance abuse, and low self-esteem and face more barriers in accessing care, higher rates of childhood adversity, and poorer health outcomes compared to hetero- and homosexual peers (Ross, et al., 2010; Bostwick, et al., 2010; Kaestle & Ivory, 2012; Kerr, et al., 2013; Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2013; Bostwick, at al., 2014; Quinones, et al., 2015; Flanders, et al., 2016). Health disparities may occur because of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural stigma (Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Martin-Storey & Baams, 2019). Although homosexuality was removed as a diagnosis from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, 3rd Edition* (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) about 40 years ago, indirect harm, such as promulgation of stereotypes and utilization of results to support harmful interventions, persists (Kaestle & Ivory, 2012; Tufford, et al., 2012). Historical mistreatment and probable disparities faced by the sexual minority community emphasizes the continued importance of studying the nonmonosexual population as a whole, as well as focusing on sub-groups within this population. Given that research into the nonmonosexual community remains scarce, and much of the existing literature documenting such problems was published 10-25 years ago, the current extent of problems and needs faced by sub-groups within the nonmonosexual community is uncertain at this time. Adding to these issues is the lack of expansive representation and accurate accounting of nonmonosexual identities in published research,

leading to a lack of nonmonosexual voices in these spaces. Due to the underrepresentation of nonmonosexual people in research, it is vitally important that researchers develop ways to encourage accurate, precise, and respectful accounting for an extensive number of nonmonosexual identities in research to ensure participant respect and increased accuracy and applicability of research findings.

Literature Review

Nonmonosexuality and Its Significance

Nonmonosexual refers to sexual identity categories encompassing various sexual sub-identities (e.g., pansexual, asexual, heteroflexible) that diverge from the binary understanding of exclusively heterosexual or homosexual. Individuals adopt sexual identity labels that best resonate with their self-concept (Young & Meyer, 2005; Ridolfo, et al., 2012; Rothblum, 2000). Consequently, individuals may adopt one or more identities within the nonmonosexual spectrum, even if they do not explicitly identify as "nonmonosexual." Additionally, individuals may engage in behavior that could be labeled as nonmonosexual but not identify as such (for an interactive and comprehensive list of LGBTQ identities, see UC Davis's Office of Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion LGBQ+ Glossary [UC Davis, date of publication unknown]). This fluidity of nonmonosexual identities allows for a more nuanced and personalized exploration of sexual identity beyond the traditional binary categorizations.

Existing prevalence data suggests that nonmonosexual individuals represent an important sexual minority population. For example, in a 2019 nationally representative sample, 4.9% of women self-identified as bisexual, and 1.4% as "Something else, or I don't know"; for men, 1.7% self-identified as bisexual, with 1.3% reporting "Something else, or I don't know" (Mishel et al., 2020). While respondents on the "I don't know category" might not identify as nonmonosexual, selecting this option may also be a way to communicate being presently unsure about ones identity.

In the Pulse Survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau (2021), 4.4% of respondents identified as bisexual, 1.9% as something else, and 2.1% reported "I don't know". As the study did not provide any identity options for nonmonosexual identities outside of bisexual, presumably respondents who chose "something else " or "I don't know" could fit into a nonmonosexual category or could be unsure about current identity label. Overall, the prevalence of LGBTQ+ individuals in the U.S. has risen from 5.6% in 2020 to 7.1% in 2022, and it can be assumed that a sizable portion of these individuals would fit under the nonmonosexual umbrella (Jones, 2022).

According to Gallup in their yearly poll of Americans, younger generations are more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ with 6.9% of Millennials and 13.1% of Gen Z identifying as bisexual, numbers that approximate or exceed the national average for overall queer identification; "The proportion of bisexual adults relative to other LGBT identities is higher among younger than older age groups. Two-thirds of LGBT individuals in Generation Z identify as bisexual, as do 62% of LGBT millennials. In older generations, less than half of LGBT adults say they are bisexual, although it is still the largest subgroup of LGBT adults in Generation X" (2023). Although nonmonosexual subgroups remain understudied, the rates of nonmonosexuality are on the rise among young persons. Between 2015 and 2019, a study found an eight-fold increase in the number of individuals from the ages of 18-24 who identified as bisexual, with half of the respondents reporting they were not 100% heterosexual, while another study found that 20% of young respondents reported a nonheterosexual identity (GLAAD and Harris Poll, 2017; Dahlgreen & Shakespeare, 2015; Waldersee, 2019).

Identity Theory

To understand the current state of ideas and beliefs around sexual identity it is integral to look at identity theory and how these theories have been used to understand and categorize diverse sexual identities. The understanding of sexual identity development has evolved through multiple phases throughout the 20th century, from purely gender or biological models to models that incorporate context, feeling, desires, and behavior. Historically, sexual orientation/identity was perceived through a biological lens, with homosexuality attributed to a biological anomaly (Krafft-Ebing, 1950; Meyer-Bahlburg, 1984). Theories such as prenatal hormonal abnormalities, body build differences, and adult hormone levels attempted to explain heterosexuality and homosexuality as biological deficiencies in homosexual bodies (Ellis, 1928; Krafft-Ebing, 1950; Banks & Gartrell, 1995). Many historical theories were used to justify invasive research and medical intervention on non-heterosexual individuals. For example, forced castration and hormone injections were utilized during World War II to eliminate homosexual feelings (Plant, 1986), while shock treatments were used to try and alter sexual desire of non-heterosexual persons (Owensby, 1941). More recently, conversion therapy and medications were used in an attempt to alter sexual attraction (Tanner, 1974; Spitzer, 2003).

Contemporary theories of sexual orientation development offer a more nuanced view, emphasizing the intertwined nature of sociocultural influences, the distinction between sexual behavior and sexual orientation, the

centrality of personal identity in orientation development, and the influence of social norms on this development (Peplau et al., 1999). These theories purport that sociocultural factors (e.g. location, time) fundamentally influence how sexual behavior, desire, and identity are viewed. They assert that an individualistic understanding of one's identity is paramount to understanding the nuances of sexual orientation. Moreover, they suggest that sexual behavior is not necessary for orientation development, nor to assert an identity a person recognizes as their own. Additionally, these theories highlight the impact of power and status on sexual identity development (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995; Peplau et al., 1999).

Multiple selves' theory purports that individuals have multiple dimensions of self, shaping multiple socially constructed identities that influence both self-perception and how they are perceived by society (Davis, 2002; Love, et al., 2005). Identity, then, operates as a system that reconciles opposing needs for "assimilation" and "individuation" within distinctive categorical memberships (Brewer, 1991, p. 478), shaped by societal norms and the self-concept individuals associate with these roles and identities (Stryker & Statham, 1985; Markus & Cross, 1990; Roberts & Donahue, 1994). Individuals define and assert themselves via their roles, group memberships, and relationships with a focus on maintaining and strengthening relationships and connectedness (Cross, et al., 2000).

Blau's (1968) exchange theory suggests that social relationships and societal structures stem from the principle of rewards, mediated by societal norms and values that guide social exchange and group stability (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013). Blau (1964) also postulated that values can be used to connect a group of individuals, as well as distinguish between groups that are considered in and those that are out or other (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013). This theory highlights why identity assertion is crucial, as it facilitates group formation, value creation, assessment of needs, and planning change. Social exchange theory also helps highlight the perpetuation of discrimination and disenfranchisement and underscores the cyclical nature of individuals' lived experience and societal interactions.

In contrast to theories that seem to hinge on identity assertion, *queer theory* seeks to overthrow harmful exchanges by negating the power of language. Queer theory purports that identity is performed, unstable, and used as a societal control mechanism, therefore categories are restrictive and can create a disadvantage for those who adopt them (Fuss, 1989; Butler, 1991). Developed in the 1990s by theorists such as Sedgwick (1990) and Butler (1993), queer theory is meant to empower marginalized groups by resisting heteronormative hegemony (Minton, 1997; Henderson, 2003).

Language, as highlighted by Butler (2010), plays a critical role in shaping identities and realities. Identity labels, Butler (2010) argues, do not exist independently but are shaped by language and defined acts. An identity cannot exist in reality if language and defined acts aren't already present; therefore, bisexuality, for example, doesn't exist until acts and language make it so because one cannot be bisexual without the label to be so. The transmission and transformation of language across time and space reinforce social control and norms (Butler, 1993). Because language is always changing, developing, and growing, there is room for resistance through language reclamation and subversive acts, such as drag, in challenging societal norms and giving voice to marginalized groups (Butler, 1993; Sampson, 1993; Salih, 2002; Segel, 2008). Most queer-centric theories now recognize that sexual orientation and identity are combinations of behavior, eroticism, intimacy, attachment, desire, emotionality, and fantasy (Ellis & Symons, 1990; Peplau & Cochran, 1990; Golden, 1996; Regan & Berscheid, 1996). These sometimes discrete, and sometimes intersected, dimensions, along with the fact that nonmonosexual based language is a newer construct, can make it especially difficult to conduct research into sexual orientation and gender identity (Faderman, 1991). Butler (1993) considers that identity labels themselves may not be problematic, rather it is the ways in which they are used that society must carefully consider. Additionally, Hacking (1986) uses labeling theory and argues that sexual identity and labeling differences are byproducts of societal construction. Hacking (2006) also asserts the utility of these labels in prevalence calculations, grouping, and resistance.

Sexual Identity Stability

Sexual identity stability across the life span is a debated topic, with some studies indicating sexual/romantic arousal and desire are stable, while others suggest relationship configuration, group membership, and behavior are more fluid (Money, 1987; Ellis & Ames, 1987; Haldeman, 1991; American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation, 2009). Many theories on sexual orientation development assert that an individual's stage in life and their sexual development trajectory significantly influences the likelihood of changes in their declared sexual identity (Dillon, et al., 2011). Research indicates that labeling of sexual identity evolves over time, with homosexual and heterosexual identities being the most stable from childhood to young adulthood, but all identities progressively gain stability (Rosario, et al., 2006; Ott, et al., 2011; Mock & Eibach, 2012). However, discrepancies arise in studies exploring identity consistency, as variations in orientation for the same participant within a single study emerge if measures of identity, attraction, and behavior do not align (Remafedi, et al., 1992; Laumann, et al., 1994; Dickson, et al., 2003; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007). Further, challenges arise in drawing conclusions about identity stability when measures are not standardized or validated; how researchers define differing sexual identities is variable, and the importance of stability in

understanding the lived experiences and needs of nonmonosex populations may not be important to some researchers (Meyer, 2003; Salomaa & Matsick, 2019).

Research underscores the fluidity of sexual identity during adolescence and early adulthood (Hu, et al., 2016). However, challenges arise from studies categorizing respondents into sexual identity groups based on the researchers' discretion rather than the respondents' stated identity (e.g. Diamond, et al., 2017) or only focusing on sexual behaviors (e.g. Rosenthal, et al., 2012; Hu et al., 2016). Studies that do allow respondents to select their sexual identity tend to provide incomplete options (often heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual), limiting the researchers' ability to fully explore identity's impact on orientation and stability. For example, research exists which supports the notion that a mostly heterosexual/mostly homosexual identity exists, but it is rarely provided as an identity option for individuals to select, leaving them to select an identity label that does not correspond to their personal identity (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012). Hall, Dawes, and Plocek (2022) conducted a systematic literature review concerning sexual orientation identity development and identified several common milestones, including becoming aware of queer attractions, questioning one's sexual orientation, self-identifying as LGB+, coming out, engaging in sexual activity, and initiating romantic relationships. Their review highlighted that these milestones do not consistently follow a uniform sequence, however attraction tended to be the initial milestone (Hall, et al, 2022). They found that milestones varied by sex, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and birth cohort (Hall, et al., 2022).

Our understanding of the stability of a respondent's identity is likely influenced by how sexual orientation is measured (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007). For example, studies conducted by Stokes, Damon and McKirnan (1997) and Stokes, McKirnan and Burzette (1993) suggest shifts in behaviorally bisexual men toward a more homosexual orientation throughout their lives, relying primarily on behavior to determine sexuality. However, this approach raises questions about what constitutes a homosexual orientation and assumes behavior as the sole basis for self-identification. There is no validated timeframe of sexual activity, fantasy, or desire level, nor type or amount of attraction that denotes a clear separation between monosex and nonmonosex identities. Such conclusions of identity instability are therefore misleading, as movement toward homosexuality might indicate the adoption of a homosexual identity or changing levels of desire, behavior, or attraction toward one gender over another, while the individual remains nonmonosexual in identity. It is difficult to accurately assess stability when researchers do not believe other identities exist or use faulty measurement tools to assess them.

The adoption of an LGBT+ identity may be influenced by stigma, being in K-12 school versus college, or individual identity assessment, leading some individuals to identify as heterosexual despite experiencing attractions to people other than their opposite sex (Rust, 2002; Diamond, 2003; Dickson, et al., 2003; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007). Longitudinal studies found shifts in identity over time, with more individuals embracing nonmonosexual identities due to fluctuations in attraction rather than major alterations in orientation (Diamond, 2008). This finding is consistent with another study (Diamond et al., 2017) that found daily fluctuations in attractions for all sexual identities was the norm. An LGBT+ identity is predicated on the capacity or experience of sexual attraction (or non-attraction) to various genders but does not assume that these individuals have acted upon or plan to act upon these attractions. Thus, exclusively judging LGBT+ identity stability based on behavior, interest, or desire may not be fully authentic to the respondent's life experiences, and therefore focusing on the participant's perception, experiences, and current label adoption, such as focused on by the FSICI instrument, might be more informative, and respectful, than concentrating on the veracity or authenticity of their identity.

Complexities in Sexual Identity Measurement

Nonmonosexual individuals have unique experiences related to intra- and interpersonal identity assertion, shaping their daily lives and lifelong trajectories (Flanders et al., 2016; Flanders et al., 2017). Understanding how identity influences a nonmonosexual person's life provides crucial insights into their needs, barriers, resiliency, and current community assumptions. However, quantitatively studying this community poses significant challenges due to the complex nature of identity measurement, particularly in affording equal respect and recognition to all identities. Thus, determining an inclusive and effective method to measure sexual identity is paramount for ethical and successful research.

The term sexual orientation encompasses multiple dimensions of sexual behavior, attraction, and identity (Laumann et al., 1994; Marshall et al., 2008; Wolff, et al., 2017). Sexual identity, however, refers to how individuals construct and perceive themselves within the context of their lived experiences (Ridolfo et al., 2012) or the "cognitive" part of sexual orientation (McCabe, et al., 2012). The quantitative measurement of sexual orientation generally involves tools assessing various dimensions of sexuality, while the measurement of sexual identity commonly employs participant-centered questions allowing the participant to voice how they perceive and label themselves.

Differences in life experiences and outcomes for nonmonosexual people highlight the importance of not only focusing on nonmonosexuals as a community, but also as diverse subgroups within the broader nonmonosexual spectrum. This approach facilitates the accurate description and understanding of nonmonosexual subgroups, especially in instances where subgroups are previously known to be dissimilar. However, combining disparate nonmonosexual individuals into one category can provide researchers with the sample sizes necessary to perform quantitative analyses. Additionally, the rapid evolution of terminology and the unfamiliarity of the term "nonmonosexual" to many research participants further complicates categorization efforts. Looking at historical and current measurement techniques informed the development of the FSICI by critically examining these techniques for points of improvement that could be integrated into the FSICI.

Existing Ways of Measuring Sexual Identity

Assessing participant-driven sexual identity often involves the use of Likert-style identity scales that ask respondents to rate their identity on a continuum, from heterosexual to homosexual (Kinsey, et al., 1948: Kinsey, et al., 1953; Klein, et al., 1985). The two most frequently used are adaptations of the Kinsey Scale, which provides a Likert scale from 0 (exclusively heterosexual) to 6 (exclusively homosexual), with varying degrees of homo-centric or hetero-centric in between, and the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG), which is a hybrid between a Likert-type Kinsey scale and an orientation scale which assesses 7 dimensions (sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, heterosexual/homosexual lifestyle, and self-identification) on a scale of 1 (more heterosexual) to 7 (more homosexual) (Kinsey, et al., 1948, 1953; Klein et al., 1985; Savin-Williams, 2009). While both scales may be useful in measuring identity, neither allows participants to self-identify with their chosen label. Moreover, people with nonmonosexual identities perceive these traditional measures as insufficient for comprehensively capturing the complexities of how they experience and perceive their sexuality (Matheson & Blair, 2023).

Sexual identity may also be measured through the use of sexual orientation scales that assess specific sexual identity attributes, such as behavior or attraction. Sexual behavior has been defined as concrete sexual actions, while sexual attraction has been defined as sexual or romantic desires (Savin-Williams, 2009). Measures that assess sexual behavior ask questions about sexual activity within a specified time frame and the gender of their partners (Laumann et al., 1994). Sexual attraction questions gauge the respondent's degree of attraction and the genders of those they are attracted to (Ridolfo et al., 2012). While many researchers develop questions to assess sexual orientation based on the needs and goals of their studies, there are two measures – the Sexual Identity Scale (SIS) (Stern, et al., 1987) and the Sell Assessment (Sell, 1997) – that look at multiple dimensions of sexual identity, considering interest, attraction, behavior, and identity. Neither has undergone rigorous psychometric evaluation, although one study does report that the SIS is high in validity and reliability (Stern et al., 1987; Sell, 1997). The Sell Assessment, on the other hand, might inaccurately inflate or deflate identity groupings due to assumption of a non-salient participant identity based on behavior or attraction (Sell, 2007). Critics of using sexual orientation dimensions to evaluate identity raise concerns about inadequate participant self-identification, the complexity of markers beyond behavior and attraction, and potential lack of correlation between these dimensions (Sell, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2009; Wolff et al., 2017).

Self-identification of sexuality generally involves allowing the participant to provide their own sexuality label through the use of various categorical or open-ended question formats (Rothblum, 2000). The most common format is using a multiple-choice with the options: (1) "gay", (2) "lesbian", (3) "bisexual", (4) "heterosexual", and sometimes (5) "not sure" or (6) "other" options are also provided (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Jorm, et al., 2002; Savin-Williams, 2009; McCabe et al., 2012). More recent research expands these options by including other identities such as curious, questioning, and unlabeled (Thompson & Morgan, 2008). This approach does not predicate identity on the adoption of specific behaviors, feelings, or desires (Rothblum, 2000; Young & Meyer, 2005), although researchers often collect such data. Despite the correlation of sexual behavior and identity, allowing individuals to self-select their sexual identity is considered the most ethical and respectful approach in obtaining information about sexual orientation (Young & Meyer, 2005; Ridolfo et al., 2012). The Ferguson Sexual Identity Classification Instrument (FSICI) uses a sexual identity approach (Rothblum, 2000; Young & Meyer, 2005), which treats sexual identity as a variable independent of behavior, attraction, feelings, desired activity, fantasy, and so forth. Individuals may adopt one or more identities they resonate with, even if they do not personally identify with the term nonmonosexual, emphasizing the dissociation between behavior and personal label adoption.

FSICI Tool Development

The purpose of this new instrument is to provide a tool that can be easily embedded into research projects to help researchers ensure more accurate representation and to provide more robust information about nonmonosexual identities. In effort to gather a well-informed understanding of nonmonosexual identities, an information search was undertaken to ensure robust representation of nonmonosexual identities in the survey and accurate representation/definition of identities. Information was compiled from various queer based websites (e.g., the LGBTQ Glossary on the Johns Hopkins website (n.d.), the LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary by UC Davis (n.d.), and others listed in the bibliography) and journal articles (e.g., those listed in the bibliography). Following a deep dive into the academic and online literature regarding nonmonosexual identities, a list of the most common nonmonosexual sexual identities was compiled and individual definitions of each were developed.

Table 1: FSICI Term Glossary

	Definition
Bisexual	An individual who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of their same gender and/or other genders.
Biromantic	An individual who experiences romantic attraction to people of their same gender and/or other genders.
Bicurious	An individual who has a desire to explore an emotional, physical, and/or sexual attraction to people of their same gender and/or other genders.
Sexually Fluid	An individual whose sexual identity does not fall within one identity or whose identity is malleable.
Abrosexual	An individual who has fluid sexual attraction that changes often or irregularly.
Abroromantic	An individual who has fluid romantic attraction that changes often or irregularly.
Asexual	An individual who little to no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships and/or behavior.
Grey Asexual	An individual who experiences some desire for sexual relationships but does not identify as asexual.
Grey Aromantic	An individual who experiences some desire for romantic relationships, between aromantic and romantic.
Queer	Often used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. Can also be used as an identity label for individuals who do not identity as heterosexual, but for whom do not want to specify a particular sexual identity.
Demisexual	An individual who experiences little to no sexual attraction until a strong emotional or romantic connection is formed with another individual.
Demiromantic	An individual who experiences little to no romantic attraction until a strong emotional connection is formed with another individual.
Questioning	An individual who (or a time when) an individual is unsure about or exploring their sexual identity.
Omnisexual	An individual who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to individuals of any gender expression.
Omniromantic	An individual who is romantically attracted to individuals of any gender expression.
Heteroflexible	An individual who is predominantly heterosexual, but is open to sexual, romantic, and/or physical thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors of individuals of their same gender or other genders.
Homoflexible	An individual who is predominantly homosexual, but it open to sexual, romantic, and/or physical thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors of individuals opposite their gender or other genders.
Skoliosexual	An individual who is primarily sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to individuals who identify as gender queer, non-binary and/or trans.
Pansexual	An individual who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction towards individuals regardless of gender expression.
Panromantic	An individual who experiences romantic attraction towards individuals regardless of gender expression.
Polysexual	The practice of, desire to, and/or orientation towards having multiple consensual sexual, romantic, and/or emotional relationships with multiple partners of any gender.
Polyromantic	The practice of, desire to, and/or orientation towards having multiple consensual romantic or emotional relationships with multiple partners of any gender.

Due to the complicated nature of the skip-logic survey, a tree diagram was created:

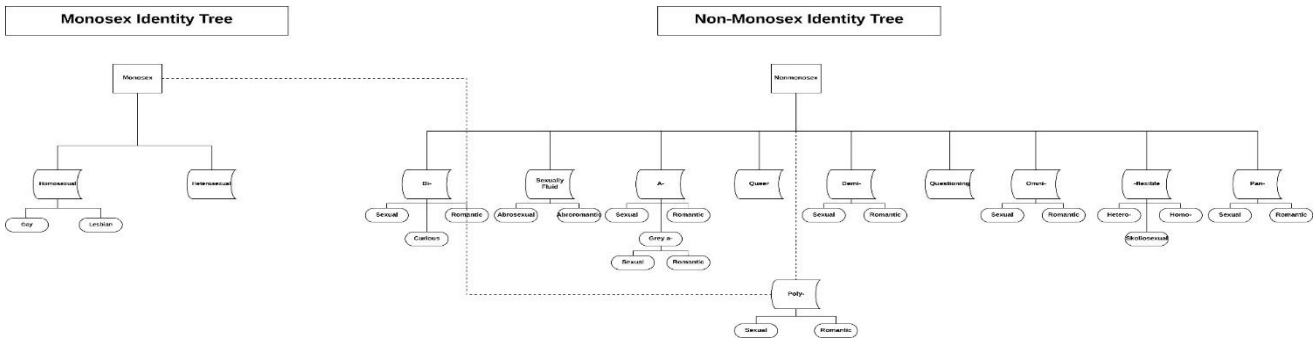

Figure 1: FSICI Tree Diagram

Utilizing the tree diagram, a skip-logic based Qualtrics survey was created that allowed for users to choose up to two sexual identity options. The tool, following the tree-diagram, allows respondents to go from a more general sexual identity to more specific. For example, if a respondent chose nonmonosexual, then they would get the option of choosing between one of nine monosexual identities. Depending on the identity chosen, new options would be released, thus going from a more general identity term to a more specific identity term as the survey is completed using skip-logic. For example, a respondent could choose nonmonosexual, which would release options for various nonmonosexual identities, such as bisexual, asexual, and pansexual. If the respondent chose asexual from the previous list, the asexual choice would release options for the participant to choose asexual or aromantic. Following that choice, the respondent would further options to assert if they identify as a grey asexual or grey aromantic. Following each selection the choice presented next are more precise until the most precise identity term is reached. Following this, respondents are able to assert a secondary identity using the same skip-logic framework.

Each sexual identity option is provided with a definition to help ensure that participants understand via the use of common language in our definition of terms and can then choose the identit(ies) that they feel are most accurate. Survey respondents can move backward in the tool to change their sexual identity choice(s) upon reflection. Because sexual identity language and identity options are evolving, the survey includes a question asking if there are any other sexual identities not present in the survey that the participant would like to assert. This question allows for revision and updating of the tool as language and identity options change across time.

The authors of this project intend for the FSICI survey tool to be freely available to anyone who wishes to utilize it and licensed the survey tool under a creative commons license that allows for free use if these authors are attributed to the work and the survey is not used for commercial purposes (Creative Commons, n.d.; CC BY-NC). Prior to the dissemination of the survey tool in this research project, the authors went through all the paths in the survey to correct any bugs. For access to the survey instrument, please contact the lead author of this manuscript.

Methods

Following development of the FSICI survey tool, a small-scale test of concept study was undertaken with approval from two midwestern universities (university A and university B) (approval #1930; approval IRB-FY24-14). The decision was made to do a concept study at this time as opposed to a more robust analysis as we wanted to a) test the user-friendliness of the instrument and b) receive feedback from participants about their perception of the instrument before a more detailed analysis of the instrument's use. This test of concept will be used to inform future versions of the instrument that can be studied more dynamically. A Qualtrics survey was developed that included the FSICI instrument, followed by questions related to the inclusiveness, respectfulness, and positives/negatives of the survey tool. Informed consent was obtained using presumed consent, whereby consent was assumed by individuals' participation in the survey. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling as follows: One set of surveys were disseminated via email to students and faculty in the Department of Social Work and members of the Queer Faculty and Staff Association (QFSA) at university A, via an online news article from the College of Arts and Sciences, and via a tweet from the university A's X (formerly known as Twitter) account inviting participation. Potential participants were advised that the survey link could be forwarded to other interested parties within university A's campus (e.g., other faculty, students, and staff throughout the university); at university B, an email was sent from the Department of Social Work and the Sexuality, Women, and Gender Studies Program and an Instagram announcement from the Gender and Sexuality Services Office. A link at the end of the survey invited participants to provide their email address if they wished to be included in a random drawing for one of three $25 Amazon gift cards. Information gathered using the survey link and gift card drawing link were collected

and kept separate to ensure anonymity of respondents. Data collection occurred between March 2023 and May 2023 at university A. Data collection occurred at university B between October 2023 and December 2023.

Following data collection there were 68 respondents at university A and 119 respondents at university B. After cleaning of the data there was a final N of 169 respondents.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics using SPSS 29 were run to assess participant responses to the instrument's questions. Demographically, participants were majority white (87%), female (75%), undergraduate (47%), 18 - 24 (58%), and heterosexual (56%). Of the 74 participants who responded as being other than heterosexual, the majority (85%) identified as nonmonosexual when asked.

Table 2 Nonmonosex Identity Label

	N	%
-flexible (An individual who is predominantly heterosexual or homosexual, but is open to sexual, romantic, and/or physical thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors of individuals of their same gender or other genders.)	6	3.6
A- (An individual who little or no sexual attraction and/or romantic attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships and/or behavior.)	8	4.7
Bi-(Anindividual who is romantically, emotionally, or sexually attracted to people of their same gender and/or other genders.)	18	11
Demi-(An individual who experiences little or no sexual attraction and/or romantic attraction until a strong emotional or romantic connection is formed with another individual.)	2	1.2
Omni-(Anindividual who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to individuals of any gender expression.)	1	0.6
Pan- (An individual who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction towards individuals regardless of gender expression.)	13	7.7
Queer (Often used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. Can also be used as an identity label for individuals who do not identity as heterosexual, but for whom do not want to specify a particular sexual identity.)	12	7.1
Questioning (An individual who is unsure about or is exploring their sexual identity.)	3	1.8

Table 2 shows the full breakdown for nonmonosexual identity labels. Of note, Bi- (10.7%), Pan- (7.7%), and Queer (7.7%) were the most commonly selected nonmonosexual identities and only Bi- (n=18) and Pan- (n=13) respondents provided further breakdown of their identities when asked about a distinction between romantic and sexual attraction. When asked about a secondary identity label, 19 participants responded that they use a secondary label and the breakdown of identities can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 Secondary Identity Label

	N	%
A-(An individual who little or no sexual attraction and/or romantic attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships and/or behavior.)	5	3
Bi-(An individual who is romantically, emotionally, or sexually attracted to people of their same gender and/or other genders.)	4	2
Demi-(An individual who experiences little or no sexual attraction and/or romantic attraction until a strong emotional or romantic connection is formed with another individual.)	4	2
Pan- (An individual who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction towards individuals regardless of gender expression.)	3	2
Queer (Often used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. Can also be used as an identity label for individuals who do not identity as heterosexual, but for whom do not want to specify a particular sexual identity.)	1	1
Sexually Fluid (An individual whose sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction can vary across time.)	2	1

Respondents were also asked open-ended questions about the survey and how they perceived their experience while participating. Respondents unanimously felt the instrument was presented in a respectful way with one participant stating, "Yes, the survey used politically correct terms and allowed for ample self-representation from those participating." They also overwhelmingly felt that the survey was accurate to their lived experience; one participant noted, "...I feel like I even learned of some new identities that I identify more with than what I have previously identified myself as." Other themes that arose as positives for the survey were its ease of use and the expansive options for self-identifying such as, "easy to complete" and "comprehensive options." However,

there were also some updates that were suggested that we feel are important to consider when adapting this survey for future use. A common theme was that the Asexual/Aromantic portion of the survey could use some clarification/updating as participants who use that label did not feel the survey allowed them to effectively select the best option for themselves; as one participant noted in reference to these identities, "the way the questions were asked made [the] distinction blurry."

A known shortcoming of this instrument that participants identified is that the same attention and process to gender identity is not provided. However, we are already working on expanding the gender identity portion of the instrument and plan to use the information learned from this test of concept to support expanding collection of gender identity information in future versions of the instrument.

Discussion and Future Directions

While this concept study provides support for the FSICI tool in functionality and ability to accurately, ethically, and respectfully classify sexual identities, it requires further testing within larger research projects to support wide scale adoption. This concept study, and prior research and academic/social concern regarding representation, does provide support for more complex analyses of the instrument in the future once user feedback has been incorporated, which was the goal of beginning with a small scale concept study. This instrument appears to better uphold respect for participants than more limited sexual identity instruments, which is an important consideration in working towards increasing participation, likelihood of more honest responses, and an overall more positive research experience. As such, we are hoping that researchers will request to use this instrument in studies and provide us with outcome information related to its use. Using this participant feedback, we can further refine and update the instrument so that it remains as accurate as possible to the lived experiences of nonmonosexual individuals and others who participate in research projects. Researchers interested in using the FSICI instrument to collect demographic data within their studies are welcome to request a copy of the instrument from the corresponding author.

As pointed out by the participants in the current concept study, this instrument will continue to be a work in progress due to the ever-changing nature of language and identity. We want to incorporate feedback from participants regarding the Asexual/Aromantic portion to provide more clarification and update it to better align with the lived experiences and identity label perceptions of Asexual/Aromantic participants. Overall, participants found the instrument to be respectful of their unique identities. We argue that providing a respectful and accurate demography instrument can have positive impacts on many aspects of the research process, including participation likelihood, outcomes and conclusions, especially the precision of study outcomes and conclusions. Further, it can provide additional protection of participants from harm resulting from research participation and/or utilization of wrong/misleading results in different practice areas.

Lack of diversity in studies has been found to have negative impacts on marginalized populations (Pateman & West, 2023; El-Galaly et al., 2023). For example, an assumption was made that black and white individuals respond the same to blood pressure medication (Johnson, 2008). This led to years where black individuals' health care interventions were not tailored to their specific needs (Beta blockers were introduced in 1968 by James Black (Oliver, et al., 2019)). In fact, ethnic difference considerations have been found for other lifesaving medication, such as warfarin and antihypertensives (Johnson, 2008).

These potentially harmful diversity issues have also been uncovered in LGBTQ+ research and intervention. Pollitt et al. (2021) looked at published research in JSPR and PR between 2002 and 2021, out of 2181 manuscripts, only 92 articles were specific to understanding LGBTQ+ lived experiences (Pollitt et al., 2021). In fact, 42 articles specifically excluded LGBTQ+ individuals (16 collected LGBTQ+ data but removed this data from analysis) (Pollitt et al., 2021). Lack of publication representation has also been found for nonmonosexual populations (see Authors own, 2018). Considering that LGBTQ+ inclusion continues to be an issue, it stands to reason that exclusion and representation issues are more prevalent and potentially problematic for lesser known nonmonosexual groups.

Increased precision may improve the understanding of these populations and ensure that interventions, problem depictions, and construction of community descriptions are helpful and correct for subgroups. For instance, one way to address gaps in policy analysis, advocacy, and jurisprudence is to better understand the sexual identity make-up of constituent groups in society. By improving and expanding sexual identity measurement advocates and policy-makers will be better able to identify, access, and understand the needs of nonmonosex populations. Nonmonosex individuals will also gain more power in the policy process if their identities are known and given a voice. If nonmonosex individuals had been listened to in the outset of fights for things such as employment and marriage rights the gaps in protection identified by BiLaw may never have existed.

Our hope is that offering a streamlined and easy to use sexual identity instrument will encourage researchers to collect and analyze data that includes nonmonosexual groups as distinct groups. Because the lack of precision and representation is not unique to research, we also hope to modify the instrument for use in educational

and clinical settings. Because identity assertion and adoption tend to be a key component to lived experiences of individuals, including health and behavioral health outcomes and risks, we can see the utility in adopting the FSICI for clinical spaces so that patients and clients can more accurately identify themselves to their providers. Being aware of a patient's precise sexual identity can assist providers in gathering more exact information for use in diagnosis, risk assessment, and other clinical considerations. The instrument may also present an avenue for providers to open conversation about sexual identity with their patients when warranted and support a more patient centered clinical practice where patients feel supported and seen for whatever identities they bring to the table. Further, we can see a use for an adopted version of the FSICI in educational arenas to assist educators in teaching about sexual identity.

It is important to note the high percentage of nonmonosexual populations represented in this study, especially those lesser represented identities. 85% of LGBTQ+ participants selected a nonmonosex label higher than even the largest group from the Gallop poll where 66% of Gen Z identified as bisexual. A possible explanation for this could be the inclusion of nonmonosex identities other than bisexual for participants to choose from. We argue that the numbers of nonmonosexual participants in this study indicate that numbers of nonmonosexual individuals, in general, is high enough to warrant specific attention on sub-populations and nonmonosexual as a group. For researchers to better understand and represent these groups, a demographic instrument, such as the one in this research project is necessary to accurately identify these individuals. Overall, we conclude that the FSICI concept and tool is supported as a user-friendly demographic tool that allows for more accurate representation of participants in research projects.

Limitations

While this concept study provides support for the continued testing and integration of the FSICI instrument into additional data collection opportunities, there are important limitations to consider. As a small-scale pilot study, random sampling methods were not feasible, and convenience sampling was utilized as described above. While there were rates of nonmonosexuality higher than expected based on previous research, this sampling method likely resulted in a sample that is not fully representative of the broader populations at the universities involved in the study. The demographic data further reflects this limitation, as the sample is predominantly composed of white, female, and heterosexual participants. This homogeneity limits our ability to fully assess the instrument's function and appropriateness for groups that are underrepresented in the sample. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct larger-scale trials and incorporate the FSICI instrument into studies that employ random sampling methods in order to ensure more diverse and representative participation that can contribute to further refinement of the demographic tool to ensure utility and appropriateness for the target populations of the instrument.

Conclusion

The FSICI was created to provide participants a way to more precisely assert sexual identity in research projects, as well as to provide researchers the ability to more accurately collect data on the sexual identities of their participants. The focus of the tool is to ensure respectful and expansive identity options for nonmonosexual individuals, who are often not represented in research projects, thus limiting the knowledge produced specific to their needs and lived experiences. This study provided positive support for use of the FSICI as a demographic instrument in research studies. Participants endorsed its expansive and meaningful response options. Response options were seen as respectful and accurate to participants' lived experiences. While this study's purpose was not to provide evidence of functionality when embedded in a larger study, it does provide strong support for its inclusion in research projects as a more accurate sexual identity demographic tool. Further use and study will need to be completed to ascertain its utility and effectiveness in larger scale research projects as a demographics tool.

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