

Adjudicating Asylum Claims of Sexual or Gender Minority Applicants

Lunch Seminars in Minority Studies
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Psychology at the Frontiers: Asylum Interviewing and Decision Making [Psych-AID]

- Our overall aim is to explore ways to develop the interview procedure and the credibility assessments to ensure fair and accurate asylum procedures.
- <https://sites.abo.fi/psych-aid/>



Posted: June 28, 2025

**Pt. 1 | They fled to Canada
as a queer refugee**

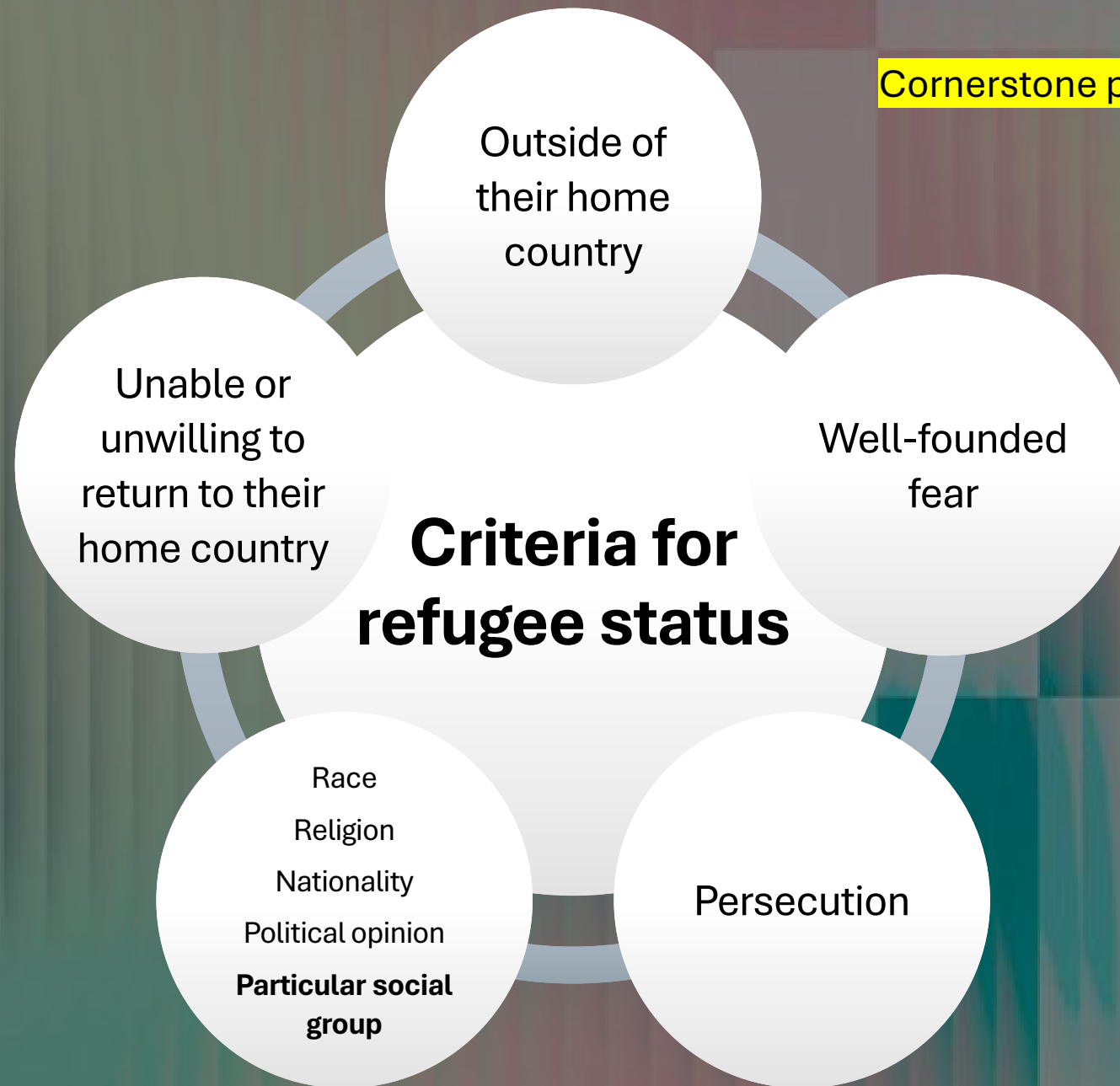
**Pt. 1
as a**

Canada

Asylum seeker vs. Refugee

- Asylum = the process of applying for international protection
- Asylum seeker = claim not yet decided
- Refugee = an asylum seeker who has been recognized as meeting the legal definition under the 1951 Refugee Convention

Cornerstone principle: Non-refoulement



The diagram consists of two overlapping circles. The larger circle is white with a thick light blue border and contains the text 'SOGIE* applicants'. The smaller circle is also white but lacks a border and contains the text 'Membership of a particular social group'. The circles overlap on the left side.

SOGIE*
applicants

**Membership of
a particular
social group**

*sexual orientation, gender identity,
or gender expression

Particular social group: SOGIE

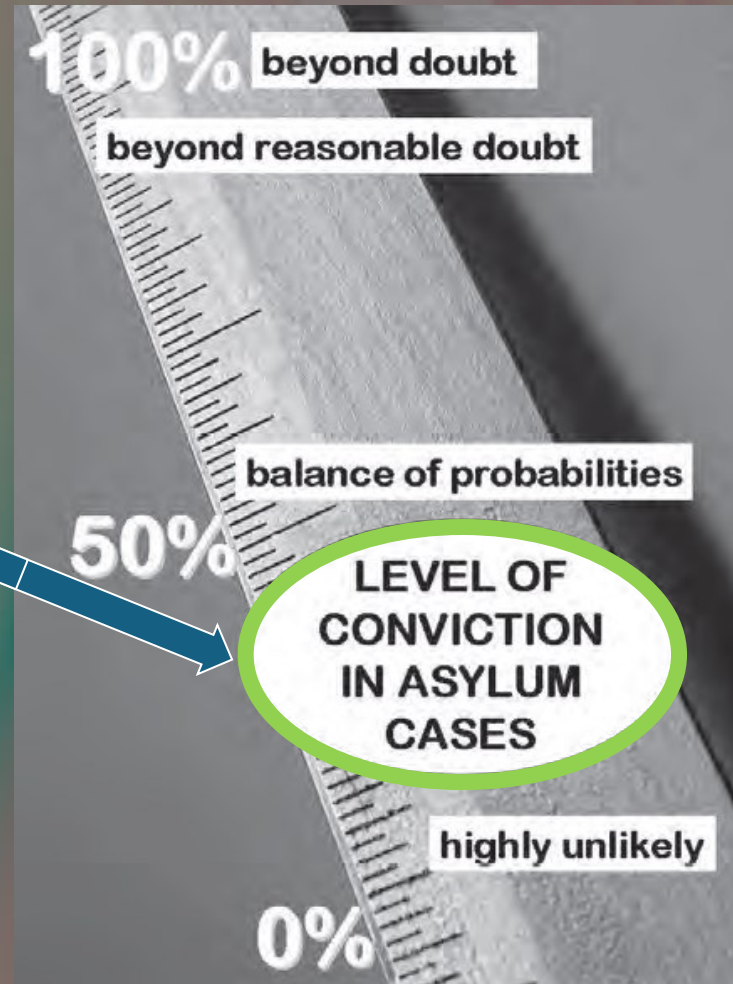
- A shared fundamental characteristic – something innate (e.g., sexual orientation or gender identity) or so central to identity that no one should be forced to change it.
- Seen as distinct in society – the group is perceived as different, often leading to stigma, discrimination, or violence.

The general asylum adjudication procedure



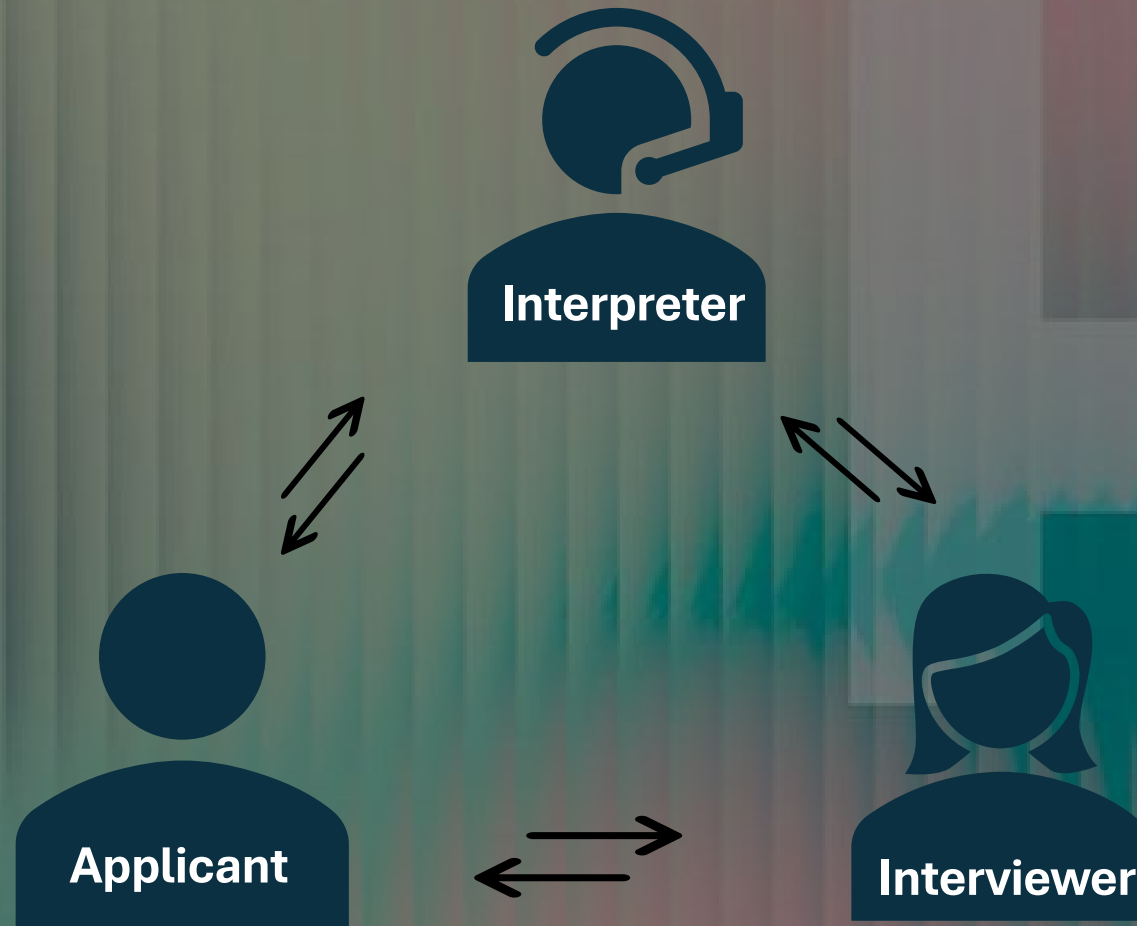
The general asylum procedure

**4. Legal
decision:**
Accept or reject



What does psychology have to do with it?

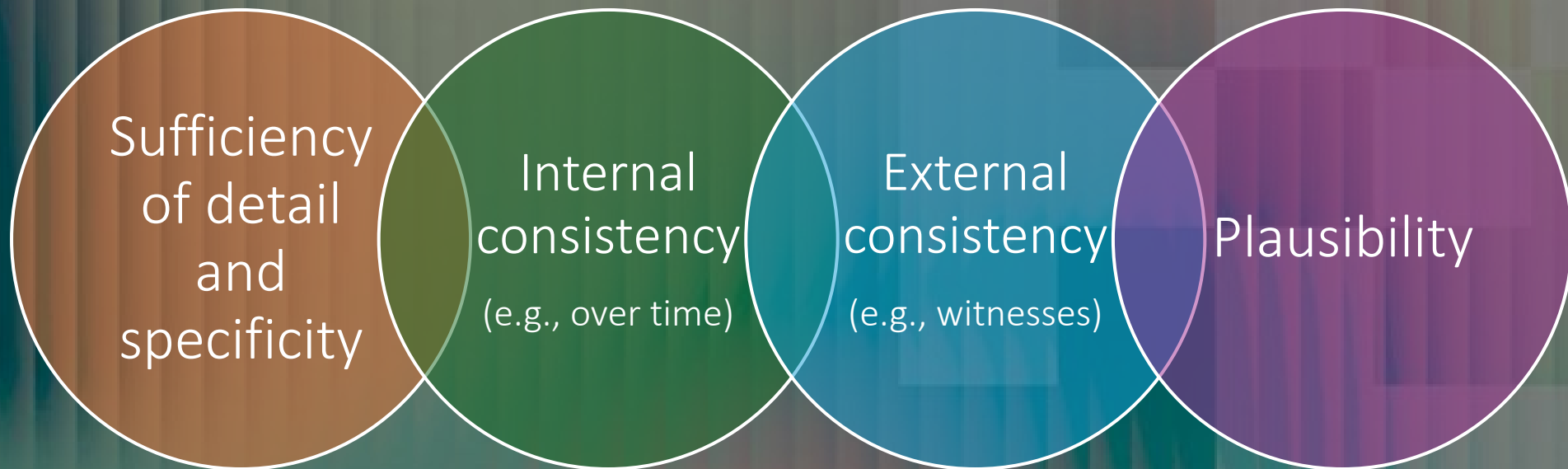
**1. Asylum
interview:**
Gathering the
evidence



Credibility assessment

**2. Credibility
assessment:**
Evaluating the
facts

The UNHCR recommends using 4 credibility indicators:





**”Is this person a
'genuine' SOGIE?
applicant”**

Credibility of SOGIE: from behavior (e.g., sexual) → identity (e.g., emotional)

- Western notions of identity → Applicants often expected to fit Western ideas of what it means to be SOGIE.
- Examples of expectations → E.g., Pride participation, being 'out and proud,' medical transition.
- Stereotypes → Credibility still shaped by stereotypes of how SOGIE people 'should' look or act.

Psych-AID research

Psych-AID research



Dr. Hedayat Selim

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(In)credibly queer? Assessments of asylum claims based on sexual orientation (2024).

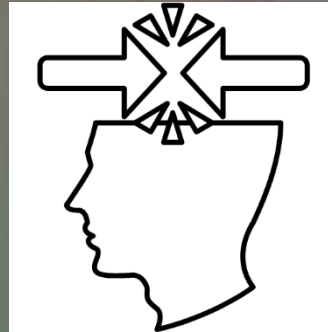
- 68 written negative decision justifications from the Finnish immigration Service

Selim, H., Lindblad, P., Vanto, J., Skrifvars, J., Alvesalo-Kuusi, A., Korkman, J., Alvesalo-Kuusi, A., Pirjatanniemi, E., & Antfolk, J. (2024). *Legal and Criminological Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lcrp.12278>

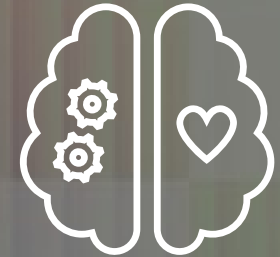
(In)credibly queer?



Account of sexual
identity not detailed
enough



Expectation of
inner conflict between
sexual identity &
religious beliefs



Emotional
reactions deemed
implausible

Excerpts from decisions

*“Although your own family background would be more liberal than a normal family from Iraq, the Finnish Immigration Service believes that, considering the generally conservative attitudes of the society of [country of origin], a person **could be reasonably required** to be able to describe more precisely **their own feelings or conflicts connected to their sexual orientation.**”*

*“You have also been asked how you experience the relationship between your religion and your sexuality. You have responded narrowly that **you do not see that as a problem**, because **although you are Muslim, you do not practice Islam.**”*

Preprint

Private file

An Experimental Test of Stereotype Congruency in Credibility Assessments of Sexual Minority Asylum Claims

September 2025

DOI: [10.31234/osf.io/acwp3_v1](https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/acwp3_v1)

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Preprints and early-stage research may not have been peer reviewed yet.

Experimental study on stereotypes

Main hypothesis: SOGIE asylum seekers who fit stereotypes = judged more credible.

Specifically, we expected feminine-presenting gay men and masculine-presenting lesbians to be rated as more credible than their gender-conforming counterparts.

Participants

**2. Credibility
assessment:**
Evaluating the
facts



- 383 participants from the UK from an online platform
- Acted as mock asylum officials
- Made a credibility assessment of one SOGIE asylum seeker

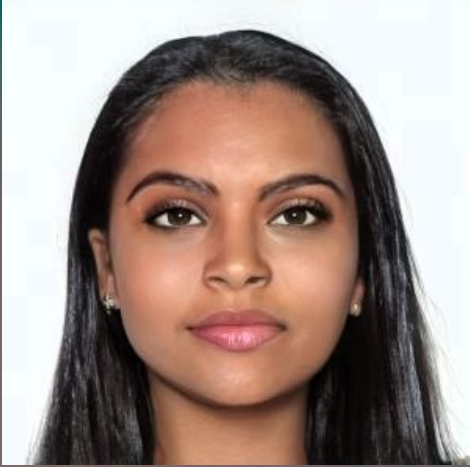
Experimental design

Sexual orientation	Stereotypical	Not stereotypical	Regions
Gay men	Feminine gay man	Masculine gay man	Middle East
	Feminine gay man	Masculine gay man	Latin America
	Feminine gay man	Masculine gay man	Africa
Lesbians	Masculine lesbian	Feminine lesbian	Middle East
	Masculine lesbian	Feminine lesbian	Latin America
	Masculine lesbian	Feminine lesbian	Africa

= 12 different conditions

AI-manipulated pictures

Sexual orientation	Stereotypical	Not stereotypical	Regions
Gay men	Feminine gay man	Masculine gay man	Africa
Lesbian	Masculine lesbian	Feminine lesbian	Latin America



Casefile

At his asylum interview, D testified as to the following:

He grew up in a small town in a Middle Eastern country. He always felt different from other boys, even as a young child. He preferred playing with girls. He recalls first being sexually attracted to other boys starting around age 12, but he was too scared to act on those feelings. When he was 17, he was approached by an older boy in the neighborhood, who was rumored to be gay. They had a sexual relationship in secret, which continued on and off for about four months. D's mother became suspicious and confronted him and D admitted that he thought he was gay. The mother responded that she was not surprised and had always suspected this. She told D that he must be careful and hide this while he lived at home - especially from his father, a senior police officer who scorned homosexuals. She told him that maybe things could be different when he left their town for university. He broke off his secret relationship and even agreed to date a female friend of his cousin - though that did not last long.

Same casefile for all 12 conditions

Casefile

As is common in asylum cases, there are some inconsistencies and contested actions in D's story. D will have the opportunity to explain these. Here are the specific contradictions and irregularities in D's case:

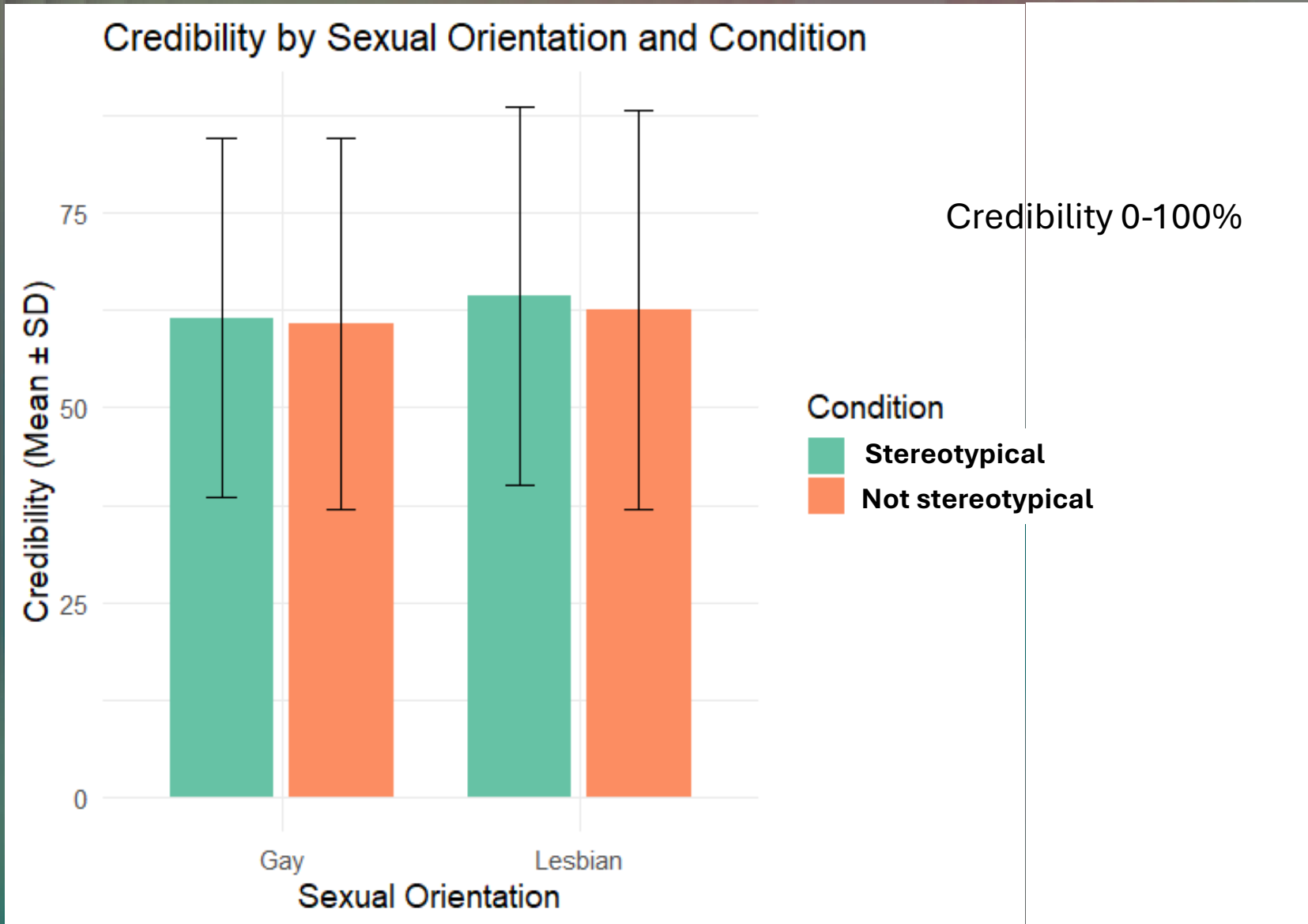
- D used forged documents to obtain a UK visa through fraud.
- He did not make a refugee claim on arrival in the UK, but instead entered the country using the fraudulently obtained visa and worked for several months without authorization.

Casefile

At D's asylum interview when these contradictions were brought to his attention, he responded as follows:

- D admits that he used a forged document to obtain a visa. He did so because he was scared, was desperate to get out of his home country and had heard that, unless he provided such a letter, the visa would be denied.
- D did not know that it was possible to make a refugee claim in the UK based on sexual orientation until he met with his lawyer after being detained. He thought refugees were people fleeing armed conflict, like in Syria. If he had known that he could make a claim on this basis, he would have done so prior to being detained. He had heard about people successfully living and working in the UK without status and thought that was his best option.

Credibility ratings – no statistically significant differences



Credibility assessment reasoning

Exploring participants' reasoning for their credibility ratings.

“Although I could see all of the inconsistency/forgeries in D's application I did feel she explained the reason why she did these things in a credible way and that lead me to believe she really was a lesbian who was scared to return to her home.” (Woman, 54)

“There are many inconsistencies in her story when it comes to establishing whether she is actually homosexual. There is also a history of lying and created fraud documents. All this together does not make her story very credible.” (Man, 50)

Moving Forward: Improving SOGIE Adjudication

Moving forward

- Current models and tools are useful, but incomplete
- Need approaches that include those who don't "fit the model"
- Shift focus from proving identity to assessing risk of persecution
- Evidence-based interviewing & decision-making

Thank you for your attention!



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[linkedin.com/company/psych-aid](https://www.linkedin.com/company/psych-aid)

