

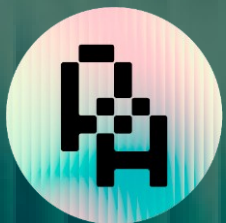
Congruent and Moral: The Effects of Stereotypes on Assessments of Credibility in Sexual Minority Asylum Claims

Malin Ekelund, Dilhan Töredi, Jan Antfolk

Faculty of Human and Social Sciences

Åbo Akademi University

malin.ekelund@abo.fi



Psychology at the Frontiers: Asylum Interviewing and Decision Making [Psych-AID]

The problem

Most asylum claims based on sexual orientation come down to one thing: whether the decision-maker believes the applicant is telling the truth about who they are.

The risk that decision-makers rely on stereotypes is therefore great.

(E.g., Selim, H., Korkman, J., Pirjatanniemi, E., & Antfolk, J. (2023). Asylum claims based on sexual orientation: A review of psycho-legal issues in credibility assessments. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 29(10), 1001-1030.)



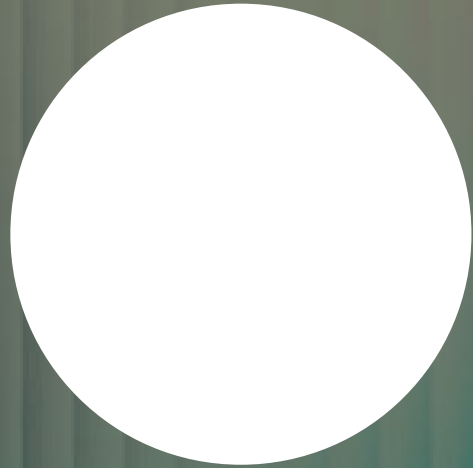
65+

countries still criminalise
same-sex relations

Source: ILGA World: Lucas Ramon Mendos and Dhia Rezki Rohaizad, *Laws On Us: A Global Overview of Legal Progress and Backtracking on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics*, 1st edition (Geneva: ILGA, May 2024)

The central hypothesis:

Does being stereotype-congruent make an applicant seem more credible?



LOOK



NARRATIVE



Narrative: excerpt from transcript

Interviewer: Tell me about any experiences in your teenage years that played a role in how you understood your sexuality.

Amir: My first experience was around seventeen. I met an older boy from my neighbourhood. People whispered that he was not like other boys, [...]

•**Stereotype-congruent:** [so I felt he might understand me. We started spending time together, at first just talking about our emotions.]

•**Incongruent:** [so I felt he might also like boys. We started spending time together, mostly



Experimental design

394 participants
(220 women, 173
men, 1 preferred not
to state), mean age
44

Fully crossed
factorial: look ×
narrative × country
of origin (Iraq vs.
Nigeria)

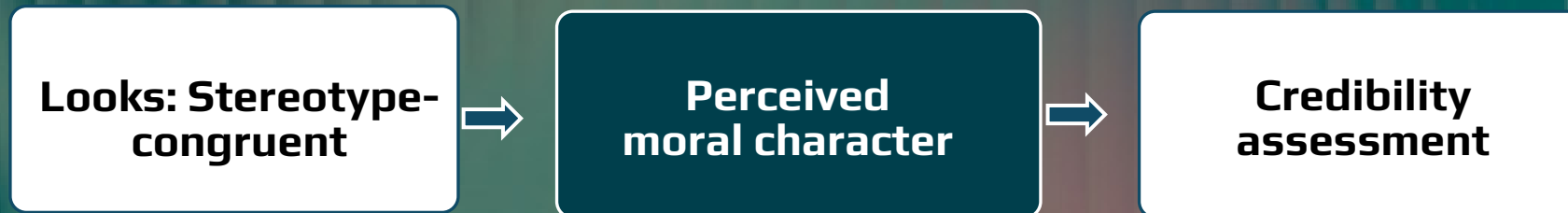
*Powered (90%) to
detect effects as
small as $f^2 = .036$*

The data analysis plan and all hypotheses and exploratory analyses were preregistered at the Open Science Framework prior to data collection

Mechanisms to stereotyping

In our previous study moral character stood out as a strong predictor of credibility assessment.

Here we further tested both the direct effect and the mediating effect of moral character on credibility.



APPLIED COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY 

RESEARCH ARTICLE | [Open Access](#) | 

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

[Malin Ekelund](#)  [Jenny Skrifvars](#) [Hedayat Selim](#) [Jan Antfolk](#)

First published: 04 June 2026 | <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.70228> | [VIEW METRICS](#)

SECTIONS  **EPUB**  **PDF**  **CITE**  **TOOLS**  **SHARE**

ABSTRACT

Previous research has highlighted a concerning reliance on stereotypes in assessing credibility of asylum claims based on sexual orientation. To experimentally examine the mechanisms behind this, 383 participants evaluated a realistic asylum casefile paired with a picture of an asylum seeker digitally altered to present either stereotype-congruent (feminine gay men, masculine lesbians) or stereotype-incongruent (masculine gay men, feminine lesbians) features. We further examined the roles of social perception dimensions—warmth, competence, and moral character—and individual differences in social dominance orientation (SDO). Contrary to expectations, stereotype congruence did not influence credibility. As predicted, perceived moral character was the strongest predictor of credibility, highlighting the importance of trust-related traits in credibility assessments. Competence negatively predicted credibility, perhaps reflecting suspicion that capable applicants are deceptive, while warmth and SDO showed no association with credibility. Future research should use more salient manipulations of stereotype-congruence to better capture its role in refugee status determinations.

The central hypothesis:

Does being stereotype-congruent make an applicant seem more credible?

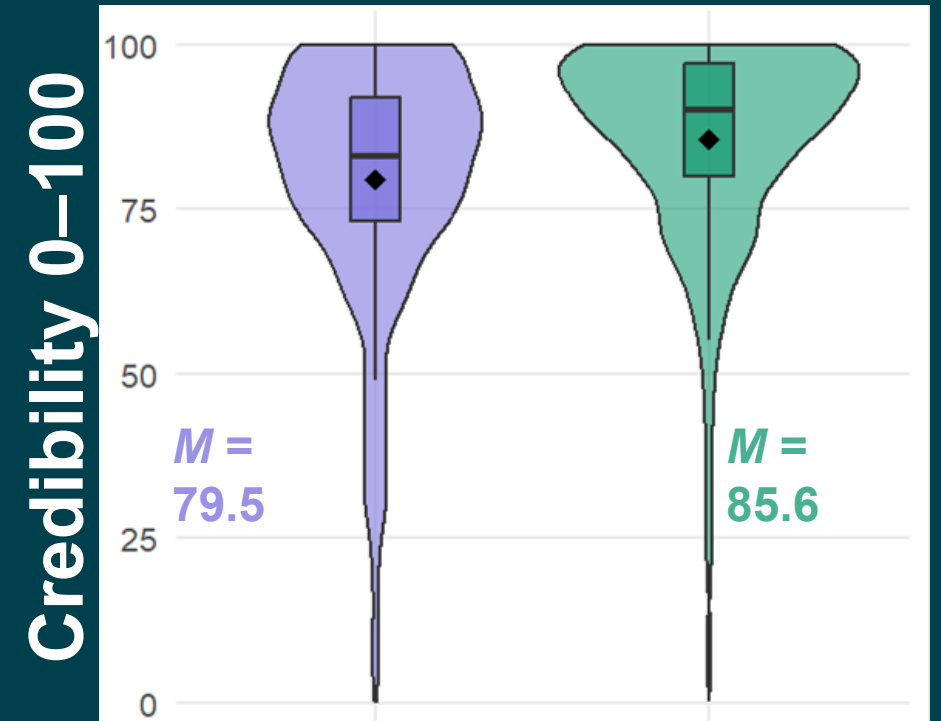
- For looks, yes!

($M = 85.6$ $SD = 15.3$ vs. 79.5 $SD = 18.6$, $b = 6.09$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$)

- For narrative, no (?)

($b = 2.44$, $p = .15$, partial $\eta^2 = <.01$),
interaction ($b = -2.42$, $p = .48$, partial $\eta^2 = <.01$)

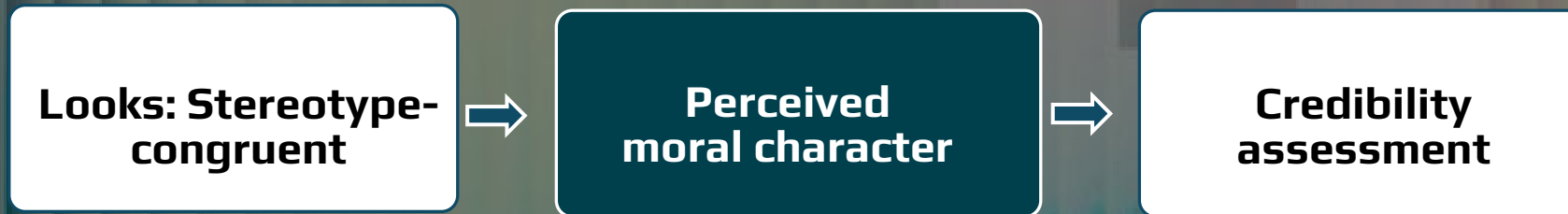
Looks



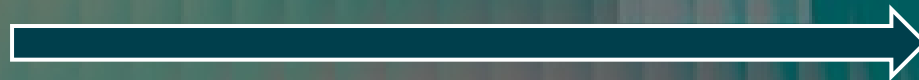
Incongruent vs. Congruent

So why does looks matter?

Stereotype-congruent looks may make an applicant seem more authentically who they claim to be — and therefore more trustworthy.



Indirect effect via moral character: 43% mediated ($ACME = 2.60$, $p = .018$)

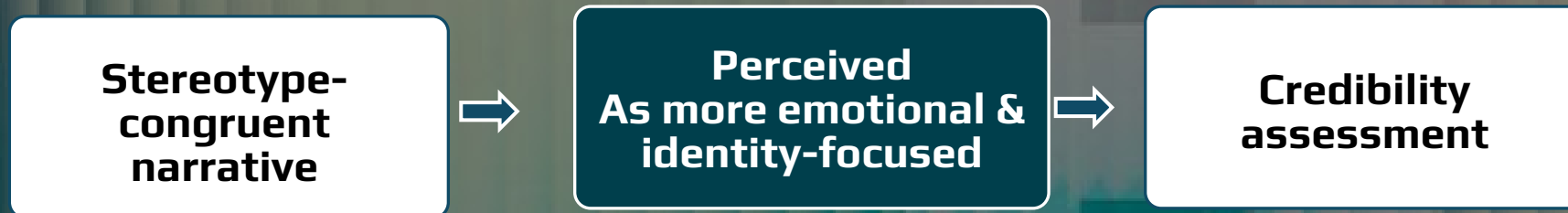


Direct effect remains significant ($ADE = 3.47$, $p = .007$)

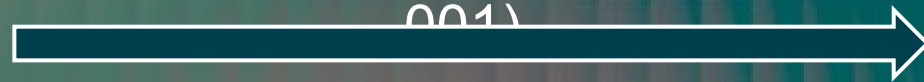
Moral character alone predicted credibility ($R^2 = .30$)

What about the narrative?

Despite a non-significant overall effect, stereotypical narratives may pull credibility in two opposing directions at once.



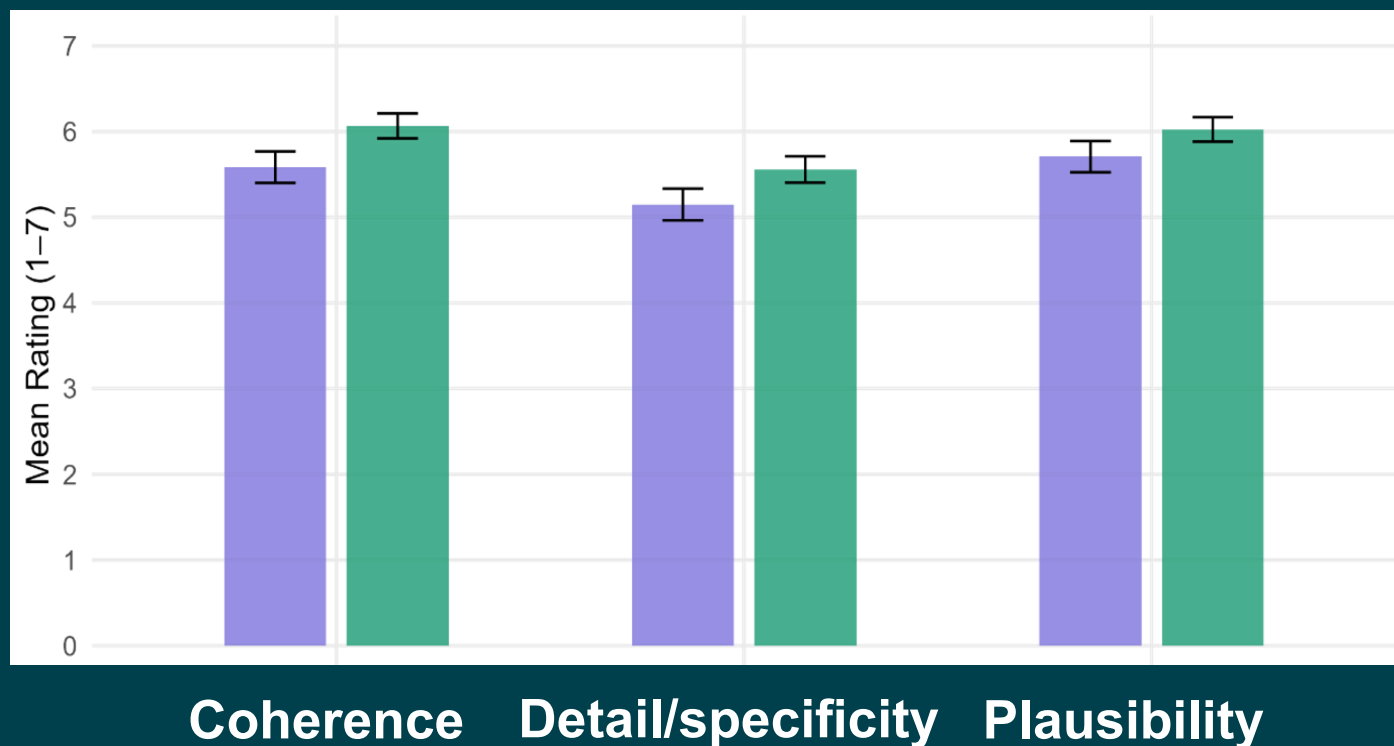
Positive path □ emotional & identity-focused □ higher credibility (ACME = 8.24, $p < .001$)



Negative path □ congruent narratives directly lowered credibility ($ADE = -5.88$, $p < .001$)

Even the “objective” is not immune

If this bias is real, it doesn't stop with the final verdict — it can shape how even supposedly objective criteria are judged.



Looks

Incongruent
Congruent

Partial $\eta^2 = .02-.04$ across all three indicators — small, but this is variance that shouldn't exist at all.

Summary: Does being stereotype-congruent make an applicant seem more credible?

Yes — but not by seeming more **truthful**. By seeming more *moral*, more trustworthy.

Even “objective” evidence isn’t **immune**. Same words, different verdict, depending on look alone.

And it happens without anyone consciously deciding it should.



65+

countries still criminalise
same-sex relations

Thank you for your attention!



Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Åbo Akademi
University, Turku, Finland
Phd student, Malin Ekelund malin.ekelund@abo.fi
Co-authors: Dr, Dilhan Töredi, dilhan.toredi@abo.fi
Professor Jan Antfolk, jan.antfolk@abo.fi



Malin Ekelund
Psych-AID



@psychaid.bsky.social