

Same Evidence, Different Judgements: Credibility Assessments of Identical Sexual Orientation-based Asylum Claims

Malin Ekelund, Jenny Skrifvars, Hedayat Selim,
Dilhan Töredi, Jan Antfolk



Presented by Hedayat Selim, PhD

Postdoctoral Researcher

Department of Psychology

Åbo Akademi University



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

The limits of analyzing written asylum decisions



- Decision *writing* gives an incomplete picture of decision *reasoning* (Rehaag & Evans Cameron, 2020)
- Impossible to control for variation across cases (e.g., Selim et al., 2025)



Experimental research needed!



Research questions

How do mock asylum decision-makers **reason** about the **credibility of an identical asylum claim** made by a fictive gay or lesbian applicant?

- To what extent do they converge (or not) when evaluating a single piece of evidence?
- To what extent are stereotypes evident in the reasoning?



Study participants



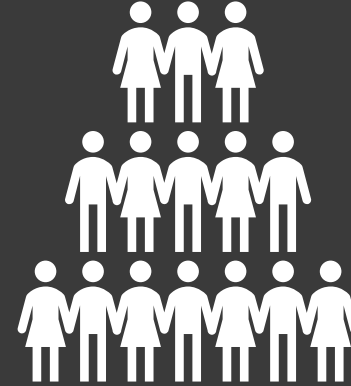
Residing in the UK



Self-identify as
heterosexual



Bachelor's degree
holders



383 mock asylum
decision-makers

207 women and
176 men

Mean age: 44.2
($SD = 12.7$; range: 22–79)



Study design & procedure



Claim of "D" + photo

- Info about asylum & credibility assessments
- Stimuli: Identical casefile + AI-manipulated photo of mock applicant
- Task – Participants were asked to:
 - Assign a credibility rating to D
 - Provide written justifications in response to one **open-ended question**



Integrative theme	First-order themes	n	Support credibility	Undermine credibility	Second-order themes
The subjectivity of credibility	1. Sexual identity	148	72%	28%	1.1 Early and enduring identification 1.2 Relationships 1.3 Married to opposite gender partner 1.4 Attending pride
	2. After the asylum claim	200	52%	48%	2.1 After meeting with lawyer 2.2. Social media postings 2.3 Support group attendance 2.4 Mental health 2.5 Ground for asylum
	3. Country of origin	190	85%	15%	3.1 Stigma 3.2 Threats and persecution 3.3 University dismissal 3.4 Mother's statement
	4. Fraud	63	31%	69%	
	5. Unspecified evidence*	117	18%	21%	5.1 Too many inconsistencies

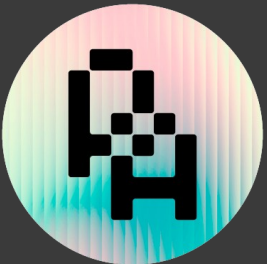
*61% of responses were neutral for *unspecified evidence*, neither supporting nor undermining credibility.

Participants' answers

He married a woman to take suspicion off himself.

The fact that she was married to a man seems to be quite extreme in trying to demonstrate her heterosexuality in her home country. This casts doubt on her being a lesbian in my mind.

Theme: Marriage to a person of the opposite gender



Discussion

- Participants differed in terms of:

What evidence they
considered
(ir)relevant in the
first place

Whether they
approached the
same evidence with
trust or suspicion

Their stereotypical
expectations
surrounding sexual
minorities



Study limitations & future directions

- Based on analysis of written materials (not interviews)
- Reflects lay judgment
- Limited to lesbian and gay applicants' claims



Key takeaway

The same evidence can be used either to support or undermine the credibility of an asylum claim, at the discretion of the individual evaluator.



References

Ekelund, M., Skrifvars, J., Selim, H., & Antfolk, J. (2026). An Experimental Test of Stereotype Congruency in Credibility Assessments of Sexual Orientation Asylum Claims. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 40(3), e70228.

Rehaag, S., & Cameron, H. E. (2020). Experimenting with credibility in refugee adjudication: Gaydar. *Can. J. Hum. Rts.*, 9, 1.

Selim, H., Lindblad, P., Vanto, J., Skrifvars, J., Alvesalo-Kuusi, A., Korkman, J., ... & Antfolk, J. (2025). (In) credibly queer? Assessments of asylum claims based on sexual orientation. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 30(1), 159-182.

Thank you!

Dr Hedayat Selim, hedayat.selim@abo.fi
co-authors: Malin Ekelund (first author), malin.ekelund@abo.fi,
Dr Jenny Skrifvars, jenny.skrifvars@abo.fi
Dr Dilhan Töredi, dilhan.toredi@abo.fi
Prof. Jan Antfolk, jan.antfolk@abo.fi
Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Åbo Akademi University,
Turku, Finland

Hedayat Selim
Psych-AID

@PsychAID

@psychaid.bsky.social

