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

Malin Ekelund  | Jenny Skrifvars | Hedayat Selim | Jan Antfolk

The Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland

Correspondence: Malin Ekelund (malin.ekelund@abo.fi)

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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.

1 | Introduction

Worldwide, 64 countries have laws criminalizing same sex relations and in 12 such relations are punishable by death (Human Dignity Trust 2024). In addition, sexual minorities experience discrimination and persecution in many countries, regardless of whether same-sex relations are criminalized (the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] 2024). These conditions have led many people belonging to a sexual minority to flee their home countries and seek international protection. A person qualifies for asylum if they are “unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (United Nations 1951). Individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, or gender expressions (SOGIE) are recognized by the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2012), as members of a particular social group, as they are considered to possess characteristics that are innate, unchangeable, or fundamental to their identity. However, assessments of SOGIE-based asylum claims are complex and vary across jurisdictions (UNHCR 2013). Such assessments are prone to errors that risk returning applicants to harm or even death, thereby undermining the integrity of the global asylum system.

In the UK, the refugee status determination (RSD) typically involves four main stages. The process begins with an interview, during which the asylum official gathers the asylum seeker's account, alongside any supporting evidence. In the second stage, the account is evaluated to determine which aspects are considered credible. In the third stage, the asylum official assesses the risk of future harm if the asylum seeker were to be returned to their country of origin. In the fourth and last stage, a decision is

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made on whether the asylum seeker meets the legal criteria for refugee status (Home Office 2023).

The second stage, the credibility assessment, is often considered the most cognitively and legally challenging aspect of RSD (Thomas 2006). Asylum seekers often have no documentary evidence (e.g., arrest warrants, written statements from witnesses) to support their claims (The European Union Agency for Asylum [EUAA] 2024). This means that the outcome of the application rests on the ability of the asylum seeker to deliver a credible and convincing account of persecution and the reason for the persecution (e.g., sexual minority status) in the interview. UNHCR (2013) recommends using four indicators of credibility: detail and specificity, internal consistency (i.e., within the asylum seeker's statements), external consistency (i.e., with external information), and plausibility. While this guidance is non-binding, similar credibility indicators are applied within the UK's statutory asylum framework, where decision-makers are required to evaluate claims based on consistency, plausibility, and detail in accordance with legally binding guidance issued by the Home Office (2023). However, the usefulness and validity of these indicators have been contested by psychological science (e.g., De Bruïne et al. 2023; Herlihy et al. 2024; Skrifvars et al. 2024). Assessing asylum based on sexual orientation is considered even more challenging due to the large variability in how sexual identity is expressed, a lack of visible traits that are reliably associated with sexual identity, and the fact that sexual identity often is fluid and can be reconstructed over one's lifetime (e.g., Bailey et al. 2016, but do see e.g., LeVay 2011 for a biological perspective emphasizing prenatal development). Empirical analyses of sexual orientation asylum decisions further show that detailedness and internal consistency are frequently emphasized in credibility determinations, despite the fact that sexual identity narratives often concern long-term identity development and subjective experiences rather than discrete, externally verifiable events (Wimark 2025). Additionally, research has highlighted that credibility assessments may be influenced by implicit assumptions and stereotypes about sexual minorities (Selim et al. 2023). As examples of this, asylum seekers belonging to a sexual minority have reported feeling obliged to participate in events like Pride in their host country to be believed (Bennet and Thomas 2013), and to voice experiences of shame regarding their orientation (Åberg 2023). Correspondingly, interviews with NGO workers and attorneys indicate that legal representatives may advise applicants to present themselves in ways perceived as increasing their chances of success, thereby reinforcing credibility norms within non-governmental support contexts that privilege gender-nonconforming presentations of sexual orientation (e.g., femininity in gay men and masculinity in lesbians; McGuirk 2018). In addition, legal scholars have argued that RSD frameworks may implicitly privilege stereotypical understandings of sexual orientation including expectations of gender nonconformity (Morgan 2006; Southam 2011). In line with this, qualitative studies show that lesbian asylum seekers report feeling pressure to dress and act in gender-nonconforming ways to enhance their credibility (Bennet and Thomas 2013; Sari 2020), and when they do not conform to such expectations, they may be dismissed as "not gay enough" (e.g., Lilian Diab 2025). These stereotypes clearly influence sexual minority asylum seekers and how they present themselves in efforts to appear credible; what remains unclear is how these stereotypes affect asylum

officials' credibility assessments and through which underlying psychological mechanisms they operate.

To the best of our knowledge, only one experimental study has examined the effect of stereotypes regarding sexual orientation on asylum credibility assessments. Rehaag and Cameron (2020) asked Canadian law students, acting as mock asylum officials, to read a casefile of a gay man seeking asylum based on his sexual orientation and to determine the credibility of his claim. All participants were presented with the same casefile, paired either with a stereotype-congruent photo (i.e., possessing gender-nonconforming, feminine traits), a stereotype-incongruent photo (i.e., possessing gender-conforming, masculine traits), or no photo. The stereotype-incongruent condition yielded the lowest credibility, while the stereotype-congruent condition yielded the highest credibility. Despite these differences, only one participant explicitly referred to physical appearance in their written justifications, suggesting that asylum officials might be unaware of how their credibility assessments are influenced by stereotypes.

Our aim with the present study was to replicate the study by Rehaag and Cameron (2020) in a UK context with a more generalized sample. We extended this replication by including lesbian asylum seekers and investigating the underlying psychological mechanisms of stereotyping. Furthermore, we explored how regional identity interacts with gender and sexual orientation to shape credibility assessments.

2 | Stereotyping, Gender-(Non)Conformity, and Intersectionality

The process of social categorization—the psychological grouping of individuals based on salient information such as sex, race, or more perceptually ambiguous characteristics like sexual orientation (Lieberman et al. 2017)—serves as a foundational mechanism in the formation of stereotypes. Stereotypes can operate bidirectionally: not only can social group membership activate assumptions about traits, but the presence of certain traits can also trigger assumptions about group membership. For example, the stereotype that "lesbians are masculine" can lead to inferences such as "because that woman is masculine, she is likely a lesbian" (Cox and Devine 2015). This stereotype of gender-nonconformity is one of the most robust and enduring stereotypes regarding sexual orientation (e.g., Blashill and Powlishta 2009; Haddock et al. 1993; Henry and Steiger 2022; Kite and Deaux 1987; Simmons 1965). These gendered assumptions play a central role in how sexual minorities are perceived, as people often evaluate lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals based on their adherence to, or deviation from, traditional gender norms (Henry and Steiger 2022). Generalizing from group to individual in this way risks costly misclassifications—both false positives, where individuals exhibit the trait but do not belong to the group, and false negatives, where individuals belong to the group but do not exhibit the expected trait (Bodenhausen 1988, 2005; Faigman et al. 2014). Concerningly, there is evidence that asylum officials have relied on cues of gender non-conformity in credibility assessments of asylum claims (e.g., Hertoghs and Schinkel 2018; Rehaag and Cameron 2020; Southam 2011).

Furthermore, stereotypes operate differently depending on an individual's unique combination of social traits (e.g., Cole 2009; Ghavami et al. 2016; Petsko et al. 2022). For example, studies have found that adding the label “gay” to Black and Arab men reduced the strength of the ‘criminal’ stereotype and decreased perceptions of hostility (Bergstrom et al. 2024; Preddie and Biernat 2021). This suggests that intersecting identities—such as the combination of regional background, sexual orientation, and gender expression—may yield different credibility assessments in asylum contexts. Regional background is relevant in asylum decision-making for two reasons. First, asylum recognition rates vary substantially by applicants' country of origin, both across and within receiving countries, indicating that nationality is a structurally meaningful factor in RSD (Ramji-Nogale et al. 2007; Toshkov 2014). Second, Western decision-makers may hold different stereotypes about sexual minorities depending on regional background, which could interact with stereotypes about gender expression to shape credibility judgments.

3 | Underlying Mechanisms of Stereotyping

The Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al. 2002, 2007) proposes that stereotypes function through two fundamental dimensions of social evaluation: warmth and competence. Warmth, considered the primary dimension, reflects whether others are perceived to have good or bad intentions toward us, while competence reflects their perceived ability to enact those intentions (Fiske et al. 2007; Nicolas et al. 2017). Previous research has shown that gay men tend to be perceived as high in warmth (similar to heterosexual women), whereas lesbians are perceived as high in competence (similar to heterosexual men)—consistent with gendered stereotypes. However, empirical support for this pattern is mixed. Some studies find full support (e.g., Mize and Manago 2018), while others find partial support or variation depending on subgroup characteristics (e.g., Brambilla et al. 2011; Klysing et al. 2021). For example, Brambilla et al. (2011) found that gender-conforming lesbians were rated equally warm and competent, whereas gender-nonconforming (“butch”) lesbians were rated high in competence and low in warmth. Other studies have found gay men rated high in both dimensions (e.g., Bye et al. 2014), or low in both dimensions (e.g., Durante et al. 2013). These findings indicate that stereotypes of sexual minorities are not uniform but instead vary across studies and contexts.

Stereotyping of sexual minorities might manifest differently in the asylum context, where asylum seekers and refugees are generally perceived as low in both warmth and competence (e.g., Bye 2020; Kotzur et al. 2019). However, perceptions vary depending on reason to flee, origin, and religion. For example, war refugees are viewed as higher in warmth than those fleeing economic hardship, and refugees from Syria have been rated as more competent than those from Eritrea (Kotzur et al. 2019). These findings suggest that intersecting identities can meaningfully shift perceptions of warmth and competence, even within stigmatized groups.

Morality has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental dimension of social perception, alongside warmth and competence (e.g., Brambilla et al. 2021; Goodwin et al. 2014), capturing

traits such as trustworthiness and fairness. This dimension may be particularly relevant for groups, including gay men, Arabs, and Muslims, who are not consistently characterized by warmth and competence alone (Fiske et al. 2002; Leach et al. 2015). Morality may play a predominantly central role in credibility assessments, as it directly signals honesty, and integrity—core components of source credibility (Hovland et al. 1953). Taken together, these dimensions—warmth, competence, and moral character—are central to social perception and may serve as mediators through which stereotype congruence influences credibility assessments. In other words, when gay and lesbian asylum seekers are perceived in line with gendered stereotypes, these trait attributes may help explain why they are judged as more or less credible.

4 | Social Dominance Orientation and Individual Differences

One of the most robust predictors of negative attitudes toward both asylum seekers and sexual minorities is social dominance orientation (SDO)—the extent to which individuals prefer hierarchical group relations and support the dominance of “superior” groups over “inferior” ones (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). SDO comprises two subdimensions: domination (SDO-D) and anti-egalitarianism (SDO-E). SDO-D reflects explicit support for group-based dominance, while SDO-E captures subtler, more socially acceptable preferences for maintaining hierarchies. In contemporary contexts, SDO-E is more prevalent and predictive of biases, as explicit dominance-related attitudes are less commonly endorsed (Ho et al. 2015). SDO originates from Social Dominance Theory (Pratto et al. 1994, 2006), which posits that individuals high in SDO are more likely to endorse ideologies and policies that maintain social hierarchies, while those low in SDO tend to support efforts to reduce group-based inequalities. Empirical findings support this: a meta-analysis in the Australian context identified SDO ($r = 0.56$) alongside right-wing authoritarianism ($r = 0.49$), as a primary predictor of negative attitudes toward asylum seekers (Anderson and Ferguson 2018). Similarly, SDO has been found to strongly predict prejudice toward transgender individuals (Hatch et al. 2022) and broader negative attitudes toward sexual and gender minority populations (Godø et al. 2024). Given these robust associations, individual differences in SDO may shape the extent to which stereotype congruence influences credibility judgments in asylum contexts.

5 | The Present Study

In the present study, we aimed to replicate previous research by Rehaag and Cameron (2020) by testing whether the claims of stereotype-congruent asylum seekers are assessed as more credible than those of stereotype-incongruent asylum seekers. We expanded the research by exploring the underlying mechanisms of how stereotypes influence credibility assessments of lesbian and gay men asylum seekers from different regions of origin (i.e., Africa, Middle East, and Latin America). Specifically, we examined how the dimensions of warmth, competence, and moral character help clarify whether credibility assessments are shaped by stereotype content related to sexual orientation and

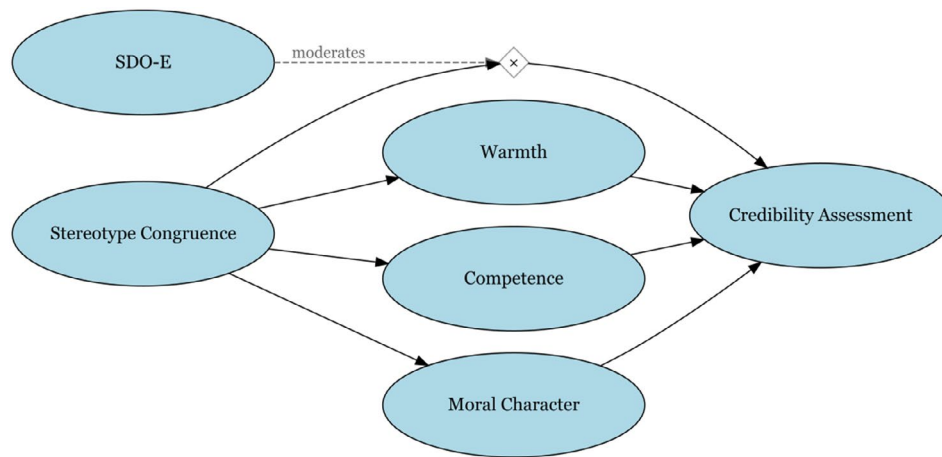


FIGURE 1 | Conceptual model. Hypothesized relationships between stereotype congruence, mediators (warmth, competence, and moral character), credibility assessment, and SDO-E as a moderator.

asylum seekers, and how these stereotypes may interact across intersecting identities. For instance, a Middle Eastern gay man who aligns with the gender-nonconforming stereotype (i.e., feminine presenting) might be viewed as more credible due to higher perceived warmth and enhanced moral character, suggesting trustworthiness. In contrast, a masculine-presenting African gay man may be perceived as lower in warmth but higher in competence, potentially triggering stereotypes of dominance and diminishing perceived moral character. These nuanced perceptions reflect how specific stereotype dimensions may bias decision-making. Measuring warmth, competence, and moral character independently allows for identifying their distinct contributions to credibility judgments in asylum contexts.

In addition, SDO-E was included as a moderator to examine individual differences in stereotype application during credibility assessments, as it may reveal whether participants' personal preferences for hierarchies and inequalities among social groups amplify or mitigate the influence of stereotype-driven biases.

In the present study, participants were presented with an asylum casefile featuring a gay or lesbian asylum seeker, along with a picture depicting them as either stereotype-congruent (i.e., gender-nonconforming) or stereotype-incongruent (i.e., gender-conforming), and as coming from one of the three different regions of origin. Participants assessed the asylum seeker's credibility and rated their perceived warmth, competence, and moral character, and completed the SDO scale. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model.

6 | Hypotheses

We hypothesized (H1) that stereotype-congruent asylum seekers would be perceived as more credible than stereotype-incongruent asylum seekers. Specifically, we predicted that feminine-presenting gay men and masculine-presenting lesbians would be rated as more credible than their gender-conforming counterparts.

We hypothesized (H2a) that warmth, competence, and moral character would independently predict credibility, with moral

character having the strongest effect, given its central role in signaling honesty and trustworthiness.

We hypothesized (H2b) that warmth, competence, and moral character would mediate the effect of stereotype congruence on credibility. We did not predict the relative strength or direction of these mediators but explored whether their effects differed across all targets, as well as separately for gay men and lesbians.

We hypothesized (H3) that participants who are more supportive of group-based inequalities (i.e., have higher social dominance orientation) would be less likely to find stereotype-incongruent asylum seekers credible, compared to participants who are less supportive of group-based inequalities. In other words, we expected that personal attitudes towards social hierarchies would shape how strongly participants rely on gender-nonconforming stereotypes when judging credibility.

We also explored whether the effects of stereotype congruence on warmth, competence, moral character, and credibility were moderated by intersecting identities (regional background, gender, sexual orientation) and by participants' gender (see the preregistration for detailed formulations of these exploratory questions).

7 | Methods

7.1 | Pre-Registration and Ethical Permission

The hypotheses, exploratory questions, and data analysis plan were preregistered and can be found at <https://osf.io/6k5sr>. The study received ethical approval from Åbo Akademi University Ethical Review Board before data collection commenced. All participants provided informed consent before participation.

7.2 | Participants

The primary effect of interest was based on Rehaag and Cameron's (2020) experiment, where 88% of participants found the asylum seeker credible in the stereotype-congruent

condition ($n=95$), compared to 75.5% of participants in the incongruent condition ($n=94$), corresponding to Cohen's $h=0.33$ (small-to-medium effect size). We conducted an a priori power analysis in G*Power ($\alpha=0.05$, $1-\beta=0.80$) which indicated that a sample of 196 participants would detect an effect size of $f^2=0.05$ for main effects. For the mediation and moderation analyses, general SEM guidelines (10–20 participants per parameter) suggested a sample size of 200–400, depending on model complexity. To ensure sufficient power across all planned and exploratory analyses, and to allow for exclusions, we recruited 400 participants.

The 400 participants were recruited from Prolific and met three criteria: They were based in the UK, identified as heterosexual (to minimize potential in-group biases in stereotyping), and had completed at least a bachelor's degree. The latter criterion ensured participants met the EUAA's recommendation that asylum officials should have at least a bachelor's degree. Due to a technical error, 399 participants completed the survey. Participants were compensated with £3 for completing the survey, which took on average 16 min and 48 s to complete. We excluded 16 participants who failed the attention check or two or more of the questions in the comprehension check. The remaining 383 participants included 207 women, and 176 men. The average age of the participants was 44.2 years ($SD=12.7$, range 22–79).

7.3 | Materials

All materials are available at <https://osf.io/6k5sr>.

7.4 | RSD and Credibility Assessment

At the start of the survey, we presented participants with a short introductory text about the refugee status determination process. The text explained the grounds for asylum and clarified that the standard of proof in asylum cases is lower than in criminal cases. It also described how asylum officials gather information, assess the credibility of an asylum seeker's claim, evaluate the risk of harm in the home country, and conduct a legal analysis to decide on refugee status. We highlighted that credibility assessments rely on factors such as internal and external consistency, plausibility, and detail, while also noting that trauma and cultural differences may affect how asylum seekers recall and describe their past experiences, and that officials should avoid relying on personal biases or stereotypes.

7.5 | Casefile

We adapted a fictional casefile by Rehaag and Cameron (2020). There was one casefile per condition, varying only in terms of the target's gender (woman vs. man), sexual orientation (lesbian vs. gay man), and regional origin (Africa vs. Middle East vs. Latin America). The casefile was designed so that participants could reasonably assess the asylum seeker as either credible or not credible, with the evidence carefully balanced to allow for variability in assessments.

7.6 | Pictures

We presented a picture of the asylum seeker together with the casefile. In total, 36 pictures were created from 18 original photographs selected from the Face Research Lab London set for their phenotypic diversity (DeBruine and Jones 2017). Using the AI platform Artbreeder (Splicer tool), images were altered to create region-consistent visual variations aligned with the asylum seeker's described background (Black African, Middle Eastern, or Latin American). Modifications were limited to surface-level visual cues (e.g., hair color, eye color, and skin tone shading), while retaining the underlying facial structure of each individual. Gender expression was varied by adjusting presentation-level cues (e.g., hairstyle, make-up) to create two versions of each picture: a stereotype-congruent presentation (feminine for gay men, masculine for lesbians) and a stereotype-incongruent presentation (masculine for gay men, feminine for lesbians). This resulted in pairs of images (gay men vs. lesbians) for each of the three regional categories. In a pilot study ($n=28$), participants rated masculinity, femininity, perceived regional origin, perceived gender, and perceived realism. Based on these ratings, we selected the six highest-rated pairs (12 pictures) for use in the present study.

7.7 | Credibility Measurements

After viewing the picture and reading the casefile, we asked participants to determine the credibility of the asylum seeker's sexual orientation. Specifically, they answered: (1) "Based on the statements and evidence above, in your view, has D established that it is more credible than not that he [she] is gay [lesbian]?" and (2) "How confident are you that, on the above statements and evidence, D is gay [lesbian]?" Both items were rated on visual analog scales ranging from 0% (not at all) to 100% (completely), in one-point increments. These questions followed the wording of Rehaag and Cameron (2020), who used a dichotomous Yes/No format for the credibility item but the same 0–100 scale for confidence. In the present study, a consistent response format was used to improve measurement reliability and permit scale aggregation. Although this represents a deviation in response format, the substantive wording and underlying construct were retained to preserve conceptual comparability with the original study. The two items were averaged to form a composite measure of credibility (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.90$).

7.8 | Measures for Warmth, Competence, and Moral Character

We measured the perceived warmth and competence of the target, from a societal perspective, using five items each on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 9 (extremely), presented in randomized order. We averaged ratings for warmth (friendly, warm, sociable, tolerant, kind; $\alpha=0.93$) and competence (competent, intelligent, competitive, confident, independent; $\alpha=0.86$) to form composite measures. These items are widely used in stereotype content research and have been validated across multiple social groups and contexts (Fiske et al. 2002,

2007). In this study, we carefully selected warmth items to ensure a conceptual distinction from moral character, focusing on sociability and friendliness rather than moral traits (e.g., sincere).

We measured moral character with five items from Goodwin et al. (2014), designed to capture high morality while remaining distinct from warmth. Participants rated the items (trustworthy, honest, just, principled, fair) on the same 1–9 scale, presented in randomized order. We then averaged the ratings to form a composite measure ($\alpha = 0.95$).

7.9 | Measure for Social Dominance Orientation

We measured participants' social dominance orientation (SDO) using items from Ho et al. (2015), rated on a scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 7 (strongly favor). We averaged responses to four items assessing SDO-D (domination, for example, "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups") to form a composite measure ($\alpha = 0.78$). Likewise, we averaged responses to four items assessing SDO-E (anti-egalitarianism, e.g., "Group equality should not be our primary goal") to form a composite measure ($\alpha = 0.86$). We made slight wording modifications for clarity while retaining the original meaning of the items (e.g., changing "Groups at the bottom are just as deserving as groups at the top" to "Groups with lower social status are just as deserving of opportunities and resources as groups with higher social status").

7.10 | Comprehension and Attention Checks

After each section of the asylum process information, participants answered one of three true-or-false statements about what they had just read "Sexual minorities are included in the definition of a 'particular social group'" (true), "Asylum claims should be proven beyond a reasonable doubt" (false), and "Asylum officials should rely on their own beliefs and biases when evaluating asylum claims" (false). After reading the casefile, participants answered two attention check questions to verify that they had noticed the target's gender and region of origin.

7.11 | Procedure

We employed a between-subjects factorial design with 12 conditions, combining stereotype (congruent vs. incongruent), sexual orientation (gay men vs. lesbians), and regional background (African, Middle Eastern, Latin American). Participants were randomly assigned to one of these conditions. Randomization checks indicated no significant differences in participant gender or age across conditions (all p s > 0.05), suggesting successful assignment. The survey was administered online through REDCap and introduced as a study on the credibility assessment of an asylum case. Participants took the role of an asylum official evaluating the credibility of an asylum seeker. After providing informed consent, they read background information on RSD and then reviewed one of the 12 casefiles. They judged the asylum seeker's credibility (0%–100%) and their confidence in that judgment (0%–100%), followed by an open-ended explanation

of their reasoning. Next, participants rated how society would perceive the asylum seeker on warmth, competence, and moral character. Finally, they completed the SDO scale and reported their age and gender identity.

7.12 | Analysis Strategy

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses. First, we examined the effect of stereotype-congruence on credibility assessments (H1). Next, we tested warmth, competence, and moral character as mediators (H2a, H2b) to determine their role in credibility assessments, with moral character expected to have the strongest effect. Finally, we tested whether social dominance orientation (SDO-E and SDO-D) moderated the relationship between stereotype-congruence and credibility (H3), with a primary focus on SDO-E. All models were evaluated using standard model fit indices (i.e., CFI, TLI, RMSEA). To ensure robustness, we used bootstrapping to assess indirect effects in mediation and interaction effects in moderation analyses. All confidence intervals for SEM are unstandardized and were obtained via bootstrapping. Standardized coefficients (β) are reported as point estimates; bootstrapped CIs for standardized coefficients could not be computed due to model instability. Although the preregistration specified 10,000 bootstrap samples for the estimation of confidence intervals, 2000 samples were used for computational feasibility. Prior research indicates this number is sufficient for stable confidence intervals in SEM (e.g., Hayes, 2022), and results were consistent across repeated runs.

For exploratory analyses, we conducted ANOVAs and regression models to assess the role of intersectional identities (e.g., regional background, gender, sexuality) in shaping credibility assessments. Additional analyses tested differences in credibility assessments between gay men and lesbians and examined how participant gender influences stereotype-driven evaluations.

We performed all analyses using R Statistical Software V4.4.2 (R Core Team 2024), using a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. We used the *lavaan* package for structural equation modeling (Rosseel 2012), examining standard model fit indices and bootstrapping for indirect and interaction effects. For exploratory analyses, including ANOVAs and regression models examining the effects of intersecting identities (e.g., region, gender, sexuality), we used *car* for hypothesis testing and diagnostics (Fox et al. 2019), *lmtest* for regression model evaluation (Hothorn et al. 2022), *effectsize* for estimating standardized effect sizes (Ben-Shachar et al. 2020), and *ggplot2* for data visualization (Wickham and Sievert 2016).

8 | Results

8.1 | Hypothesis Tests

All confirmatory analyses followed the preregistered analysis plan. Prior to analyses, assumptions for SEM were assessed (Kline 2016). Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were within acceptable ranges (± 2), supporting normality. Credibility and moral character showed slight negative skew, so $\log(x + 1)$

transformations were applied to improve distributional properties. All predictors had VIF values below 5, indicating no multicollinearity. Assumptions of linearity and absence of extreme outliers were also met.

8.2 | Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlations among the main study variables. Warmth, competence, moral character, and credibility were all significantly intercorrelated. In contrast, stereotype-conformity was not significantly associated with any of the other variables, including credibility. This suggests that the absence of an effect in the SEM does not reflect suppression from other predictors but rather a lack of a bivariate relationship.

8.3 | Model Fit

The proposed moderated mediation model was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation and 2000 bootstrap samples. Model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2(6) = 27.67$, $p < 0.000$, CFI = 0.953, TLI = 0.860, RMSEA = 0.097, 90% CI [0.062, 0.135], SRMR = 0.065. Although RMSEA exceeded the pre-registered cutoff of < 0.08 , other fit indices (CFI and SRMR) indicated acceptable fit, and the lower bound of the RMSEA confidence interval fell below 0.08. Given the model's theoretical coherence and alignment with the pre-registered hypotheses, it was retained for interpretation. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for all key variables included in the analyses.

TABLE 1 | Zero-order correlations among key variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Warmth	—	—	—	—	—
2. Competence	0.55***	—	—	—	—
3. Moral character	0.64***	0.48***	—	—	—
4. Credibility	0.37***	0.19**	0.52***	—	—
5. Stereotype congruence	−0.05	−0.04	0.00	0.03	—

Note: $N = 383$. Stereotype congruence (0 = incongruent, 1 = congruent). All correlations are Pearson's r . $p < 0.05^*$; $p < 0.01^{**}$; $p < 0.001^{***}$.

TABLE 2 | Mean ratings of key variables by sexual orientation and stereotype congruence.

Measure	Gay target				Lesbian target			
	Congruent ($n = 95$)		Incongruent ($n = 95$)		Congruent ($n = 94$)		Incongruent ($n = 99$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Warmth	5.29	1.23	5.30	1.36	5.46	1.27	5.73	1.33
Competence	5.32	1.16	5.46	1.48	5.68	1.22	5.72	1.20
Morality	4.10	1.64	3.99	1.72	4.30	1.73	4.43	1.60
Credibility	61.52	23.02	60.73	23.84	64.37	24.19	62.58	25.59

Note: Morality = Moral character. The scales for the measures warmth, competence, and moral character were 1–9, and for credibility 0%–100%.

8.4 | Effect of Stereotype Congruence on Credibility

Contrary to our first hypothesis (H1), stereotype congruence did not directly predict credibility ratings ($\beta = 0.023$, 95% CI [−0.213, 0.259], $p = 0.848$). Thus, there was no evidence that stereotype-congruent asylum seekers (feminine-presenting gay men, masculine-presenting lesbians) were rated as more credible than their stereotype-incongruent counterparts. The full structural model with standardized path coefficients is presented in Figure 2.

8.5 | Predictors of Credibility (Warmth, Competence, and Moral Character)

Supporting H2a, perceived morality emerged as a strong predictor of credibility ($\beta = 0.477$, 95% CI [0.343, 0.610], $p < 0.001$, see Table 3 for full estimates) with a medium-to-large effect, indicating that higher ratings of moral character were associated with higher credibility ratings. Perceived competence negatively predicted credibility ($\beta = -0.122$, 95% CI [−0.238, −0.005], $p = 0.040$), such that higher competence ratings were linked to lower credibility, however, with a small effect. Contrary to H2a, perceived warmth did not significantly predict credibility. Taken together, the results indicate that morality stands out as the key predictor of credibility perceptions relative to warmth and competence.

To test whether relationships differed by gender, we compared a constrained model (paths fixed equal across groups) with a freely varying model (paths estimated separately). The freely varying model ($\chi^2 = 31.95$, $df = 12$) fit better than the constrained model ($\chi^2 = 48.62$, $df = 21$), but the improvement was not statistically significant, $\Delta\chi^2(9) = 16.67$, $p = 0.054$. Thus, there was no evidence of group differences.

In the freely varying model, moral character significantly predicted credibility for both gay men ($\beta = 0.498$, 95% CI [0.447, 0.993], $p < 0.001$) and lesbians ($\beta = 0.501$, 95% CI [−0.555, 1.719], $p < 0.001$). For lesbians only, competence negatively predicted credibility with a small effect ($\beta = -0.210$, 95% CI [−0.284, −0.011], $p = 0.044$), while warmth was no significant in both groups. Although competence was significant only among lesbians, the model comparison indicated no reliable group difference.

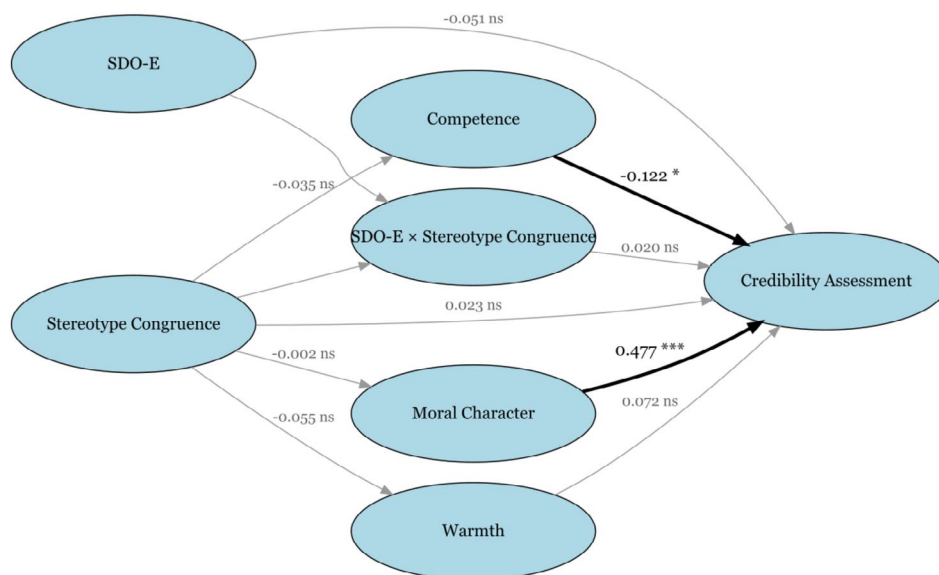


FIGURE 2 | Structural equation model H1–H3. Bold black paths are statistically significant. Grey paths are non-significant. * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

8.6 | Mediation of Warmth, Competence, and Morality on Credibility

Contrary to H2b, none of the mediation pathways were significant. This aligns with H1, which showed no main effect of stereotype congruence on credibility assessments. Because mediation requires a significant predictor–outcome relationship, warmth, competence, and moral character did not explain credibility assessments in this context.

8.7 | Moderation by SDO

Contrary to H3, neither dimension of social dominance orientation predicted credibility. For SDO-E, there was no significant main effect and no moderation of the stereotype–congruence–credibility relationship. Similarly, SDO-D showed no significant direct effect ($\beta = -0.063$, 95% CI $[-0.130, 0.002]$, $p = 0.634$) or interaction effect ($\beta = 0.003$, 95% CI $[-0.163, 0.166]$, $p = 0.970$). These results indicate that neither SDO-E nor SDO-D played a role in shaping credibility judgments in this context.

8.8 | Additional Findings

The overall model explained 22.9% of the variance in credibility ratings ($R^2 = 0.229$), with minimal variance explained in the mediator variables (warmth: $R^2 = 0.003$; competence: $R^2 = 0.001$; morality: $R^2 = 0.000$), indicating that the mediators explained little variance when predicted from stereotype congruence, which is consistent with the absence of a direct effect of stereotype congruence on credibility. Nevertheless, the overall R^2 shows that credibility was substantially shaped by participants' trait evaluations, especially moral character. In short, credibility assessments appear to hinge less on stereotype congruence and more on whether asylum seekers are perceived as morally trustworthy.

8.9 | Exploratory Analyses

Given the non-significant effects of stereotype–congruence in the full group and subgroup analyses, subsequent exploratory analyses examined the direct effects of intersecting identities (i.e., region, gender, and sexuality) on warmth, competence, moral character, and credibility, without including stereotype congruence as a moderator.

8.10 | Impact of Intersecting Identities

Exploratory analyses examined whether target sexual orientation (gay vs. lesbian), region of origin (Africa, Middle East, Latin America), or their combinations influenced credibility ratings. Across hierarchical regression models, t tests, and ANOVAs, neither main effects nor interactions were statistically significant (all p s > 0.05), indicating that credibility ratings did not systematically differ across intersecting identity groups.

Participant gender was also examined as a potential influence on trait and credibility ratings. No significant effects emerged for warmth, competence, or moral character. However, women ($M = 64.52$, $SD = 23.30$) rated targets as more credible than men ($M = 59.67$, $SD = 24.90$), $F(1, 381) = 4.49$, $p = 0.035$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.011$, 95% CI $[0.000, 0.042]$. See Appendix A for full statistics and figures.

8.11 | Supplementary Analyses

Given evidence of age-related variation, we conducted a one-way ANOVA on credibility ratings by age group (under 30, 30–45, 45+). The analysis showed a statistically significant but very small main effect, $F(2, 380) = 3.59$, $p = 0.029$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.002$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.03]$. Tukey's HSD indicated that participants aged 45+ ($M = 59.52$, $SD = 26.44$) rated asylum seekers' credibility lower than those under 30 ($M = 66.87$, $SD = 20.52$), $p = 0.037$; no other group differences emerged.

TABLE 3 | Standardized path coefficients from structural equation model predicting credibility.

Predictor	Outcome	β	95% CI	<i>p</i>
Direct effects				
Stereotype congruence	Credibility	0.023	[−0.213, 0.259]	0.848
SDO-E	Credibility	−0.051	[−0.199, 0.097]	0.498
SDO-E × stereotype congruence	Credibility	0.020	[−0.256, 0.296]	0.887
Warmth	Credibility	0.072	[−0.099, 0.242]	0.412
Competence	Credibility	−0.122	[−0.238, −0.005]	0.040
Moral character	Credibility	0.477	[0.343, 0.610]	< 0.001
Paths from conformity to mediators				
Stereotype congruence	Warmth	−0.055	[−0.156, 0.046]	0.289
Stereotype congruence	Competence	−0.035	[−0.136, 0.065]	0.488
Stereotype congruence	Moral character	−0.002	[−0.101, 0.097]	0.967
Indirect effects				
Stereotype congruence (via Warmth)	Credibility	−0.004	[−0.015, 0.007]	0.490
Stereotype congruence (via Competence)	Credibility	0.004	[−0.009, 0.017]	0.520
Stereotype congruence (via Moral character)	Credibility	−0.001	[−0.048, 0.046]	0.967
Total effects				
Stereotype congruence	Credibility	0.023	[−0.226, 0.271]	0.859

Note: β = standardized path coefficient, 95% CI = bootstrap confidence interval (2000 samples). SDO-E = social dominance orientation–egalitarianism. The paths shown are from the full SEM model. Significant results ($p < 0.05$) are bold.

A MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect of sexual orientation on warmth and competence, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.98$, $F(2, 380) = 3.53$, $p = 0.003$. Univariate tests showed small effects for both dimensions. Lesbians ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.30$) were rated slightly warmer than gay men ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.29$), $F(1, 382) = 5.05$, $p = 0.025$, $\eta^2_p = 0.013$, 95% CI [0.001, 1.00], contrasting with prior research where gay men are typically perceived as warmer. For competence, lesbians ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.21$) were rated slightly higher than gay men ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.21$), $F(1, 382) = 5.86$, $p = 0.016$, $\eta^2_p = 0.015$, 95% CI [0.002, 1.00], consistent with SCM predictions that lesbians resemble heterosexual men in perceived competence.

9 | Discussion

Our aim with the present study was to examine whether gay and lesbian asylum seekers' claims are perceived as more credible when they align with appearance-based stereotypes of gender-nonconformity—that is, whether feminine-presenting gay men and masculine-presenting lesbians are assessed as more credible than their gender-conforming counterparts. Contrary to our predictions and the result of Rehaag and Cameron (2020), we did not find support in our data for the stereotype congruence hypothesis. In other words, the gender-nonconforming gay men and lesbian asylum seekers were not rated as more credible than their gender-conforming counterparts. The absence of a direct stereotype-congruence effect indicates that credibility judgments may not be driven by appearance-based congruence

alone. This suggests that previously documented stereotype-related expectations may instead operate through more complex or multimodal pathways, for example when reinforced by narrative content or when integrated into broader trait inferences about the applicant. Indeed, Gaucher and DeGagne (2016) analyzed decisions from Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board and the Federal Court and found that credibility was frequently tied to applicant's sexual histories. Decision-makers appeared to expect a pattern of multiple same-sex experiences, reflecting an underlying assumption that sexual minority individuals are inherently promiscuous. Credibility may also be undermined when decision-makers interpret visible gender-nonconformity as incompatible with fear or risk, even though such visibility may heighten the risk of persecution (UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group 2010). Conversely, feminine-presenting lesbian and bisexual women face the opposite problem: their gender-conformity leads to dismissal of their claims as 'not urgent' or accusations that they 'don't look gay enough' (Lilian Diab 2025). This double bind, where both visibility and invisibility become grounds for disbelief, reveals how deeply gendered expectations of sexual orientation are embedded in credibility assessments. Moreover, Hertoghs and Schinkel (2018) found that appearance stereotypes were more influential in live hearings than in written case files, suggesting that stereotype activation may depend on interactional context. It is also possible that contextual differences contributed to the divergent findings. Rehaag and Cameron's (2020) study was conducted in the Canadian context, whereas the present study was framed within the UK asylum system. Differences in institutional practices,

public discourse surrounding asylum, or cultural norms regarding sexual identity may shape how stereotype cues are interpreted. In addition to these contextual considerations, features of the experimental design may also have limited the salience of stereotype-congruence cues. The picture of the asylum seeker only appeared at the start of the lengthy casefile (3455 words), and we did not explicitly instruct participants to pay attention to the picture. Because the picture showed only the asylum seeker's head, cues related to clothing, posture, and overall presentation were not visible, potentially limiting the clarity of gender-(non)conformity. A full-body image could capture these cues better. Additionally, the guidelines ended with information about not relying on biases and stereotypes, further enhanced with a true-or-false question on the topic. Although this improved ecological validity, it may have contributed to making the experimental manipulation less impactful. These features suggest that stereotype-congruence effects may depend on sufficiently salient or repeated cues. In contexts where such cues are subtle or ambiguous, credibility judgments may instead rely more heavily on broader evaluative impressions of the applicant.

10 | Social Perception Mechanisms and the Influence of Intersecting Identities

The secondary aim of the present study was to examine how the underlying psychological mechanisms—warmth, competence, and moral character—affect credibility judgments, and whether intersecting identities, specifically sexual orientation, gender, and region, influence these ratings. In line with our predictions, moral character was the strongest predictor of credibility ratings, with higher perceived morality linked to greater credibility—regardless of the asylum seeker's sexual orientation. This underscores the central role of moral character in credibility judgments, consistent with classic research emphasizing honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity as fundamental tenets of believability (Hovland et al. 1953; Rosenbaum and Levin 1968; Wojciszke 2005). In this context, stereotypes may shape credibility to the extent that they inform moral inferences about intent and trustworthiness (Knobe and Fraser 2008), suggesting that the central cognitive question in credibility assessment may be “is this person honest?” rather than “does this person fit the category?”. The mean moral character rating near the midpoint ($M \approx 4$ on a 1–9 scale) reflects the casefile's careful calibration, which balanced evidence supporting and challenging the asylum seeker's credibility, and indicates that participants perceived the asylum seeker's moral character as somewhat questionable. This pattern resonates with scholarship describing SOGIE RSD as embedded in a broader discourse of suspicion and “fakeness,” in which applicants' moral integrity is continually scrutinized (e.g., Ferreira 2022). If credibility judgments hinge on perceived integrity, current legal frameworks emphasizing ‘objective’ credibility indicators may underestimate the extent to which moral inference shapes decision-making.

Competence negatively influenced credibility; individuals perceived as more competent were judged as less credible, potentially reflecting a belief that greater competence equips someone with more sophisticated deception skills (Vrij et al. 2010). In contrast, warmth showed no significant effect on credibility for either group. Taken together, our findings suggest that in

contexts where assessments of honesty and trustworthiness are paramount, moral character is the primary trait influencing credibility, while warmth—which reflects sociability and kindness—may be less relevant for credibility judgments. Meanwhile, competence appears to play a more nuanced role, potentially undermining credibility when associated with greater ability to deceive.

To contextualize our findings within the broader literature on social perception, we conducted an additional analysis based on the stereotype content model. Results partially supported the stereotype that lesbians are more competent than gay men, consistent with our expectations, but contradictory they were also rated as warmer. Prior research typically uses warmth and competence to predict emotional responses (e.g., pity, disgust), rather than credibility judgments specifically. Moreover, most stereotype content model studies rely on group labels alone to capture culturally shared perceptions (Cuddy et al. 2007; Fiske et al. 2002, 2007). This simplification likely produces stronger, more consistent effects than those found in complex, real-world contexts such as asylum credibility assessments, where richer information leads to more nuanced, multidimensional evaluations. Notably, while prior research often suggests that warmth and competence are inversely related in perceptions of gay and lesbian targets, our findings illustrate that this pattern does not necessarily hold for individuals with intersecting identities. For example, a gender-conforming lesbian asylum seeker may be rated similarly on both warmth and competence. This highlights how simplified stereotype predictions can fall short when applied to complex social identities and underscores the need to consider intersectionality in understanding social judgments.

We found no significant differences in credibility based on intersecting identities (e.g., Middle Eastern stereotype-congruent lesbian vs. African stereotype-incongruent gay man). Given the casefile's substantial length, participants may have focused primarily on its content—evidence, counterevidence, and explanations—leaving little room for them to attend to the asylum seeker's different identity facets. However, some attention will have been paid to the region of origin as an attention check specifically tested this fact. Although region did not significantly predict credibility, the direction of the association suggests that region of origin may still warrant attention in future work. Previous studies have demonstrated that social categories such as ethnicity, gender (e.g., Espinoza et al. 2015; Maeder and Yamamoto 2019; Pozzulo et al. 2010), and sexual orientation (e.g., Wiley and Bottoms 2009), can substantially influence legal decision-making. As an illustration, Wiley and Bottoms (2009) found that mock jurors were more likely to prosecute a child sexual offender when they were portrayed as gay versus straight, and especially when the victim was a boy rather than a girl. Given these findings, further investigation of intersecting identities as potential factors in credibility assessments appears justified. In addition, research has highlighted that, particularly in the context of sexual minority asylum claims, various identity facets intersect in ways that can create unique vulnerabilities to persecution (Laviolette 2015). Illustrating this, Laviolette (2015) pointed to a Canadian asylum case where the written risk assessment explicitly recognized that a lesbian from the Russian minority Tatar was granted asylum because her intersecting

identities—as a woman, Tatar, and lesbian—made her particularly vulnerable to persecution.

11 | The Role of Participant Characteristics

Contrary to expectations, SDO did not significantly moderate the relationship between stereotype congruence and credibility. Notably, since stereotype congruence itself had no significant effect, this may have limited the potential for moderation to emerge. While SDO is a robust predictor of policy attitudes and explicit intergroup preferences, its influence may be muted in complex, information-rich credibility assessments like the present. Using group-specific measures such as the prejudice against asylum seekers scale (PAAS; Anderson 2018) may offer deeper insight into how prejudice translates into credibility assessments in the asylum context, beyond the reach of broad ideological constructs like SDO. Furthermore, research consistently shows that emotional prejudices, rather than abstract beliefs, are stronger predictors of discriminatory behavior (Talaska et al. 2008). Future studies may therefore benefit from combining asylum-specific measures like PAAS with tools that capture emotional prejudice, offering a more comprehensive account of how both group-directed bias and affective reactions translate into credibility assessments.

We also investigated whether participants' gender and age influenced credibility ratings. Women rated lesbian and gay asylum seekers as more credible than men. Although this effect was small, it is consistent with previous research showing that women tend to view individuals with marginalized identities as more credible than men (e.g., Voogt and Klettke 2017) and grant asylum at a higher rates than men (Menkel-Meadow 2009). Participants 45 years and older rated targets as less credible than those under 30, again with a small effect. This is consistent with previous research showing that younger populations are generally more accepting of both asylum seekers (e.g., Dražanová et al. 2024) and sexual minorities (e.g., Jarasiunaite-Fedosejeva 2022). Moreover, the older age group may exhibit skepticism toward the asylum seeker's credibility, regardless of stereotype-congruence, while the younger group may be more inclined to believe the asylum seeker, irrespective of whether the stereotypes align, further explaining our non-significant results for the stereotype-congruence hypothesis.

12 | Limitations

A key limitation of this study is that the simulated credibility assessment inevitably differ from real-world assessments. Participants only received a short overview of the asylum process and credibility assessment guidelines, which—although based on official EUAA guidance—was much briefer than the extensive training provided to actual asylum officials. Unlike real decision-makers, our participants also lacked professional experience with asylum law and case handling.

Moreover, the task itself was simplified. Participants evaluated a carefully balanced casefile designed to include both supporting and opposing evidence, and they were asked to judge only whether it was credible that the asylum seeker was gay or

lesbian. In practice, asylum officials assess credibility in the context of longer interviews, where they for example interact directly with asylum seekers, ask clarifying questions, assess all evidence individually and often weigh multiple grounds for protection simultaneously. Furthermore, by limiting potential in-group biases, the design does not fully reflect how sexual orientation alignment influences credibility judgments in real-world settings. While the controlled design allowed us to isolate the role of stereotypes and traits in credibility judgments, the findings should be interpreted with caution when generalizing to the complexities of real asylum procedures.

Participants in our study evaluated the credibility of asylum seekers' sexual orientation, mirroring the focus in RSD. However, legal scholars have raised concerns about the fairness of decision-making in SOGIE claims. They argue that such decisions may fail to comply with the Refugee Convention, or at least undermine its underlying purpose of ensuring fair and equal protection, due to disparities in the way international refugee law is applied across national contexts (e.g., Dustin and Ferreira 2021; Mulé 2020). Dustin and Ferreira (2021), and Mulé (2020), further argue that requiring asylum seekers to “prove” their sexual orientation is problematic, and that the focus should instead be on the persecution they face in their home country due to their (perceived) sexual orientation. Rigidly prioritizing identity verification risks reinforcing narrow stereotypes and may fail to capture the diversity of asylum seekers' experiences. In contexts where identity is difficult to verify, credibility judgments may become anchored in perceived moral integrity, potentially amplifying the role of subjective moral inference in decision-making. Given the complexity of, and current limits in, scientific understanding of sexual orientation, as well as the Western-centric bias in much of the research (Young and Bond 2023), it remains unclear how asylum officials could reasonably expect asylum seekers to “prove” their sexual orientation.

These conceptual challenges are also relevant to the present study. We operationalized sexual orientation using the labels “gay” and “lesbian,” rather than “homosexual” as used in Rehaag and Cameron (2020), given the term's historical association with pathologizing discourses and its discouragement in contemporary psychological guidelines (APA 2026). Although “gay” and “lesbian” are widely recognizable in Western contexts and were selected to ensure clarity within the experimental materials, they do not capture the full diversity of sexual identities or culturally specific understandings of sexuality. Accordingly, the findings do not encompass the broader spectrum of SOGIE-based claims and should not be generalized beyond applicants explicitly identified as gay or lesbian. At the same time, examining how such widely used identity labels shape credibility judgments provides an important starting point for understanding stereotype-based mechanisms in asylum decision-making.

A methodological consideration concerns the use of AI to enhance regional phenotypic features in the stimulus photographs. AI-based image modification introduces the possibility that such tools encode racialized biases through their training data (Park 2024), potentially inviting unintended variation in how features are rendered beyond the intended manipulation. Researchers using AI-generated or AI-modified stimuli are encouraged to consider how underlying model biases may shape the stimuli produced.

13 | Conclusions

We found no support for the stereotype-congruence hypothesis: gender-nonconforming lesbian and gay asylum seekers were not perceived as more credible than their gender-conforming counterparts. Instead, credibility was shaped primarily by perceptions of moral character, with warmth showing no influence and competence unexpectedly predicting lower credibility. These findings highlight the central role of trust-related traits in credibility assessments, suggesting that when detailed case information and formal guidelines are available, sexual orientation-based stereotypes may exert less influence than previously assumed. At the same time, our relatively weak manipulation of stereotype congruence means that stereotype effects cannot be ruled out. We therefore caution against interpreting our null findings as evidence that stereotypes play no role in asylum decision-making, given that previous research has consistently documented their presence. The question of under which conditions and through which mechanisms stereotypes operate in this context remains open and warrants further investigation.

Author Contributions

Malin Ekelund: conceptualization, investigation, writing – original draft, methodology, validation, visualization, writing – review and editing, formal analysis, project administration, data curation, resources. **Jan Antfolk:** funding acquisition, writing – review and editing, supervision, conceptualization, methodology. **Jenny Skrifvars:** writing – review and editing, supervision, conceptualization, methodology. **Hedayat Selim:** writing – review and editing, supervision, conceptualization, methodology.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data, analysis code, and study materials will be made publicly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF, <https://osf.io/6k5sr>) upon publication.

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Appendix A

Full Test Statistics and Figures for Exploratory and Additional Analyses

Impact of Sexual Orientation and Region on Credibility

A hierarchical regression analysis examined how sexual orientation (gay vs. lesbian) and region (centered) influence credibility ratings (log-transformed). The analysis was performed in two steps.

Step 1: Main effects of sexual orientation and region. In the first step, sexual orientation and region were entered into the model as predictors. The results indicated that neither sexual orientation nor region significantly predicted credibility ratings. Specifically, sexual orientation (lesbian vs. gay) had a non-significant effect ($\beta = -0.016$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.819$), and region did not significantly predict credibility ratings either ($\beta = 0.037$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.392$). The overall model fit was poor ($R^2 = 0.002$, $Adj. R^2 = -0.003$), and the F-statistic was not significant ($F(2, 380) = 0.39$, $p = 0.678$).

Step 2: Interaction effect of sexual orientation and region. In the second step (Model 2), the interaction term between sexual orientation and region was added to the model. The interaction term was not significant ($\beta = -0.16$, $p = 0.062$). The overall model was also not statistically significant, $F(3, 379) = 1.43$, $p = 0.235$, with an R^2 of 0.01 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.003.

The effect size (Cohen's f^2) for the model was calculated as $f^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.02], which suggests a small effect size. These results suggest that neither sexual orientation nor region alone significantly affects credibility ratings. The interaction between sexual orientation and region was not statistically significant, although the coefficient was in the predicted direction. The results pointed to a poor fit of the model overall, indicating that other factors may better explain credibility ratings.

Credibility by Sexual Orientation

A Welch two-sample t test compared credibility ratings between gay men ($M = 61.12$, $SD = 23.37$) and lesbians ($M = 63.45$, $SD = 24.87$). Results revealed no statistically significant difference between the groups ($t = -0.94$, $p = 0.346$, Hedges' $g = 0.10$, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.30]).

Different Identity Combinations' Effect on Credibility

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined whether the combination of region, gender, and sexuality (e.g., Middle Eastern gay men, Black African lesbian women) had a differential impact on credibility ratings. The effect was not statistically significant, $F(5, 377) = 1.58$, $p = 0.165$, $\eta^2_p = 0.021$ indicating that there were no significant differences in credibility ratings across the identity combinations.

Influence of Participant Gender

A series of one-way ANOVAs examined whether participant gender influenced ratings of warmth, competence, moral character, and credibility. Participant gender did not significantly influence warmth, competence, or moral character (all $ps > 0.12$, $\eta^2_p \leq 0.006$). For credibility, there was a statistically significant difference between genders ($F(1, 381) = 4.49$, $p = 0.035$, $\eta^2_p = 0.011$, 95% CI [0.000, 0.042]), reflecting a small effect. Women ($M = 64.52$, $SD = 23.30$) rated targets as more credible than men ($M = 59.67$, $SD = 24.90$), see Figure 3.

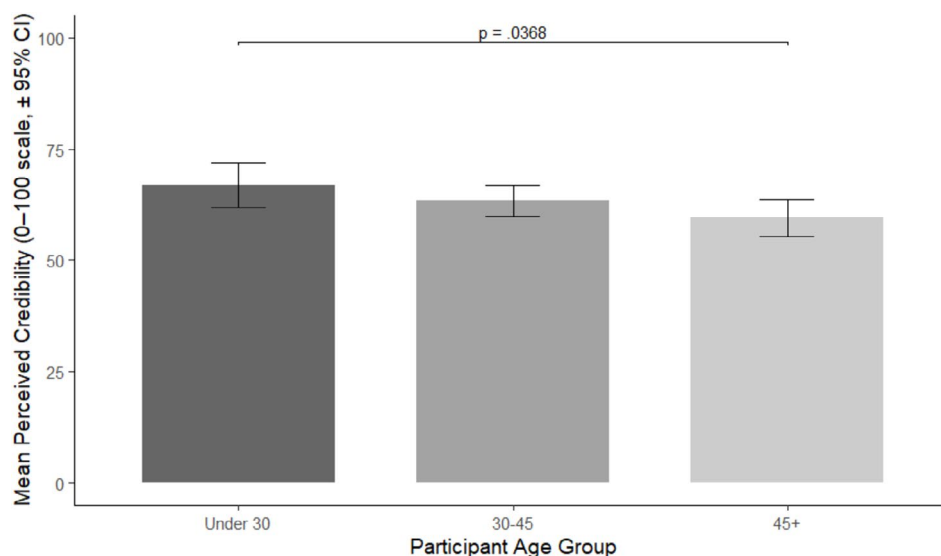


FIGURE 3 | Mean perceived credibility by participant gender.

Additional Analyses

While not part of the pre-registered analyses, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the influence of age group (under 30, 30–45, 45+) on credibility ratings, given evidence of age-related variation in social evaluations (see Section 9). The results revealed a statistically significant main effect of age group on credibility ratings, $F(2, 380) = 3.59$, $p = 0.027$, $\eta^2_p = 0.019$, 95% CI [0.000, 0.038] indicating a small effect of age group on credibility ratings. To explore the specific differences between age groups, Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) post hoc test was conducted. The results showed that participants in the 45+ age group ($M = 59.52$, $SD = 26.44$) rated applicants' credibility significantly lower than participants in the under 30 age group ($M = 66.87$, $SD = 20.52$) $p = 0.037$, see Figure 4. No

other statistically significant differences between groups were found, all $ps > 0.05$.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) examined the effect of sexual orientation on perceptions of warmth and competence. The MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect of sexual orientation on the combined dependent variables, Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.98$, $F(2, 380) = 3.53$, $p = 0.030$. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs indicated that lesbians ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.30$) were rated as significantly warmer than gay men ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.29$), $F(1, 382) = 5.05$, $p = 0.025$, $\eta^2_p = 0.013$, 95% CI [0.000, 0.044], and lesbians ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.21$) were also rated as more competent than gay men ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.21$), $F(1, 382) = 5.86$, $p = 0.016$, $\eta^2_p = 0.015$, 95% CI [0.000, 0.048]. These effects were small in magnitude and are consistent with the gender-inversion stereotype.

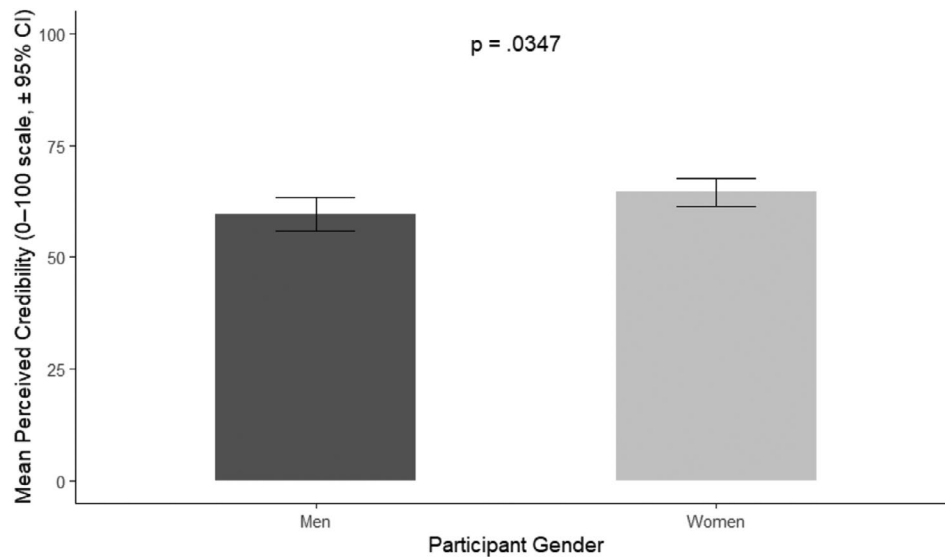


FIGURE 4 | Mean perceived credibility by participant age group.