

# Understanding the Veiling of Muslim Women in the Netherlands

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*In this study we analyze veiling as an Islamic religious practice among Turkish and Moroccan immigrant women in the Netherlands, investigating whether the strength of religious identity, education, contact with natives, and gender role attitudes can explain who veils and who does not. Confirming stereotypical interpretations of the veil as a religious symbol of a strongly gendered religion, we find that a strong Muslim identity and traditional gender role attitudes are positively associated with veiling. While our results seem to support predictions that contact with natives and education relate negatively with wearing a headscarf, these relationships with veiling are more complex. Education strengthens the positive relation between religious identification and veiling, indicating that most highly educated women endorse veiling as a religious practice if they are more religious. Contact with Dutch, however, weakens the association between religious identification and veiling, meaning socially well integrated women veil less often even if they are religious. We discuss our findings against the background of previous qualitative research on veiling as a religious practice and regarding theories on immigrant religion in Europe.*

**Keywords:** *veiling, religious practice, Islam, the Netherlands, secularization.*

## INTRODUCTION

With Islam being the fastest growing religion in Europe (Buijs and Rath 2006), scholars have increasingly focused on the role of religiosity for immigrant integration. Researchers and commentators often perceive Muslim immigrants as the most “problematic” immigrant group in terms of education, employment, and income (Foner and Alba 2008) and see their religiosity as an “identity marker” (Alba 2005) and a barrier to integration (Foner and Alba 2008).

The headscarf is an important symbol that has come to signify the cultural divide between the West and Muslim immigrants (Crabtree and Husain 2012). In the wake of controversies regarding veiling in public places and institutions in many Western European countries, several European countries have imposed headscarf bans in public buildings (Foner and Alba 2008; von Campenhausen 2004). The reasoning underlying these bans is that wearing a headscarf is considered as oppressive and in conflict with liberal values of Western societies (Joppke 2009;

*Note:* The data used for this research, the Survey Integration of Minorities (SIM 2006), were collected by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research and are available for users in the scientific community from the data archive of the Royal Dutch Society of Sciences (DANS EASY) after signing a confidentiality statement. For replication purposes, documentation of the processing of data is available from the first author upon request.

*Acknowledgments:* The research presented here was conducted for the Master’s thesis of the first author in Migration, Ethnic Relations, and Multiculturalism (MERM) at Utrecht University. The authors thank all MERM students, as well as the course instructors, Maykel Verkuyten and Jeroen Weesie, for their comments on previous drafts and their overall support.

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Prisching 2006). This impression has been supported by the media, which often portray the headscarf as a symbol of fundamentalism and patriarchal power (Shirazi and Mishra 2010).

Although Western perceptions and interpretations have dominated most of the public discourse on the headscarf, ethnographic studies have tried to identify the diverse meanings of veiling by analyzing why women choose to wear a headscarf. Interviewing Muslim immigrant women in the Netherlands, Lorasdağı (2009) showed that veiling is often a personal choice, not something forced upon women by parents or the religious community. Furthermore, studies showed that a headscarf can be part of a woman's Muslim identity (Hopkins and Greenwood 2013; Williams and Vashi 2007), a religious obligation (Killian 2003), or a piece of cloth that underlines pious behavior when tempted to engage in nonreligious acts (Bracke and Fadil 2012; Carvalho 2013; Patel 2012). Much less attention has been paid, though, to motivations for not wearing a headscarf. Fadil (2011) studied choosing not to veil among Muslim immigrants in Belgium and argued that this choice can be seen as an attempt to establish a liberal Muslim identity that emphasizes both women's agency and religious identity.

These results provide a more nuanced image by showing that the practice of and the motives for veiling are complex. Thereby they suggest that common stereotypes about wearing a headscarf do not capture the whole range of meanings attached to it. However, the existing studies use interviews, focus groups, and field studies to derive their conclusions. This implies that findings are based on a small sample of women, which limits the generalizability of the outcomes. Moreover, some of these qualitative studies are selective, in that participation is conditional on either wearing or not wearing a headscarf, which implies that the samples are not representative of the female Muslim population.

This study will therefore add to previous research on veiling by using quantitative data from a random sample of first- and second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands. Although our data are not able to grasp the manifold meanings of veiling, quantitative data offer the advantage of being able to disentangle the different ways in which selected characteristics are related to decisions to wear or not to wear a headscarf. Thus, unlike small-scale qualitative studies, we can draw conclusions about the relationship between individual characteristics and veiling while controlling for the influence of other sociodemographic characteristics. Within our sample we will focus on Moroccan and Turkish female participants that self-identified as Muslims. In the context of immigrant religiosity, and more specifically immigrant religious practice in the Netherlands, our analysis investigates to what extent individual characteristics that have been found in the sociology of religion to predict religious practice can explain who veils. By looking at characteristics such as strength of religious identity, education, contact with natives, and gender role attitudes, this article attempts to explain who does and who does not practice Islamic religiosity in terms of wearing a headscarf.

We will develop a theoretical model to predict who wears a headscarf by first embedding veiling into the broader conceptualization of religiosity as a multidimensional construct and then by linking veiling as religious practice to theories within the framework of secularization. Because several scholars have highlighted the importance of the receiving context for the study of immigrant religiosity (see, e.g., Aleksynska and Chiswick 2013; Connor 2010; Shirazi and Mishra 2010) and specifically for wearing a headscarf (Bracke and Fadil 2012), we first of all start by outlining the Dutch context to then place the theoretical expectations within this context.

#### STUDYING IMMIGRANT RELIGIOSITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

The population of the Netherlands includes about 12 percent non-Western immigrants, of which people originating from Turkey and Morocco (and their locally born children) comprise the largest groups (CBS 2012). Both ethnic groups started arriving during the 1960s and 1970s

as labor migrants (Maliapaard 2012). During this period, the Dutch concept of pillarization<sup>1</sup> enabled the separate development of cultural and religious community institutions, which is why ethnic groups in the Netherlands have had ample opportunities to create their own religious institutions (Buijs and Rath 2006). Yet, despite these multicultural policies—which were recently dismantled in a turn towards assimilationism (Vasta 2007)—being a Muslim in the Netherlands is still associated with social disadvantage, prejudice, and stigmatization (Kamans et al. 2009). Maliapaard, Lubbers, and Gijsberts (2010) explain that being a Muslim is still equated in public discourse with lagging behind in terms of structural and social integration, as Turkish and Moroccan minorities are disadvantaged with regard to employment, income, and educational attainment (CBS 2012). As one of the most visible religious practices, wearing a headscarf has provoked much political, public, and scientific debate regarding the integration of Muslim minorities in the Netherlands throughout the last years (Maliapaard 2012).

Western European countries tend to value secularization and being irreligious (Casanova 2003). Although the Netherlands are distinctive in providing significant room for religion in the public sphere (Buijs and Rath 2006), the Dutch population is one of the most secular in Western Europe (Need and De Graaf 1996). Applying classical assimilation theory to immigrant religion in the Netherlands therefore leads to the expectation of secularization because gradual convergence to the norms and values of the native population would imply that immigrants become less religious (Fleischmann and Phalet 2012). This expectation found support in several Dutch studies on immigrant religion that confirm immigrant religiosity to decline with socioeconomic and cultural assimilation (see, e.g., Phalet, Gijsberts, and Hagendoorn 2008; Van Tubergen 2007). It is furthermore in line with social-psychological analyses that found Muslim identity to be constructed in opposition to Dutch national identity. Verkuyten and Martinovic (2012) as well as Verkuyten and Yildiz (2009) demonstrate that identifying strongly as Muslim is associated with dis-identifying as Dutch national and with opposition to liberal practices, mirroring the perception among native Dutch that the ways of life of the Dutch majority and of Muslims are incompatible.

Although secularization theory and the prediction derived from classical assimilation theory regarding immigrant religion have found empirical support in the Netherlands, recent studies found no support for a decline of religiosity among Muslim minorities, but rather point towards religious stability or revival, particularly among the most highly educated segment of the second generation (see, e.g., Maliapaard and Gijsberts 2012; Maliapaard, Gijsberts, and Lubbers 2012). Dobbelaere (1981) stresses that secularization should not be narrowly understood as religious decline but can also imply a change of religious meaning, thereby taking up findings of qualitative studies that stress the manifold meanings of religiosity. Processes of modernization and individualization might thus not necessarily result in less religiosity, but can also lead to more variation in the understanding of religiosity as well as the privatization of religious practice. Duderija (2007) highlights that especially for second and subsequent migrant generations religiosity is salient but de-ethnicized, so it differs in practice and commitment from the religiosity of their parents. Although first-generation migrants grew up in contexts where Islam is not just a religion, but also a sociocultural ideology, subsequent generations have experienced Islam solely as religion within a secular surrounding. Values and norms might hence develop in dialogue with secularization and the host society (Cesari 2003), leading to varying interpretations of religiosity. In line with these notions, Fleischmann and Phalet (2012) found that the level of religiosity was dissociated from societal integration among second-generation Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands.

<sup>1</sup> Pillarization refers to a society that is organized vertically along ideological or religious lines. In such a society, every religion or ideology has its own institutions, such as schools, political parties, or media. In the Netherlands, pillarization along religious lines was practiced until the end of the 1960s (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007).

To sum up, previous research in the Netherlands has revealed contradictory findings regarding the role of religion in immigrant integration, but has not specifically focused on veiling as a religious practice. Our study focuses on this outcome and aims to integrate partly contradictory previous findings by elaborating on the theoretical framework most commonly used in these studies and clearly applicable in the Dutch context: secularization theory. Based on this framework, we aim to provide insights into how wearing a headscarf is related to individual characteristics of Muslim women in the Netherlands.

## UNDERSTANDING THE PRACTICE OF VEILING

### **Veiling as Religious Practice**

Religiosity is a complex concept that is claimed by most sociologists to be multidimensional (see, e.g., Glock and Stark 1965; Voas 2007) and this has been empirically confirmed for Muslim minorities in the West (e.g., Scheible and Fleischmann 2013). Although the literature more or less agrees that there are different conceptualizations of religiosity, it remains indecisive on the exact dimensions (Küçükcan 2005). A much-used approach distinguishes between beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors as dimensions of religiosity (Küçükcan 2005), thereby addressing the observation that religiosity can have both participatory as well as a cognitive elements (Voas 2007). Clayton and Glagged (1974) summarize this debate by underlining that religiosity (first and foremost) refers to the strength of religious commitment, yet this commitment may be expressed in different ways. They thus stressed that any form of religious attitude or practice has to be rooted in religious commitment.

Fadil (2011) highlighted that wearing a headscarf can be considered a ritual act that qualifies as Muslim religious practice. Following the reasoning of Clayton and Glagged (1974), this practice is linked to the strength of religious commitment. Moreover, ethnographic research on veiling has indicated time and again that wearing the veil is used to express one's Muslim identity (see, e.g., Hopkins and Greenwood 2013), leading us to expect that

*H1: Muslim women who are more religious in terms of a stronger religious identification are more likely to practice their religiosity in terms of veiling.*

Controlling for the influence of strength of religious identity, sociology of religion offers several explanations on how religious practice is related to personal characteristics of the believer. Two popular approaches within the secularization framework are the scientific worldview and the social integration theory (Van Tubergen and Sindradottir 2011). In the following, we will shortly elaborate on these theoretical notions and will then connect them to immigrant religious practice by predicting who veils and who does not.

### **Secularization and the Religious Practice of Veiling**

#### ***The Role of Education***

Theories of secularization are intimately linked with the role of educational expansion. More specifically, education has often been connected to the expression of religiosity through the scientific worldview theory. With increasing levels of education and scientific advances, individuals are assumed to become more critical in their attitudes and adopt a more rational worldview (Berger 1967; Need and De Graaf 1996). This is associated with more skepticism towards religious doctrines and with increasing abilities to detect inconsistencies and contradictions in religious beliefs (Van Tubergen and Sindradottir 2011). Consequently, higher educated individuals could be expected to be more critical about religiosity and its rituals, a prediction that was confirmed in several studies among immigrants containing large samples of Muslims (Diehl and König 2009;

Phalet, Gijsberts, and Hagendoorn 2008; Van Tubergen and Sindradottir 2011). Therefore, we expect that

*H2: Better-educated Muslim women will be less likely to express religiosity by wearing a headscarf.*

As the central argument of our theory implies that education is related to veiling through a decline in religiosity, we furthermore predict that strength of religious identity mediates the relationship between education and veiling, thereby testing the central notion of secularization theory that education results in lower levels of religious practice through lowering the importance of religion for the self. Thus, we expect that

*H3a: Better-educated women attach less importance to their religious identity, which in turn results in lower levels of veiling.*

However, as discussed earlier, secularization does not necessarily take the form of religious decline but can also entail a change in religious meaning systems (Dobbelaere 1981). This suggests that the relationship between religiosity and veiling might depend on other individual characteristics, such as the level of education. We will therefore also test the alternative hypothesis that posits that the influence of religiosity on veiling depends on individuals' level of education. Several studies have argued that it is especially highly educated middle-class women who decide to wear a headscarf (see, e.g., Lorasdağı 2009; Mule and Barthel 1992; Smith-Hefner 2007). Carvalho (2013) analyzed this phenomenon and developed a model of veiling that explains the positive relation between education and veiling through the cultural resistance of Islamic women. When educated women enter the public sphere (e.g., in working life or for schooling), they often use the headscarf as a tool to maintain their Muslim identity (Hopkins and Greenwood 2013; Patel 2012). In line with previous research, we will therefore test whether

*H3b: The relationship between religiosity and veiling is stronger for higher educated women as compared to women with lower education levels.*

### ***The Role of Social Contacts***

Another reason we expect to observe a decline in religiosity with increasing societal integration among Muslim minorities in the Netherlands stems from social integration theory. The general idea of this theory is that the more contact one has with a certain group, the more likely one is to adhere to the values and beliefs of this particular group (Durkheim 1951). As a member of a social group, one fears being sanctioned in case of noncompliance, which implies that group membership can reinforce certain group norms (Need and de Graaf 1996; Van Tubergen and Sindradottir 2011). In the context of migration, immigrants who have more contact with natives are more likely to adopt the beliefs and ideologies of the secular native majority, meaning these migrants are more likely to become secular themselves. This expectation has found support in several studies on immigrant integration in the Netherlands (Maliopaard and Phalet 2012; Phalet, Gijsberts, and Hagendoorn 2008; Van Tubergen 2007; Van Tubergen and Sindradottir 2011). Applied to our study of veiling as religious practice, it follows that

*H4: Muslim women with more contact with natives are expected to be less likely to wear a headscarf.*

Similar to the scientific worldview theory, the social integration theory takes up ideas of secularization by arguing that contact with natives who cherish secular norms changes the religiosity of immigrants. Interpreting secularization in terms of religious decline therefore leads to the expectation that the negative relationship between contact with natives and veiling can be explained by a decrease in religiosity. We therefore expect that

*H5a: Contact with natives relates negatively to wearing a headscarf via lower religious identification.*

Similar to our arguments regarding the role of education, social integration can also change the meaning of religiosity in terms of its behavioral expression. This implies that the relationship between religious identification and veiling might vary depending on the degree of contact that immigrants have with natives. Women who are well integrated socially might express their religious identification in ways besides wearing a headscarf, as they are aware that veiling as a visible form of Islam is less accepted by the majority population. At the same time, those with less contact with the Dutch might be less susceptible to the expectations of the majority and still link veiling to traditional interpretations of religion, which consider the headscarf a religious obligation (Göle 2003). Correspondingly, we will investigate whether

*H5b: The predicted positive association between strength of religious identity and veiling is weaker for those who have more contact with natives as compared to those who are less well integrated socially.*

### **Gender Role Attitudes**

A revised version of the scientific worldview theory states that increasing levels of modernization also bring changes to gender role attitudes (Norris and Inglehart 2004). Gender role attitudes refer to gendered task distributions with traditional attitudes emphasizing males as breadwinners whereas women take care of children and household (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Because Muslims often hold more traditional views on gender roles (including those in the Netherlands) (Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver 2007), gender role attitudes have been described as one of the key differences between Islam and the West (Inglehart and Norris 2003).

Inglehart and Norris (2003) found that traditional gender role attitudes correlate strongly with higher religious participation, and this relation was confirmed among Turkish Muslims in Germany (Diehl, König, and Ruckdeschel 2009). In line with these previous findings, we expect that

*H6: Muslim women who hold more traditional gender role attitudes are more likely to express religiosity by wearing a headscarf.*

Furthermore, Norris and Inglehart (2004) argued that education also promotes equality among men and women because higher educated women are more likely to enter the labor market and hence less likely to solely take care of household and children. Diehl, König, and Ruckdeschel (2009) confirm this association by demonstrating that gender role attitudes relate to social background characteristics such as age and education among Muslim immigrants. Taken together, this reasoning suggests that gender role attitudes partly explain the relation between education and veiling. Therefore, it is expected that

*H7: Education is indirectly negatively related to veiling through more egalitarian gender role attitudes.*

Finally, as social integration theory argues that social incorporation makes immigrants' attitudes more similar to those of natives, gender role attitudes might be more egalitarian among well-integrated women. Western societies value gender equality and put more emphasis on autonomy and self-realization (Buijs and Rath 2006; Inglehart and Norris 2003). Immigrant women with frequent contact with natives might adopt these Western values. Given the expected association between gender role attitudes and veiling, it follows that gender role attitudes might explain the association between contact with natives and the religious practice of wearing a headscarf. It is therefore suggested that

*H8: Gender role attitudes mediate the negative relation between contact with natives and veiling.*

Figure 1  
Theoretical model for explaining the practice of veiling

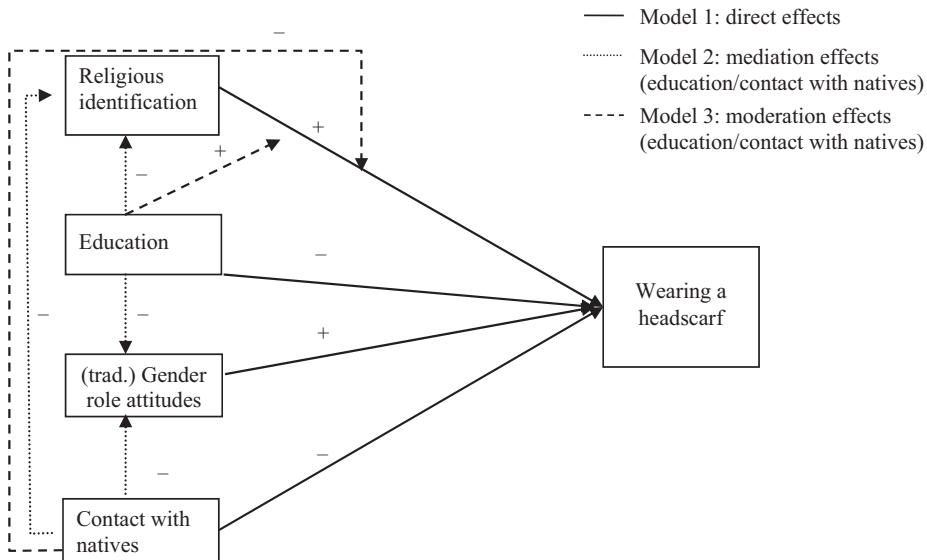


Figure 1 presents a summary of the models to be tested. We will test competing moderation and mediation hypotheses. Therefore, we will first test a model with only direct effects. In a second model we add indirect effects, and in a third model we replace the indirect effects between contact with natives and education through religious identity with interactions.

#### DATA AND VARIABLES

We use the Survey Integration of Minorities (SIM) data from the Netherlands, which were collected during 2006/2007 and focus on the life situation of first- and second-generation immigrants as well as native Dutch. The main groups included in the SIM are Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antilleans. Participants were selected based on random sampling by the central statistics office of the Netherlands and data were collected using computer-assisted personal interviewing (Hilhorst 2007). Turkish and Moroccan participants could choose to receive the questionnaire in Dutch or their native language. The overall response rate was 53 percent.

Given our interest in female Muslim participants, we selected only Turkish and Moroccan women as both groups are primarily Muslim (Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012). The sample size used in this article is 1,038, with 510 Moroccan (49 percent) and 528 Turkish (51 percent) participants. Within each ethnic group approximately 75 percent belong to the first generation and 25 percent to the second generation. The age range is 15–79 years.

#### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of our analysis is whether the respondent *wears a headscarf* or not. This dichotomous variable was measured by asking “Do you wear a headscarf when you go outside?” with the value 1 being assigned to women wearing a headscarf. This variable has 1.3 percent missing values, which we excluded from the analysis reducing the sample size to 1,025.

## Independent Variables

*Strength of religious identification* was assessed by measuring agreement with the following statement on a five-point scale: “My belief is an important part of myself,” where higher values stand for more religiosity. Although we had two other available items that seemed to address strength of religiosity (“It hurts if somebody speaks badly about my religion” and “Nobody should question my religion”), the correlation between all three items is low (between .41 and .47) and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is only close to being acceptable ( $\alpha = .68$ ), indicating that they might not represent the same concept. Therefore, instead of constructing a malfunctioning scale for strength of religiosity, we decided for parsimony to only use the first item as a single measurement for strength of religious identification.

*Education* is measured in terms of the highest level of education respondents attained. For those still in education, the level of education they are following is taken as a proxy. The variable has four categories: (1) primary education, (2) lower secondary education, (3) upper secondary education, and (4) tertiary education.<sup>2</sup> Although it is not ideal to treat a four-category variable as continuous, Rhemtulla, Brosseau-Liard, and Savalei (2012) demonstrated that results are not biased when the focus lies on interpreting structural coefficients. Therefore, it will be treated as a continuous variable here. Some (2.8 percent) participants did not indicate their level of education. These are coded into missing cases. The distribution of education is positively skewed with most participants having primary education only. This skewedness is mainly due to the lower educational level of the first generation. Here, 56 percent have only primary education as compared to 7 percent of second-generation immigrants.

*Gender role attitudes* are analyzed as a latent construct. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to check whether agreement with the following five moderately correlated items constitutes one common factor: “It is best if women have the responsibility for the household,” “Men can best have the responsibility for the money,” “It is more important for men than for women to earn their own income,” “Decisions about big investments should be taken by the man,” and “A woman should stop working once she has a child.” Only one factor with an eigenvalue above 1 was extracted and all items load above .76 on this factor, except for the last item, which only loads at .49. Although this loading is still sufficiently high to be included into the latent factor, previous research using the SIM data set has shown that the item is not suited to measure traditionalism as even the most religious and most conservative people do not score high on this item (Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012). Therefore, we excluded it. The evolving factor is thus constructed out of four items. It explains 57 percent of the total variance and is reliable ( $\alpha = .83$ ). All items were recoded so that higher values indicate more traditional attitudes.

*Contact with natives* is assessed using the following items: “How often do you have contact with Dutch friends and acquaintances?” “Are Dutch friends or neighbors visiting you often, sometimes or never?” and “In your free time, do you spend often, sometimes or never time with Dutch?” Another available item was “How often do you have contact with Dutch neighbors?”; however, this item correlated so highly with the first item ( $r [1,025] = .98, p [2-sided] < .001$ ), that we decided to exclude it from the analysis. The remaining three items have a moderate correlation, with Pearson’s  $r$  ranging from .48 to .71. Because all items refer to different types of contact, we decided to use their mean instead of a latent construct to measure contact with natives. Answer possibilities for the first item ranged on a five-point scale from “never/less than once a year” to “every day.” For the other two items, a three-point scale was used (“often,” “sometimes,” “never”). For the mean to signify that higher values mean more contact, we recoded the latter

<sup>2</sup>In the original data set, the Dutch educational categories measured are (1) bao, (2) vbo/mavo, (3) mbo/havo/vwo, and (4) hbo/wo. Respectively, these refer to the ISCED categories 1; 2 + 3a; 3b; and 5a + b. For more information on the ISCED, consult the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012).



Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	<i>N</i>	Range	Mean/ Proportion	Standard Deviation
Wearing a headscarf	1,025	0/1	.59	
Religious identification	1,017	0–4	3.43	.74
Education	996	0–3	.91	.99
Gender role attitudes				
(1) Women's responsibility: household	1,019	0–4	2.50	1.28
(2) Men's responsibility: money	1,016	0–4	1.47	1.27
(3) Boys: important to earn own money	1,018	0–4	1.32	1.25
(4) Investment decisions made by men	1,017	0–4	1.25	1.19
Contact with natives	1,025	0–5	2.08	1.24
Age	1,025	15–79	36.02	14.03
Second generation	1,025	0/1	.23	
Moroccan	1,025	0/1	.49	
Sunni	1,025	0/1	.62	

two variables into a five range score, where the values 1, 2, and 3 were recoded into 1, 3, and 5. The final scale has a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .71.

### Control Variables

Throughout the analysis we will control for *age* (in years) and for different *streams within Islam* because both factors have been found to be relevant predictors of immigrant religiosity within previous studies (see, e.g., Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012; Verkuyten and Yildiz 2009). Most participants in our sample classified themselves as Sunni Muslims (62 percent) or "Islam-other" (30 percent). Because all other subtypes of Islam (e.g., Alevi, Shii) have rather few followers in our sample, we will contrast *Sunnis* with all other types of Muslims. Because some previous analyses have suggested that immigrant *generation* (Maliepaard, Lubbers, and Gijsberts 2010) and *ethnicity* (Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012) also influence religiosity, we include these two variables as controls. Ethnicity contrasts Moroccan (1) with Turkish (0) participants. In line with the classification used by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), a person is considered Turkish or Moroccan if (s)he or his/her parents are born in Turkey or Morocco, irrespective of current citizenship. *Immigrant generation* distinguishes first- (0) and second-generation (1) migrants, with first-generation immigrants being born in Turkey or Morocco and older than 15 years when they migrated. Second-generation migrants are those who were born in the Netherlands but have parents born abroad, and those who were younger than 15 years when they came to the Netherlands.

The descriptive statistics of all variables, including mean, standard deviation, and range are summarized in Table 1.

### Analytic Strategy

The analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus version 7. SEM offers the advantage that it can estimate latent variables and is able to test indirect effects. Furthermore, Mplus can deal with missing values through full information maximum likelihood estimation, a method where results are estimated based on all available information without filling missing values first (Kline 2011). This is useful as we kept all missing values except those on the

dependent variable. For a summary of the fit indices that SEM reports and that we use throughout our analyses, consult Kline (2011).

In our analysis we predicted the practice of veiling using logistic regression. This method has been chosen given that our outcome variable is binary. Because we used logistic regression, the standardized coefficients of our analysis will be interpreted in terms of change in the log-odds of veiling. Hence, the results will show how the log-odds of the dependent variable vary with a one standard deviation change in one of the predictors (Menard 2001). Regarding model fit indicators, we will report AIC and BIC, where smaller values indicate better fit, as the  $\chi^2$  model fit statistics cannot be used for model fit comparisons of logistic regression models (Muthén and Muthén 2012).

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results of Veiling

In our sample, 59 percent of all respondents indicated they wore the veil. When analyzing how many women within each ethnicity and each generation veil, we find that first-generation immigrants and immigrants with Moroccan background wear a headscarf more often. Among Moroccan women in our sample, 67 percent indicate veiling as opposed to 51 percent of the Turkish participants. Furthermore, 68 percent of first-generation immigrants wear a headscarf, whereas only 30 percent of second-generation immigrants veil.

### Predicting the Practice of Veiling

First, we tested the structural model presented in Figure 1 including only the direct effects (H1, H2, H4, and H6). Strength of religious identification is a strong predictor of veiling and, in line with our expectation, is positively related to wearing a headscarf. Thus, more religious women are more likely to veil ( $b = .24, p$  [1-sided]  $< .001$ ).<sup>3</sup> Controlling for this relationship, education and contact with natives are significantly negatively related to veiling. A one standard deviation change in education goes together with significantly lower log-odds of wearing a headscarf (vs. not wearing one), indicating that highly educated women are less likely to veil ( $b = -.21, p$  [1-sided]  $< .001$ ). Similarly, more contact with natives is associated with less veiling ( $b = -.10, p$  [1-sided]  $= .001$ ). Finally, a strong positive relationship between gender role attitudes and veiling denotes that women who endorse more traditional gender role attitudes are more likely to wear a headscarf ( $b = .25, p$  [1-sided]  $< .001$ ).

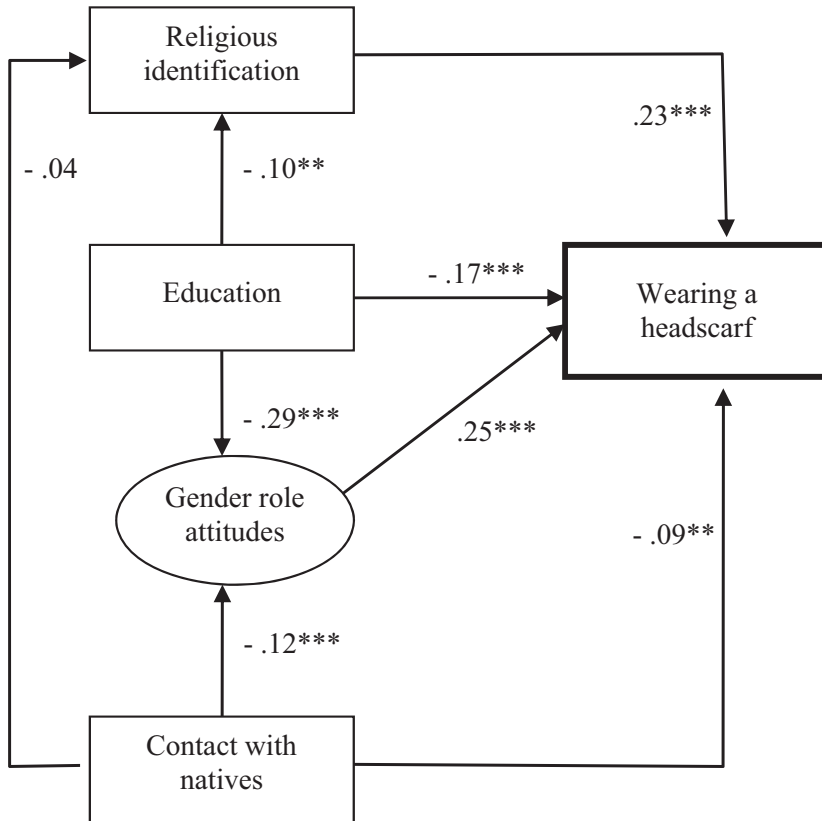
As for the control variables, age, being Sunni, and being Moroccan are positively associated with veiling, meaning that older women, Sunni and Moroccan women are more likely to wear a headscarf. Generation, however, is negatively related to veiling, indicating that second-generation migrants are less likely to veil. Overall, the model with only direct effects explains 41 percent of variance in veiling and has the following model fit: log likelihood =  $-6,552.76$ ,  $df = 21$ , AIC =  $13,147.52$ , BIC =  $13,250.31$ .

In a second step, we added the indirect effects to the model just presented (H3a, H5a, H7, and H8). A Wald's test demonstrated that the mediation of education through gender role attitudes on veiling is significant ( $\chi^2$  [1] =  $17.18, p$  [1-sided]  $< .001$ ) as is the indirect relation between contact with natives and wearing a headscarf through gender role attitudes ( $\chi^2$  [1] =  $8.27$ ,

<sup>3</sup>We repeated the analysis first with the item "It hurts if somebody speaks badly about my religion" as a measure of the strength of religiosity, then with the item "Nobody should question my religion" representing religiosity. All relationships are the same as presented in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2

Logistic regression for the practice of veiling with mediation effects (standardized coefficients)

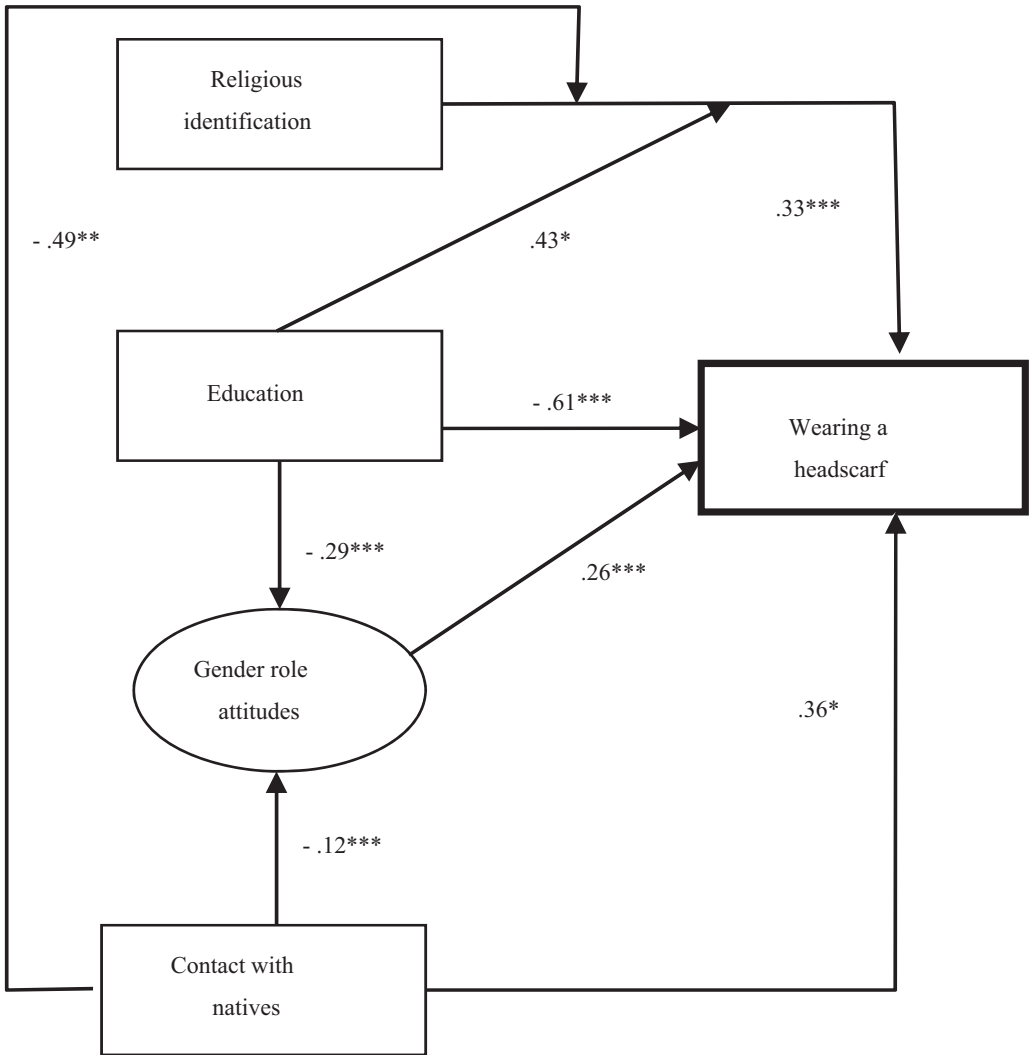


$p$  [1-sided] = .002). The negative, direct nature of the relationship between education and veiling is thus accompanied by a negative indirect relation of  $-.04$ , whereas the negative direct relation of contact with natives and wearing a headscarf is joined by a  $-.02$  indirect relation. The indirect relation of education with veiling through religious identification is also significant ( $\chi^2$  [1] = 5.70,  $p$  [1-sided] = .009). The only nonsignificant indirect relation is the association between contact with natives and veiling through religiosity ( $\chi^2$  [1] = 1.13,  $p$  [1-sided] = .14). Hence, the negative, direct relation of education is accompanied by another negative, indirect relation (through strength of religious identification) of  $-.02$ . The total relations of education and contact with natives on wearing a headscarf are thus negative. However, the model including indirect relations has a worse fit than the previous one that included only direct relations (AIC = 15,294.51, BIC = 15,466.11), but explains slightly more variance in veiling (43 percent).

In a third step, we replaced the indirect relations of education and contact with natives with their interactions with religious identification (H3b and H5b). This model fits better than any of the models presented so far (AIC = 12,984.79, BIC = 13,126.73) and explains 46 percent of variance in wearing a headscarf. Contrary to the direct relations presented earlier, the direct relation of contact with natives with veiling is now positive, indicating that at the same level of religiosity those who are better socially integrated veil more often. Yet, the other direct relations keep the signs as presented above. Looking at the interaction terms, the relation between religious identification and veiling is, as predicted, positively influenced by education. The positive association between strength of religious identification and veiling is thus stronger for more educated women. As for the moderation of strength of religious identification and contact with

Figure 3

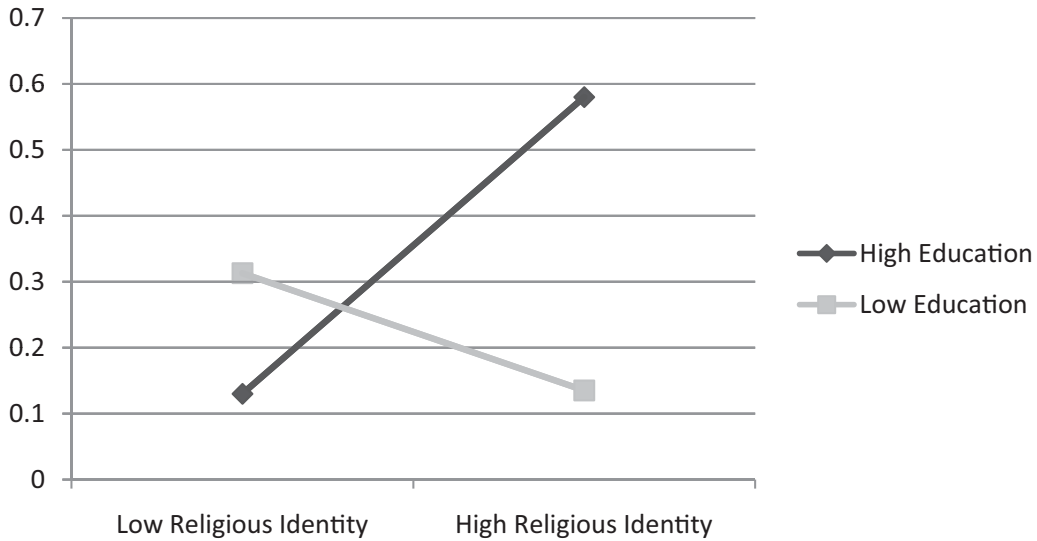
Logistic regression for the practice of veiling with moderation effects (standardized coefficients)



the Dutch, again as predicted the positive relationship of religious identification with veiling is weaker for those who have frequent contact with natives. Furthermore, it should be noted that the direct relations of education and strength of religious identification with veiling have become stronger in this model.

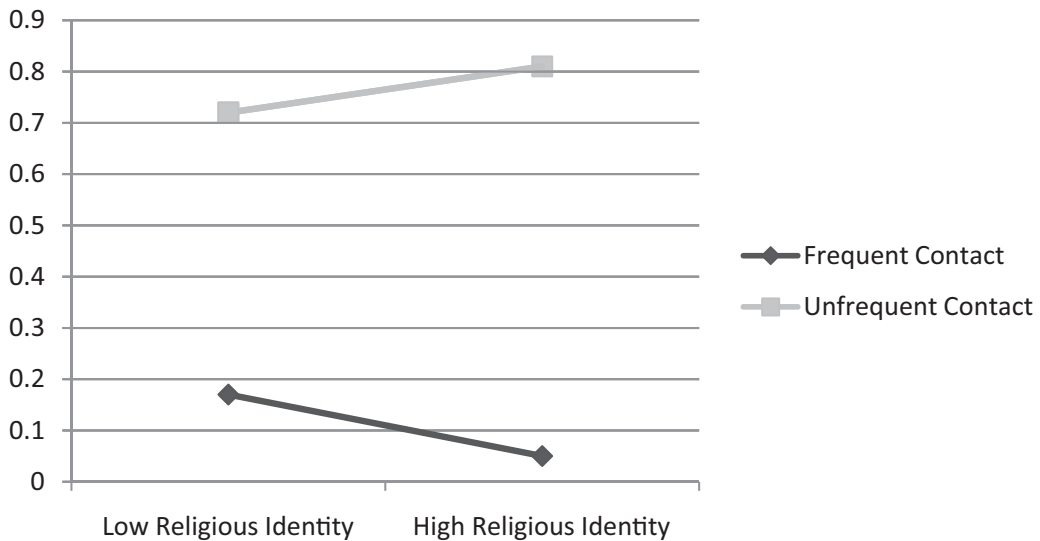
Figures 4 and 5 visualize these interactions by plotting the predicted probabilities of veiling at different levels of education, contact, and religious identification. As depicted in Figure 4, at low levels of religiosity (defined as one standard deviation below the mean), lower educated women are more likely to veil than higher educated women. However, at high levels of religious identification (defined as one standard deviation above the mean), highly educated women are actually more likely to wear a headscarf than their lower educated counterparts. Similarly, Figure 5 shows the moderation of contact with natives. As suggested by our results, contact with native Dutch influences the relationship between religious identification and veiling negatively. Those who are well integrated socially are less likely to veil, and even less so when they have a strong

Figure 4  
 Predicted probabilities of veiling by level of education



Note: High and low religious identity, as well as high and low education, is defined as one standard deviation above and below the mean.

Figure 5  
 Predicted probabilities of veiling by frequency of contact with natives



Note: High and low religious identity, as well as frequent and infrequent contact with natives, is defined as one standard deviation above and below the mean.

religious identity. For those who have less frequent contact with the Dutch, a strong religious identity slightly increases the likelihood to veil.

In summary, we have to reject H5a, which predicted that the negative relation between contact with natives and veiling is mediated by strength of religious identification. Also, H4 is only partly confirmed. Although more contact with natives is associated with less veiling in our first model,

this relationship changes into the opposite once we control for the moderation of contact with natives and religious identification (H5b). However, we find support for all other hypotheses. A strong Muslim identity and traditional gender role attitudes are positively, whereas higher education is, directly and indirectly (through more egalitarian gender role attitudes and strength of religious identification), negatively related to veiling. In addition, more contact with natives is directly and indirectly, through more egalitarian gender role attitudes, negatively associated with veiling. Also, the positive relationship between religious identification and wearing a headscarf is stronger for more educated women, but weaker for women who have more contact with natives.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed at adding to the understanding of veiling as Muslim religious practice by investigating who does and who does not wear a headscarf. Whereas qualitative studies have stressed the diverse meanings of veiling, this study used a quantitative approach to disentangle which individual factors influence veiling. Using a large random sample of Turkish and Moroccan women from the Netherlands, we showed that individual characteristics that are expected to influence veiling based on the framework of secularization are well suited to predict who wears a headscarf as they explain 46 percent of variance in veiling within the Dutch context.

Our study used two approaches to test secularization theory. Dobbelaere (1981) highlighted that secularization can be understood in terms of declining religiosity, but might equally result in a change of expression of religion while keeping strength of religiosity stable. This latter approach is in line with results from qualitative studies that particularly stress the diverse meanings of veiling. Thus, we tested whether the strength of religious identity mediates the relationships between contact with natives and education on the one hand and veiling on the other hand. Although this explanatory mechanism is supported for the relationships among education, strength of religious identification, and veiling, no support was found for a similar relation of contact with natives. To test the alternative interpretation that secularization might be related to different understandings of religiosity, we also estimated to what extent the relationship between strength of religious identification and wearing a headscarf varies with degree of education and social integration. Our results demonstrate that the positive association between religious identity and veiling is stronger for highly educated women, but weaker for those who keep close contact with native Dutch. As the model including these interactions explains more variance in veiling and provides a better fit to our data, we can conclude that secularization in terms of changing religiosity is a more accurate approach to the explanation of veiling within the Dutch context than secularization as declining religiosity. This finding is especially interesting because earlier studies among first-generation immigrants have shown that Islamic religious practice within the Netherlands declines with increasing secularization (e.g., Phalet, Gijsberts, and Hagendoorn 2008; Van Tubergen 2007). However, our findings are in line with recent studies that have stressed the changing character of religiosity and demonstrated that religiosity is not losing importance, particularly among the most educated segments of the second generation (e.g., Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012; Maliepaard, Gijsberts, and Lubbers 2010).

Some of our findings are in line with the scientific worldview theory of secularization, as higher educated women directly and indirectly, through more egalitarian gender role attitudes and reduced strength of religious identity, are less likely to wear a headscarf. This is the case even when we control for the strong positive relation between religiosity and veiling indicating that education has an influence on decisions to veil over and above religious identification. Moreover, education was negatively related to veiling by increasing egalitarian gender role attitudes, which is in line with previous theory and research regarding the relation between traditionalism and religiosity (Diehl, König, and Ruckdeschel 2009; Inglehart and Norris 2003). On the other hand, the finding that religious identification reduces the negative relation between education and veiling

contradicts secularization theory. This finding shows that higher education does not necessarily translate into lower levels of religiosity; neither does it result in a changing interpretation of religiosity—which would have been the case if the relation between religious identity and veiling had been weaker for higher educated women. Our findings are not in line with a strict and simplistic interpretation of secularization theory, but they confirm previous studies that found particularly highly educated and middle-class women to embrace veiling as an Islamic religious practice (Carvalho 2013; Lorasdağı 2009; Mule and Barthel 1992; Smith-Hefner 2007). Although we cannot interpret based on our data why these women decide to veil, qualitative studies suggest that the headscarf constitutes an important part of their identity (Hopkins and Greenwood 2013; Williams and Vashi 2007) and is a tool of identity building that is increasingly used by immigrants to define their self within a bi-cultural context (Lorasdağı 2009). Especially for second-generation migrants who are confronted with the cultural expectations of their parents and the norms of the receiving society, decisions of veiling are complex and need to be placed within the wider context of identity building. In this context, education might not necessarily lead to declining religious practice, but rather facilitate the conscious scrutinizing of what the headscarf means (Killian 2003; Lorasdağı 2009). Carvalho's (2013) theory of veiling offers another explanation for our findings by relating the veiling of highly educated women in secular environments to cultural resistance. He argues that in secular surroundings religious women show high levels of veiling to resist the temptations of their secular environments. This might explain why particularly the combination of high education and high religious identification is associated with high probabilities of veiling. A similar interpretation is offered by Hopkins and Greenwood (2013), who found that Muslim women adopted the veil when entering university to maintain their Muslim identity in a context where it is less self-evident and requires more conscious social approval than in their previous surroundings (e.g., family and neighborhood). Therefore, despite our finding of a negative direct relation of education with veiling and with religious identity in a mediation model, these recurring results from studies in multiple contexts using a diverse range of research methods do not provide strong evidence for a straightforward secularizing effect of education and they strongly suggest that religious practices such as veiling are likely to persist despite increasing levels of education among Muslim immigrants in the West (cf. Voas and Fleischmann 2012). Rather, our findings oppose common stereotypes as they suggest that veiling is not related to backwardness, but that educated women also wear a headscarf—be it to show that they are a good Muslim, to negotiate their identity, or to culturally resist influences of their host society.

Regarding social integration theory, our findings are also mixed. On the one hand, contact with natives is negatively related to wearing a headscarf through more egalitarian gender role attitudes. Also in line with our prediction, contact with native Dutch was associated with a less strongly positive association between the strength of religious identification and veiling. This suggests that highly religious women who are well integrated socially choose different behavioral expressions of their religious identity and less often adopt the veil, compared to women with similarly high levels of religiosity but less contact with native Dutch, who are more likely to veil. However, when this interaction between contact and religiosity is taken into account, more contact with native Dutch is associated with a greater likelihood of veiling, which disconfirms our expectation derived from social integration theory. One explanation for this positive association may be that social integration could reinforce the need to preserve cultural continuity among immigrants, which in turn leads to higher levels of veiling (Carvalho 2013; Killian 2003). However, this argumentation would suggest the interaction of religious identification and contact with natives to be positive, which is not the case in our study. Rather, we demonstrated that increasing levels of social integration suppress the positive association between religious identification and veiling. This finding is in line with secularization as changing religiosity in that veiling might not be chosen as religious practice by socially integrated women as their close social contacts with the native Dutch might make them more aware of the fact that the headscarf is a controversial sign of their religiosity that is met with resistance among the Dutch population. This finding is in line

with qualitative findings of the decision not to veil, which underline that even Muslim women with strong religious identification sometimes decide not to veil as they seek alternative routes for establishing a liberal Muslim identity that is incorporated into the Western secular environment (Fadil 2011).

Future analyses should take a closer look at the complex link between veiling and social contacts and also incorporate the majority perspective. Previous analyses have shown that the acculturation attitudes of the host society are essential for integration outcomes, as the climate of reception determines the integration options available to minorities (Montreuil and Bourhis 2001). If a majority group is not supporting an integrationist environment, it might not be open towards intergroup contact (Piontkowski et al. 2000). Thus, whereas our study focused on immigrant minorities and we had no means of assessing to what extent they actively control the amount of contact they have with native Dutch, these findings from the acculturation literature remind us that contact is a mutual process that is shaped by both migrants and the host population. Furthermore, studying the concept of identification in more detail would extend our inquiry. Several studies have shown that migrants can have dual identities and reconcile their manifold identities in different ways (see, e.g., Hopkins 2011; Martinovic and Verkuyten 2014). Whether and how migrants identify as both Muslim and Dutch can influence their religious behavior (Martinovic and Verkuyten 2014) and hence relate to the likelihood to veil. By adding measures of Dutch identity and out-group attitudes, one might thus gain a better insight into decisions to wear a headscarf.

Finally, when drawing conclusions from this study, one should keep in mind that our results are based on two ethnic groups within one country only. As outlined earlier, understandings of wearing the headscarf might be highly dependent upon the context of reception of immigrant women. Consequently, it has to be tested whether our findings still hold in other secular as well as in less secular contexts where religion plays a different role in the public sphere. Moreover, a potential replication of our findings with longitudinal data would allow for conclusions with regard to causality and hence for a better specification of the predicted paths.

Nevertheless, we would like to highlight that this was the first quantitative study on veiling according to our knowledge. In contrast to the predominantly qualitative literature on the topic, we tested our hypotheses among a large sample of randomly selected Muslim women from different ethnic backgrounds and managed to shed light on the complex relationships that underlie veiling. Consequently, our conclusions are more generalizable than previous studies on the headscarf and demonstrate that education, contact with natives, and gender role attitudes relate to veiling even while controlling for the positive effect of religious identity. Furthermore, we revealed that the relation between religious attachment and veiling depends on sociodemographic characteristics such as contact with natives and education.

In conclusion, our study showed that veiling is a complex religious practice that is more diverse in nature than Western stereotypes commonly assume. Our study underlines that more attention should be paid to what secularization actually means by focusing not solely on declining religiosity but also on the changing character of religiosity and religious practice.

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