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Aubrey Westfall  
*Wheaton College*

Bozena Welborne  
*Smith College, bwelborne@smith.edu*

Sarah Tobin  
*Brown University*

Özge Çelik Russell  
*Gazi University*

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# The Complexity of Covering: The Religious, Social, and Political Dynamics of Islamic Practice in the United States\*

Aubrey Westfall, *Wheaton College*

Bozena Welborne, *Smith College*

Sarah Tobin, *Brown University*

Özge Çelik Russell, *Gazi University, Ankara*

*Objective.* Mainstream American perception often views Islamic headcovering as a controversial practice indicative of gender repression and norms violating individual rights. Practicing Muslims counter that headcovering expresses piety, modesty, and protection. Recent scholarship affirms the complexity of the practice, and reveals that the motivations behind donning the headscarf span the religious, social, and political realms for Muslim women. *Methods.* We explore the motivations for the practice among American Muslims, examining the way religious, social, and political life interact and reinforce one another, using data from an online survey of 1,847 Muslim-American women from 49 states. *Results.* Our findings demonstrate that religiosity is not a monolithic factor, and religious practices interact with and enforce headcovering in complex ways. We illustrate that conventionally understood indicators of Islamic religiosity align along three dimensions: religious lifestyle, religious abstinence, and religious socialization. Elements of a religious lifestyle, such as praying and attending mosque as well as fostering connections with Islamic social networks, are more strongly associated with covering than practices related to abstinence or socialization. *Conclusions.* Ultimately, our research demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of how different aspects of Muslim religiosity condition covering among Muslim-American women.

Popular debates surrounding the Islamic headscarf in the United States are “intense” and “emotional” (Giddens, 2004:10). Despite some efforts in mainstream media to illustrate the commonalities between Muslims and non-Muslims, and to depict the headscarf as a tool of personal and religious expression, many Americans view the Islamic headcovering<sup>1</sup> as the hallmark of a controversial and repressive religion (Chan-Malik, 2011). Practicing Muslims often counter that headcoverings represent their religiosity, and assert that the headcovering is an index for modesty and a protection from the continual assault of overly sexualized, consumer-driven interests. These communities see the headcovering as indicative of their freedom of religion and personal religious expression (Droogsma, 2007; Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Williams and Vashi, 2007). In the post-9/11 context, many

\*Direct correspondence to Aubrey Westfall, 26 E. Main St., Norton, MA 02766, (westfall\_aubrey@wheatoncollege.edu). All data and coding are available upon request for anyone wishing to replicate this study. We thank Virginia Wesleyan College and the University of Nevada, Reno, for their financial support to conduct and analyze the survey. We also thank the reviewers for their helpful comments.

<sup>1</sup>A term including the practice of wearing a headscarf, veil, hijab, any other localized term for headscarf, a burqa, or a niqab.

Muslim women adopt the practice in an effort to represent Islam, to assume a public Islamic identity, or to define what it means to be a Muslim living in a pluralistic society (Ali, 2005; Haddad, 2007; Peek, 2005).

While acknowledging that the reasons for wearing the headscarf span the religious, social, and political spheres, this article probes the distinctive motivations for the practice among Muslim-Americans, examining the way religious, social, and political life interact and reinforce one another. Our findings demonstrate that religiosity is not a monolithic concept, and religious practices interact with and enforce headcovering in complex ways. We illustrate that conventionally understood indicators of Islamic religiosity align along three dimensions: religious lifestyle, religious abstinence, and religious socialization. Elements of a religious lifestyle, such as praying and attending mosque, as well as fostering connections with Islamic social networks, are more strongly associated with covering than practices related to abstinence or socialization. Thus, our research demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of how different aspects of Muslim religiosity condition the practice of covering among Muslim-American women. Our findings also support the work of Ahmed (2005), Moore (2007), Haddad (2007), Peek (2005), and Ali (2005) by demonstrating the importance of sociopolitical contexts for the practice of headcovering in the United States.

In what follows, we briefly review the literature on headcovering in the United States. We then summarize our original survey of 1,847 Muslim-American women, followed by a discussion of measurement and methodology.<sup>2</sup> Using principal components factor analysis and logistic regression, we find that our respondents' religious and social lives are intertwined, and that both public and private elements of religiosity are strongly associated with the practice of covering, as are specific ethnic and racial markers (i.e., whether our respondents identified as "black" or "Asian"). We conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

### *Literature Review and Hypotheses*

Wearing the headscarf became more common in the United States in the 2000s (Ali, 2005; Carvalho, 2013), with 60 percent of Muslim-American women reporting that they cover at least "some of the time" (Pew Research Center, 2011). While data on frequencies of public covering are available, much less has been revealed about Muslim women's beliefs and guiding motivations for the practice. The literature maintains that the distinct qualities of religiosity and religious practices of contemporary Islam in the United States play determinative roles in wearing the headcovering. The headscarf is often considered to be a religious behavior, which can be characterized in terms of engagement in and execution of practices associated with a religious lifestyle including prayers, mosque attendance, and even in the selection and creation of Muslim community networks (Ali, 2005; Cole and Ahmadi, 2003; Kühle, 2012; Peek, 2005). This is because covering is a means of constructing and sharing in a particular localized socioreligious identity, whether cultural,

<sup>2</sup>We focus on Muslim women in the United States because of the sizeable, heterogeneous, and largely underexplored Muslim population living within its borders. Gallup and Pew surveys conducted in 2009 and 2011 revealed Muslim Americans were the most ethnically and racially diverse religious group in the United States. Moreover, the United States has a distinctive historic Muslim community within the African-American population, as well as a considerable recent immigrant community largely from South Asia and the Middle East, both with very different norms about religious engagement (Ali, 2005; Haddad, 2007; Hu et al., 2009; Pew Research Center, 2007, 2011). By examining Muslim women's distinctive attitudes toward covering in the United States, we enrich the literature exploring women's religiosity, the negotiation of Islam in America, and the experiences of Muslims as a minority group.

community oriented, politically motivated, or some combination thereof (Badr, 2004; Droogsmas, 2007; Peek, 2005; Williams and Vashi, 2007). Ahmed (2005), for example, asserts that motivations for donning the headcovering in the United States are largely about engaging with the Muslim community and creating new meanings for Islamic practice in a national context.

Much of the literature linking conventional measures of religiosity to headcovering treats religiosity as a monolithic concept, often combining measures of religious practice into a single index or capturing religiosity through single variables (Barreto and Bozonales, 2009; Barreto, Matsuoka, and Sanchez, 2008; Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). We suspect that Islamic religious practices are more complex, and that elements of deliberative ritualized religious practice function differently in their relationship to headcovering than forms of religious abstinence. Ritualized religious practices, such as daily prayers, mosque attendance, or religious dress, serve as highly influential aspects of religious life for Muslim women. In McGinty's (2012) study, for example, Muslim women reported mosque attendance and prayer (two activities performed while wearing a headcovering) were integral components of facilitating and deepening Muslim friend networks and community activism. Amina Wadud's controversial leading of a mixed-sex prayer in a mosque in 2005 was a focal point for the women in this study who saw these Islamic practices as highly gendered and closely linked with propriety in dress, including the headcovering. We conceptualize religious rituals like prayer, mosque attendance, and headcovering as deliberative and active religious actions, to be contrasted with more passive religious practices of abstinence.

Practices of abstinence or refraining from certain behaviors often marked as not-Islamic (such as eating pork and drinking alcohol) are passive religious behaviors requiring restraint rather than action. Their passive nature may differentiate them from the active ritualized religious practices discussed above, though the practices of abstinence are similarly intertwined with socioreligious lifestyles. Michalak and Trocki (2006) describe the important social linkages between abstaining from alcohol and practicing Islam, demonstrating that Muslims may abstain as a means to refrain from problematic social situations caused by drunkenness in non-Muslim settings. The case of Muslim Somali immigrants to the United States (Decker, 2005) demonstrates that social and cultural solidarity for Somali and Sudanese Muslims in the United States is reinforced by collectively abstaining from certain foods or practices due to Islamic prohibitions, including pork and alcohol. Practices of abstinence can also be linked to headcovering, as demonstrated by the lawsuit that was brought against Disney by a female employee, Imane Boudlal. Imane sought to wear the headscarf on the first day of Ramadan—a time of abstinence and reflection in the Islamic calendar and a period of heightened religious ritual. Her request was summarily refused and she was ultimately fired for making it (Robinson, Franklin, and Hamilton, 2012). These considerations guide us to our first hypothesis: *We expect higher levels of religiosity are positively associated with the likelihood that our survey respondents wear the headcovering. However, active religious practices should be more strongly associated with headcovering than abstinence practices, largely because headcovering is a more active ritualized religious behavior.*

The literature also reveals that religious socialities play a key role in determining whether or not one wears a headcovering. As Read and Bartkowski (2000) note, the meaning of the headscarf is not inherent to the actual garment or fashion, but rather a product of cultural discourse and social interaction on multiple levels and across communities. Al-Huraiibi and Konradi's (2012) research also broadly confirms Mizra's (1999) earlier scholarship in which she finds no uniform style of dress across her sample, but discussed that style is largely governed by the localized and socialized interpretations of the headscarf as a garment of modesty, religion, or tradition. Similarly, McGinty (2014) discusses the primary role that

sociospatial context and processes play in wearing the headcovering, and a number of additional studies demonstrate that levels of religiosity among Muslim women are, in fact, contingent on public and private social networks (Ali, 2005; Hu et al., 2009), leading to our second hypothesis: *The stronger her social ties to a Muslim community, the more likely our survey respondent is to wear the headcovering.*

While ritualized and abstinence religious practices along with religious socialities are believed to encourage wearing the headcovering, other elements of sociality (like political networks) can play a more complex role. Headcovering has been linked to political activity in the United States through the increased awareness of Muslims in America in the post-9/11 context with the growing political emphasis placed on multiculturalism (Ali, 2005; Peek, 2005). Haddad (2007) argues that after 9/11, adolescents and young Muslim women donned the headscarf to publicly affirm their rights to freedom of religion and speech as part of their Muslim-American identity. Similarly, Badr (2004) reports her respondents asserting that wearing the cover after 9/11 stemmed from a belief that they could represent Islam more positively in a politically fraught environment.

While many studies find a positive association between formal political participation and wearing the headcovering (Hu et al., 2009; Williams and Vashi, 2007), the literature is not fully in consensus. As a point of contrast, Jalalzai (2011) found that Muslim women who had experienced discrimination due to their status as a visible minority in post-9/11 America became more active in politics, but that the discrimination created a context less amenable to wearing the headcovering in public. Karim (2009) found that some of her South Asian interview subjects were hesitant to cover for fear of being mistaken for Arabs in a fraught post-9/11 political climate as well as to prevent identification as “immigrants” (Karim, 2009:132–33). Similarly, Shirazi and Mishra (2010) found that many of their respondents suggested they had stopped covering because it did not encourage political discourse and activity, and instead rendered them invisible in the public and political sphere. Furthermore, while Islamic headcovering is often politicized in countries such as Turkey and France due to state regulation, in the United States the practice is not governed by state or national legislation, and is legally protected as a religious act. From the lack of consensus on the relationship between political activity and the headcovering and the sociopolitical pressures simultaneously encouraging and discouraging the practice, we derive the following third hypothesis: *We expect there to be no association between the political participation of our survey respondents and wearing the headcovering.*

## The Survey

To investigate the complex and interactive relationship between religiosity, social networks, and political participation, we conducted an online survey of 1,847 Muslim-American women from 49 states. While we owe much to the insights of the previous studies on the subject of the headscarf, the existing data on Muslim women’s motivations for wearing the headcovering have been largely obtained from focus groups and in-depth interviews, often through convenience samples (Ahmed, 2005; Ali, 2005; Cole and Ahmadi, 2003; Droogsma, 2007; Haddad, 2007; Hu et al., 2009; al-Huraibi and Konradi, 2012; Mishra and Shirazi, 2010; Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Williams and Vashi, 2007). We extend this research by administering an online survey to a larger and broader range of respondents. Study participants were recruited for our online survey via snowball sampling by contacting mosques, Islamic centers, Islamic organizations, Muslim Student Associations, and vendors of Islamic dress and headcoverings via email or online post across the

50 states in the summer and fall of 2012 (see Atkinson and Flint, 1997, 2001, 2002; for details on snowball sampling). A more detailed account of the respondent selection process may be found in Appendix A. The survey constitutes the largest online survey of Muslim women conducted exclusively on the topic of headcovering to date. The data generated from the survey allow us to unpack the different aspects of religious motivations behind the choice to cover for our respondents, and illustrate the complexities of the religious, social, and political factors underlying this practice.

Since we did not use probability sampling to recruit participants for our survey, it is important to highlight that our results are not “representative” and some key differences emerge in our sample demographics relative to the samples collected by a probabilistic method, like those of Pew and Gallup. Generally, the participants in our survey are slightly younger, more educated, more likely to be employed in part-time labor, and more likely to be U.S. citizens than the female participants of the aforementioned studies. In addition, African-American Muslims are significantly underrepresented in our survey, constituting only 8 percent of the sample. We suspect the bias in our sample is likely an artifact of recruiting through an online survey. Appendix C provides a discussion and illustration of our survey demographics compared with those of Pew.

We recognize that our sample may not align with the sociodemographic reality of Muslim women in the United States; however, its primary goal is to reveal the motivations for wearing the headcovering across a greater and more diverse sample of Muslim women than heretofore. While the academic and popular literature often makes broad generalizations or assumptions about why women cover, we hope to explicitly assess the relative impact of diverse elements of religiosity, society, and politics on the practice of covering within the United States.

## Measurement and Methodology

Hypothesis 1 predicts that our survey participants’ religiosity will be positively associated with wearing a headcovering, but that the magnitude of the relationship will depend on the active or passive nature of the religious practice. In order to test this hypothesis, we measure how often the participants eat pork, drink alcohol, perform daily prayers, fast during Ramadan, and go to the mosque.<sup>3</sup> We also include a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent is a convert to Islam (approximately 26 percent of our sample), since converts typically display high levels of religiosity (Pew Research Center, 2007).

<sup>3</sup>Our survey respondents are almost universally dedicated to some measured manifestations of Islamic practice. For example, 98.8 percent of respondents “Never” eat pork, 94.4 percent “Never” drink alcohol, and 87.7 percent fast during Ramadan. The respondents are less regimented about their personal practice of Islam, as 62.7 percent of our respondents report performing the daily prayers “Always,” and 20.1 percent report doing so “Frequently.” The only indicator that provides more variance in the level of religious commitment is mosque attendance; 44.8 percent of respondents indicated that they attend “Always” or “Regularly.” However, this behavior is not necessarily indicative of a lack of religious commitment because Islamic practice and culture has historically not required women’s mosque attendance, which is derived from certain interpretations of Islamic law that support confining women to the home except in the case of very specialized tasks. A 2009 Gallup survey also found that women attended mosques in the United States at higher rates than they do in Muslim-majority countries (Duin, 2009). As to possible concerns on the lack of variance across our religious indicators, the factors revealed from factor analysis converge across social (more variance) and religious variables (less variance), which results in greater variance in the emergent factors of Muslim socialization, religious lifestyle, and religious abstinence (see Appendices D and E). Furthermore, if variance was a concerted issue, our expectation would be to see a unitary religiosity factor emerge, which is not the case. Our data shows three different types of religious affect emerging, which demonstrates the underlying complexity of religiosity.

A number of the studies reviewed previously demonstrate that levels of religiosity among Muslim women are contingent on public and private social networks. Hypothesis 2 extends this logic and suggests that the strength of our respondents' social ties to the Muslim community should be positively associated with headcovering. We use a range of survey questions to measure the strength of Muslim social networks, including an additive measure capturing which female family members wear the Islamic headcovering. Our survey also asks that they indicate the proportion of their close friends who wear the headcovering as well as what proportion of close friends are Muslims. Finally, we include an indicator capturing the sociopolitical environment of respondents' formative years—a binary variable measuring whether their youth was spent in a Muslim-majority country.<sup>4</sup>

While Islamic headcovering is often politicized internationally, we expect the practice of covering is less formally politicized in the United States because it is not governed by state or national legislation, and hypothesize that the formal political participation of our respondents does not correlate with headcovering. We quantify our respondents' level of formal political participation with binary measures, indicating whether they identify with a political party and whether they voted in the 2012 presidential elections.<sup>5</sup>

Our control variables include standard demographic indicators such as age, education level, employment, U.S. citizenship, and marital status. We also include two controls for whether our respondents are Asian or African-Americans since these two ethnic groups, alongside Arabs, comprise the largest communities in the domestic Muslim population (Bowen, 2008; Mahmood, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2011; Scott, 2007; Wickham, 2002).<sup>6</sup> We use standard Census racial and ethnic identifiers to capture these distinctions. Because it is the largest group in our sample, we omit those respondents who identified themselves as "white" from the model and use them as the reference group for our analysis.<sup>7</sup> Finally, we incorporate a dummy variable controlling for whether our respondents were born in a foreign country to assess immigrant status and the strength of potential cultural influences from their place of birth. Appendix B illustrates the coding of all the variables included in the analysis, and the breakdown of our survey participant demographics is provided in Appendix C.

Our methodology engages two statistical techniques to investigate how and to what extent religiosity is associated with the practice of headcovering when compared to social or

<sup>4</sup>Up to 50 percent of our respondents have mothers who cover while an overwhelming 81 percent report a friend network where at least "Some" of their closest friends cover. Furthermore, 57 percent report that at least "Some" of their friends are Muslim. Finally, 26 percent of our sample spent their formative years in a Muslim-majority country.

<sup>5</sup>Up to 98 percent of our respondents identifying with a specific political party select the Democratic Party, thus we cannot distinguish specific party effects. Instead, we code for party affiliation generally, using a binary variable. While there are other ways to measure political engagement that capture political activity more broadly, such as attending rallies or campaigning for office (see Jamal, 2005), we chose to focus on electoral turnout and party identification as they have been operationalized in previous studies of Muslim-American political affect (see Barreto and Bozonales, 2009; Cho et al., 2006). Furthermore, our primary interest is to capture participant exposure to the political institutions of the United States and how that exposure might structure sociopolitical affect.

<sup>6</sup>African-American Muslims are significantly underrepresented in our survey, constituting only 8 percent of the sample. A comparison of the ethnic breakdown of our survey participants compared to the Pew samples can be found in Appendix C.

<sup>7</sup>This means that any interpretation of direction of the relationship between the ethnic variables and practices of headcovering will be made with reference to the white population, rather than as a general relationship. It is important to note that identifying oneself as "white" is not limited to a Caucasian conceptualization. The majority of Muslims from the Middle East and North Africa tended to describe themselves as "white" in the 2011 Pew survey (60 percent). Of the 589 people who identified themselves as "white" in our sample, 296 were born in the Middle East, and more may be Middle Eastern in heritage.

TABLE 1  
Principal Component Factor Analysis for Religious, Social, and Political Characteristics  
(Varimax Rotation)\*

Factor	1 Factor Loading	2 Factor Loading	3 Factor Loading	4 Factor Loading
Does not eats pork	-0.0085	-0.1195	<b>0.7322</b>	-0.0730
Does not drink alcohol	-0.0115	0.2682	<b>0.6765</b>	-0.0456
Fasts during Ramadan	0.2189	0.1710	<b>0.6693</b>	0.0737
Prays daily	0.1805	<b>0.5855</b>	0.4538	0.0418
Attends mosque	0.1021	<b>0.4584</b>	0.1981	0.3208
Friends wearing headcoverings	-0.0060	<b>0.8106</b>	0.0248	-0.0535
Muslim friends	-0.1051	<b>0.6417</b>	-0.0439	0.2203
Convert	<b>-0.8626</b>	0.0396	-0.0608	0.0100
Family wearing headcovering	<b>0.7704</b>	0.2497	0.0851	-0.0535
Youth in a Muslim country	<b>0.6364</b>	-0.0399	-0.0252	-0.1159
Political party affiliation	-0.0949	-0.0597	0.0074	<b>0.8138</b>
Voted in 2012 election	-0.0949	-0.0597	0.0074	<b>0.8241</b>
Factor 1: Muslim socialization				
Factor 2: Religious lifestyle				
Factor 3: Religious abstinence				
Factor 4: Formal political participation				

\*N = 721.

political factors. The first approach uses principal components factor analysis to investigate the way the religious, social, and political behaviors of our participants interact with and reinforce one another by statistically identifying how diverse elements of our survey respondents' attitudes cluster or correlate. Highly correlated variables load on factors. In doing so, the factors reveal the internal structure of the data by best describing the underlying variance of the data. We use principal component analysis in the interest of allowing our data to reveal how survey respondents conceive their religiosity, rather than assuming it through the creation of an indexed "religiosity" variable. Once the initial analysis of the data is complete, the factors are translated into mutually exclusive (i.e., uncorrelated) variables and included in a logistic regression predicting the odds of covering for the women in our sample. The dichotomous dependent variable in this analysis is derived from a survey question asking whether or not the survey respondents regularly wear an Islamic headcovering. Seventy-seven percent of 1,761 survey participants who answer this question indicate that they do wear an Islamic headcovering.

## Results

Table 1 displays the results of a principal component factor analysis of the independent variables in the full model (varimax rotation), while Appendix D exhibits the descriptive statistics for all of the variables included in the factor analysis.

The factor analysis produced four distinct factors. The ordering of the factors indicates the levels of variance accounted for by each factor, though all four factors display eigenvalues greater than 1, which suggests that all four factors should be retained for analysis according



to the Kaiser criterion (Kaiser, 1958). The relevant factors produced by the analysis in order of eigenvalue strength are as follows:<sup>8</sup>

1. Muslim socialization: The first factor captures indicators relating to Muslim socialization; namely, the number of family members who cover, whether the respondent spent her formative years in a Muslim-majority country, and whether the respondent is a convert to Islam (negatively correlated). This factor accounts for the largest total variance (11 percent) that is represented by all the variables included in the analysis.
2. Religious lifestyle: The second factor includes religiosity indicators relating to prayer, mosque attendance, and the proportion of the respondent's closest friends who cover as well as the proportion of Muslim versus non-Muslim friends in her social network. We call this the religious lifestyle factor because praying, attending mosque, and using religion as a selection mechanism for close friendship are all deliberative actions relating to religious life and building a Muslim community, and the social dimension of the factor extends it beyond religious ritualistic practices and into a more comprehensive measure of a religious lifestyle.
3. Religious abstinence: The third factor captures religiosity indicators relating to religious abstinence such as fasting during Ramadan and abstaining from pork and alcohol.
4. Formal political participation: The fourth factor contains the variables relating to political participation, including information on whether the respondent belongs to a political party and whether she voted in the 2012 presidential elections.

The factor loadings capture the complex and sometimes unexpected interactions of religious and social life. In particular, the indicators that are traditionally expected to measure religiosity or religious experience (refraining from pork and alcohol, fasting during Ramadan, praying, and attending mosque) load on two separate factors with one reflecting *religious lifestyle* and the other *religious abstinence*. *Religious lifestyle* encompasses the experiences associated with the day-to-day practice of religion like prayer and attending religious services. The proportion of friends who cover as well as the proportion of Muslim friends also loads onto *religious lifestyle*, suggesting the respondents who pray and attend mosque are likely drawing their social networks from Muslim communities.

The inclusion of the measures of *religious abstinence* in a factor that is distinct from the *religious lifestyle* factor capturing prayer, mosque attendance, and patterns of social engagement suggests that abstinence practices are empirically different. We argue religiosity associated with abstinence may function in a unique way because abstinence represents socially passive behavior (i.e., avoiding certain types of food), while prayer, attending mosque, and choosing certain patterns of social engagement require active and often social participation on the part of the believer.

Unlike the religious and social indicators, which load across two or more factors to varying degrees, the *political participation* indicators loaded exclusively on a single factor. This suggests that our respondents do not necessarily link their political practices with the other aspects of their religious and social lives and may compartmentalize political engagement in distinct ways.

We incorporate the four factors emerging from our initial factor analysis of the survey data in the logistic regression featured in Table 2. The regressions are further disaggregated into two models to better tease out the dynamics revealed by our ethnic control variables.

<sup>8</sup>When determining the factor a variable primarily loads on, it is generally important to look for the strongest loading across the retained factors, with 1 or -1 representing the strongest possible load.

TABLE 2  
Logistic Regression Model

Dependent Variable: Headcovering	Model 1 Coeff/(SE)	Model 2 Coeff/(SE)
Factor 1: Muslim socialization	0.313/(0.128)*	0.401/(0.146)*
Factor 2: Religious lifestyle	1.167/(0.117)*	1.181/(0.123)*
Factor 3: Religious abstinence	0.511/(0.099)*	0.552/0.093*
Factor 4: Political participation	-0.219/(0.106)*	-0.209(0.111)
Married	0.047/(0.241)	0.135/(0.251)
Employed	-0.437/(0.240)	-0.391/(0.074)
Education	-0.162/(0.071)*	-0.139/(0.074)
Student	-0.654/(0.344)	-0.756(0.363)*
Age	-0.001/(0.010)	-0.011(0.011)
Foreign born	-0.714/(0.255)*	-0.471/(0.269)
Black		1.268/(0.682)
Asian		-1.016/(0,231)*
Mixed race		0.513/(0.709)
Constant	3.450/(0.642)*	3.814/(0.708)*
	N = 719	N = 703
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.23	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.28

\* $p < 0.05$ .

The descriptive statistics for the factors and the control variables included in the logistic regression are detailed in Appendix E.

In both logistic regression models, three of the four factors are significantly associated with covering.<sup>9</sup> As expected, *Muslim socialization* is positively associated with covering, and the variance captured by the factor represents an increase in the probability of covering by 59.7 percent.<sup>10</sup> *Religious lifestyle* exhibits the strongest positive relationship with covering in terms of magnitude, increasing the probability that our respondents cover by 93.8 percent. This finding confirms expectations since for some Muslim women covering is a ritual embedded in daily religious life, much like prayer. The positive relationship between *religious abstinence* and the practice of headcovering suggests that those who abstain from alcohol, pork, and all food and drink during Ramadan are more likely to cover, and the full variance captured by the factor increases the probability of covering by 88.2 percent. These results mirror hypotheses 1 and 2, especially considering factors one and two are the product of both social and religious indicators working in tandem. However, contrary to our expectations in hypothesis 3, we find a statistically significant relationship between political activity and the likelihood of covering. Furthermore, our *political participation* factor is the only one that has a negative association with the likelihood of covering, and it is only significant in Model 1, which does not include the racial controls (the relationship between our political factor and covering approaches significance in Model 2,  $p = 0.08$ ). The direction of the relationship suggests that the more engaged our respondents are in the formal American political system, the less likely they are to cover. This significant

<sup>9</sup>The sample size drops to 719 and 703, respectively, because participants had the option to discontinue participation at any time during the survey and were not required to answer every question. For some survey questions, nearly a quarter of our respondents did not provide any information. Because our statistical models may only include data for respondents with observations for each included variable, the number of respondents in the statistical models is typically substantially lower than the maximum 1,847 respondents.

<sup>10</sup>All probabilities are estimated on Model 2, using CLARIFY software (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King, 2003).

relationship is particularly striking because the variables that compose *political participation* exclusively loaded on the one factor hinting that the respondent's political characteristics are distinct from other indicators of sociality and religiosity, and the political factor shares a unique relationship with headcovering, distinct from other forms of religious ritual.

Our control variables also reveal several intriguing relationships. In the first model, whether our respondents were born abroad has a negative association with the likelihood of covering. This potentially confirms Yang and Ebaugh's (2001) theory that second-generation citizens are more likely to embrace Islamic religiosity and covering as part of forging a distinct identity. However, the effect drops out once racial and ethnic controls are added in Model 2. Here, we see reporting oneself as "Asian" negatively associated with covering, compared to the reference category of "white," which includes Middle Eastern respondents. In our sample, identifying as "Asian" reduces the likelihood of covering by 16.5 percent. Those who identified themselves as "black" or mixed racial heritage are not statistically different from the "white" reference category, though the positive relationship between "black" and covering approaches significance ( $p = 0.06$ ), suggesting that the "black" Muslims in our sample may be more likely to cover than the "white" respondents. One possible explanation for these findings could be generational. As the first model shows, the foreign-born respondents are less likely to cover and 68 percent of our "Asian" sample was born abroad. Furthermore, other research in the North American context has shown that South Asian Muslims have only recently started to embrace covering as a more standard part of Islamic practice (Meshal, 2009).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Our results reveal the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of both Muslim-American women's religiosity and its influence on their practice of headcovering. The factor analysis provides statistical evidence for the multidimensionality of religiosity. The indicators of *religious abstinence* (Factor 3) cluster on a different factor from the indicators of religiosity that speak to *religious lifestyle* (Factor 2) suggesting that religious practices requiring believers to *execute* certain behaviors function differently from those practices requiring religious adherents to *refrain* from other behaviors. Measures of our respondents' *socialization* into Islam through their families or surroundings (Factor 1) also load on a unique factor. This factor captures elements of religious life that our respondents have no individual control over (i.e., the behavior of family, where they grew up). Furthermore, *religious lifestyle* and *Muslim socialization* converge on both social and religious indicators, ultimately reflecting a distinctly community-oriented religiosity, while *religious abstinence* captures a more private and perhaps individualized practice of the faith. In particular, elements of an individual's religious lifestyle extend beyond the more personal practices of prayer and worship into the selection of one's friend group, as measured by the proportion of our respondents' friends who wear the headscarf and the proportion of one's friend group who are Muslim. The inclusion of these social variables in *religious lifestyle* suggests that the selection of one's friend group is as much a religious activity as prayer or mosque attendance. The distinctions between *religious lifestyle* and *religious abstinence* may be in part a feature of the cultural and familial influence associated with lifestyle more than abstinence behaviors.

The difference between the *religious lifestyle*, *religious abstinence*, and *Muslim socialization* factors is further teased out through the logistic regression model testing the relative influence of religious, social, and political motivations for wearing the headcovering. While

the *religious abstinence* factor significantly increases the odds of covering, the magnitude of the relationship is weaker than it is for the *religious lifestyle* factor. We believe that while covering may be motivated by similar socioreligious reasons as abstinence, the different magnitudes of the factors suggest that it more strongly associates with the daily and somewhat routinized religious practices of prayer and mosque attendance, which connect our survey participants to Islamic social networks. The *Muslim socialization* factor also shares a significant relationship with covering, though it has the weakest magnitude of the three religious factors, suggesting that covering may be more an expression of individualized religious practice and self-chosen patterns of socialization as captured in the *religious lifestyle* and *religious abstinence* factors. Because all three religious factors significantly increase the odds of covering, our results suggest that multiple dimensions of religiosity simultaneously influence the choice to wear the headcovering.

Importantly, the political characteristics of our respondents cluster on a single factor. This finding indicates that our respondents' political behavior is systematically different from their religious and social behavior. Despite the exclusion of the political indicators from the social and religious variables, our *political participation* factor is significantly and negatively associated with covering in Model 1. This potentially confirms the contention by Ali (2005), Ahmed (2005), Haddad (2007), Moore (2007), and Peek (2005) that political affect may also impact the practice of covering. The statistical association between formalized politics and covering is somewhat surprising in the context of the United States, where covering has not been explicitly politicized through regulation, and where Muslim women are generally held to be less politicized than their counterparts in Europe and other global settings (Mahmood, 2005; Wickham, 2002). Importantly, the effect of political participation loses significance in the second model ( $p = 0.06$ ), which includes the control variables for racial groups.

In the second model, identifying as "Asian" is significantly and negatively associated with wearing the headcovering. The Muslim community is not uniform in its practice and embrace of the headcovering, which may signal cultural effects (as well as generational and immigrant effects), but could also hint at the specific use of the headscarf as a "distinguishing" identity marker. Asian Muslims are less likely to cover than their "white" counterparts, perhaps in a bid to more thoroughly assimilate into mainstream American culture. A substantial proportion of our sample was born abroad and may still face the pressures of being first-generation immigrants. The African-American community, on the other hand, feels marginalized by both American mainstream culture and the immigrant Muslim community (Elliot, 2007; Karim, 2009; McCloud, 1995). Perhaps embracing the headscarf is a way to further set themselves apart and elevate what is essentially a Muslim identity marker to an emblem of African-American Muslim group consciousness (see Wong, Lien, and Conway, 2005:557).

Ultimately, we find wearing the headcovering is a practice grounded in expressions of religious piety, while incorporating important social and political markers. Although covering is neither prohibited nor proscribed in the United States, the practice is influenced by the larger social and political context. Ali (2005) finds that peer groups impact the decision to cover and that the women who make this choice often turn to their Muslim friends to model good Islamic practice in a non-Muslim setting. In the United States "there is a new trend among younger Muslims to define collectively for themselves what it means to be a Muslim" (Ali, 2005:521). Our findings support these more subtly functioning political and social influences related to Muslim-American women's practice of headcovering in line with the work of Ahmed (2005), Moore (2007), and Haddad (2007). More importantly, our research also demonstrates that religiosity is not a monolithic factor. Factor analysis teases out the complexity of Muslim religiosity in the American context and the more

individualized versus socialized facets of Islamic practice from our survey respondents rather than assuming a singular expression of religiosity. Thus, our findings have important implications for conceptualizing the nuances of religiosity across other faiths, as well as parsing out when and where the political sphere interacts with socioreligious life in meaningful ways.

## Appendix A: Respondent Selection

This article uses data derived from an online survey we conducted in 2012 across 1,847 women in 49 states. We used a snowball sampling mechanism, which is a technique for finding research subjects by referral from one subject to the next.<sup>11</sup> We adopted snowball sampling as our recruitment mechanism due to the difficulty of accessing Muslim-American populations. The American Census has no clear estimate on how many Muslims currently live in the United States since it does not collect religious data. Statistics on the size of the Muslim-American population are usually garnered from privately and publicly administered surveys by organizations such as the General Social Survey (GSS), the Religious Landscape Survey by the Pew Research Group, the Gallup and newly IPSO Mori polling agencies, and many others with estimates ranging from between 2 to 7 million Muslims. In 2011, the GSS ventured there were approximately 1.2 million Muslims while the Pew Research Group calculated some 2.75 million in the United States. The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) put the number closer to 7 million.<sup>12</sup>

Participants were recruited for an online survey by contacting more than 1,300 mosques, Islamic centers, Islamic organizations, Muslim Student Associations, and vendors of Islamic dress and headcoverings via email or online post across the 50 states. An online solicitation requested they forward the email and the survey link to Muslim-American women. Potential survey participants were provided with a website link to an online survey.

Upon entering the survey via the link and consenting to be surveyed, participants were asked to identify themselves as either a Muslim man or Muslim woman. Only women were directed to the remainder of the survey. Survey participants were first led through a series of demographic questions, after which they were asked to agree or disagree with seven potentially controversial statements about covering one's head. They were then asked to identify whether or not they wear a headcovering. Twenty-two percent or 415 participants do not cover in our sample, while 77 percent or 1,416 of respondents wear the headcovering.<sup>13</sup> Those responding in the affirmative were directed to a number of questions about the practice of covering their head. Those who do not cover were directed to a series of questions about their personal history with the practice of headcovering. All respondents completed questions about the beliefs and practices of Islam and headcovering by friends and family members, and finished the survey with questions about their other Islamic practices. Questions about religiosity concluded the survey in order to avoid priming the responses to the earlier questions about headcovering.

Participants had the option to discontinue participation at any time during the survey. They were not required to answer every question. For some survey questions, nearly a

<sup>11</sup> Atkinson, Rowland, and John Flint (2001) and Heckathorn (1997, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Khan (2011) and Pew Research Center (2011).

<sup>13</sup> A total of 1,831 survey participants directly responded to the question on whether they do or do not cover. An additional 86 respondents completed the survey but did not answer this question.

quarter of our respondents did not provide any information. Because our statistical models may only include data for respondents with observations for each included variable, the number of respondents in the statistical models is typically substantially lower than 1,847. For example, the number of individuals with data complete enough to be included in the factor analysis is 721.

**Appendix B: Variable Coding**

Table B1 provides the coding for the variables presented in Tables 1 and 2. The variables for the factor analysis are above the solid line, and the control variables from Table 2 are below it.

**TABLE B1**  
Variable Coding

Variables	Survey Question	Coding
Does not eat pork	Do you eat pork?	0 = always 1 = frequently 2 = sometimes 3 = infrequently 4 = never
Does not drink alcohol	Do you drink alcohol?	0 = always 1 = frequently 2 = sometimes 3 = infrequently 4 = never
Fasts during Ramadan	Do you fast during Ramadan?	0 = never 1 = infrequently 2 = sometimes 3 = frequently 4 = always
Prays daily	Do you perform daily prayers	0 = never 1 = infrequently 2 = sometimes 3 = frequently 4 = always
Attends mosque	Do you go to the mosque?	0 = never 1 = infrequently 2 = sometimes 3 = frequently 4 = always
Friends wear headcoverings	How many of your closest friends wear Muslim headcoverings?	0 = none 1 = very few 2 = some 3 = nearly all 4 = all
Convert	If you converted to Islam, when did you convert?	1 = indicates a conversion date 0 = no conversion indicated

*Continued*

TABLE B1

continued

Variables	Survey Question	Coding
Family wearing headcovering	Does anyone in your family wear a Muslim headcovering?	Ranges from "0" = no family members wear a headcovering to "7" = at least one of each type of female family member wears a headcovering
Youth in Muslim country	Where did you live between the ages of 6 and 18? (Open response)	1 = youth spent in a country outside the United States 0 = youth spent in the United States
Political party affiliation	Which political party do you most often vote for?	1 = political party identified 0 = I do not consistently vote for a political party
Voted in 2012 election	Did you vote in the 2012 presidential election, or not?	1 = yes 0 = no
Age	In what year were you born?	Scale with age translated from year born
Education	What is the highest level of education you have completed?	Ranges from "0" = no schooling completed to "11" = doctoral degree
Married	What is your relationship status?	1 = married 0 = other
Foreign born	Where were you born? (Open response)	1 = born in a country outside the United States 0 = born in the United States
Student		1 = student 0 = other
Employed	Which of the following categories best describes your employment status (select all that apply)?	1 = employed, working 40 or more hours per week 1 = employed, working 1–39 hours per week 0 = other

*Continued*

TABLE B1  
continued

Variables	Survey Question	Coding
Black		1 = black or African American 0 = other
Asian	What racial or ethnic group or groups best describes you?	1 = Asian 0 = other
Mixed race		1 = multiple races 0 = other

**Appendix C: Comparison of Survey Respondent Characteristics to Those from Pew Surveys**

Although neither representative of the Muslim population generally nor conducted with a probability sample, our survey demographics compare favorably with the large-scale Pew surveys of Muslim Americans conducted in 2007 and 2011.<sup>14</sup> The large-scale Pew surveys of Muslim Americans provide a validity check for our survey sample. In 2007 and 2011, the Pew Research Center conducted interviews with, respectively, 1,050 and 1,033 Muslim American adults 18 years or older from a probability sample consisting of two sampling frames. Interviews were conducted by phone, and interview subjects were identified through random digit dialing (the list contained landlines for the 2007 survey, and landlines and cellular phones for 2011) and by recontacting self-identified Muslim households from previous Pew studies. The Pew surveys set appropriate demographic benchmarks because the Pew research design was careful to yield a probability sample, meaning that each adult in the United States had a known probability of being included in the sample, allowing for important statistical adjustments to make the sample representative. Pew estimates the sampling error of its interviews as  $\pm 5$  percent. We are able to isolate the female population for both studies. The 2007 study included 495 women out of 1,050 American-Muslim respondents. When the 2011 data set is released, we will be able to compare demographics of 495 American-Muslim women in 2007 with 461 women in 2011. In order to check the validity of our sample, Table C1 compares basic demographic information (age, education, employment, citizenship, marital status, and race) of our survey participants to information available to date of the nationally recognized 2007 and 2011 Pew Muslim American Studies surveys.

Generally, the participants in our survey are slightly younger, more educated, more likely to be employed in part-time labor, and more likely to be U.S. citizens than the female participants of the previous studies conducted by Pew. African-American Muslims are significantly underrepresented in our survey, constituting only 8 percent of the sample, which is not reflective of their size in the general population, nor in the Pew or Gallup Surveys of Muslims. Conversely, the size of the white and Asian populations in our sample is overrepresented compared to the Pew samples. Gallup maintains the most numerous ethnic group among Muslim Americans are African Americans (35 percent), while according to

<sup>14</sup>Pew Research Center. 2007. "2007 Muslim American Survey." Accessed January 16, 2014. <http://www.people-press.org/2007/05/22/2007-muslim-american-survey/> Pew Research Center. 2011. "2011 Muslim American Survey." Accessed May 26, 2015. <http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/2011-muslim-american-survey/>



TABLE C1

Comparison of Survey Participant Demographics to Pew Surveys from 2007 to 2011

	Our Survey	Pew 2007 Women	Pew 2007	Pew 2011 Women	Pew 2011
<b>Age</b>					
18–29	37 percent	24 percent	21 percent	26 percent	25 percent
30–39	29 percent	25 percent	24 percent	26 percent	23 percent
40–54	22 percent	35 percent	37 percent	30 percent	31 percent
≥55	12 percent	16 percent	18 percent	18 percent	21 percent
<b>Education</b>					
Graduate study	34 percent	20 percent	24 percent	18 percent	23 percent
College degree	32 percent	27 percent	27 percent	30 percent	28 percent
Some college	30 percent	23 percent	21 percent	20 percent	20 percent
HS graduate*	4 percent	21 percent	19 percent	33 percent	29 percent
Not HS graduate	1 percent	9 percent	8 percent		
<b>Employment</b>					
Employed full-time	20 percent	36 percent	51 percent	32 percent	48 percent
Employed part-time	32 percent	21 percent	17 percent	16 percent	15 percent
Not working	39 percent	42 percent	31 percent	51 percent	38 percent
<b>Family life</b>					
Married	61 percent	66 percent	67 percent	65 percent	65 percent
Committed**	6 percent			2 percent	2 percent
Divorced	4 percent	10 percent	7 percent	6 percent	6 percent
Separated	1 percent	3 percent	3 percent	2 percent	1 percent
Widowed	1 percent	4 percent	2 percent	5 percent	3 percent
Single***	25 percent	18 percent	21 percent	20 percent	23 percent
<b>Race</b>					
White	47 percent	36 percent	34 percent	32 percent	27 percent
Black	8 percent	18 percent	21 percent	16 percent	20 percent
Asian	39 percent	29 percent	30 percent	29 percent	31 percent
Other	7 percent	16 percent	16 percent	23 percent	23 percent
<b>Citizenship</b>					
U.S.	88 percent	68 percent	71 percent	77 percent	77 percent
Foreign born	48 percent	69 percent	73 percent	68 percent	72 percent

NOTE: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding, a refusal to answer, or a "don't know" response. \*In the 2011 Pew survey, the high school graduate and less than high school educational levels are combined into "High school or less."

\*\*In our survey, this response option is labeled "Engaged" or "In a committed relationship," while in the Pew 2011 Survey, this category is labeled "Living with partner."

\*\*\*In the Pew surveys, this category is labeled "Never married."

Pew the plurality (over 30 percent) of its respondents identified themselves as "white" both in 2009 and 2011.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, there is no clear consensus on the exact size of the specific ethnic groups underlying the Muslim-American population even across Pew and Gallup.

The differences in the demographic profile can be explained by several factors, the most important of which are likely attributable to the online survey method, which may not be equally accessible across all socioeconomic and generational strata in the Muslim-American survey population. Online survey distribution requires potential participants to have access to a computer and the Internet. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, populations under the age of 44 have wide access to the Internet, and Internet usage rises with both age and school enrollments as well as household incomes.<sup>16</sup> This makes our relatively young survey

<sup>15</sup>Hodges (2009) and Keeter (2009).

<sup>16</sup>U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

respondents likely to have accessed our survey through their educational networks and/or their socioeconomic positioning. For example, Muslim Student Associations provided frequent assistance in distributing our survey, leading to the overrepresentation of college-age survey participants.

### Appendix D: Descriptive Statistics from Factor Analysis

The descriptive statistics for the factor analysis presented in Table 1 are reported in Table D1.

TABLE D1  
Descriptive Statistics

	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Does not eat pork	1,694	3.982	0.187	0	4
Does not drink alcohol	1,691	3.915	0.389	0	4
Fasts during Ramadan	1,691	3.761	0.747	0	4
Prays daily	1,692	3.370	0.989	0	4
Attends mosque	1,701	2.336	0.945	0	4
Friends wear headcoverings	1,709	2.236	0.930	0	4
Convert	1,592	0.255	0.436	0	1
Family wearing headcovering	1,847	2.377	2.265	0	7
Youth in Muslim country	1,454	0.262	0.440	0	1
Political party affiliation	1,396	0.655	0.476	0	1
Voted in 2012 election	1,320	0.710	0.454	0	1

### Appendix E: Descriptive Statistics from Logistic Regression Analysis

The descriptive statistics for the control variables in the logistic regression model presented in Table 2 are reported here in Table E1.

TABLE E1  
Descriptive Statistics

	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Factor 1: Muslim socialization	889	0	1	-2.077	1.907
Factor 2: Religious lifestyle	889	0	1	-3.786	2.920
Factor 3: Religious abstinence	889	0	1	-10.511	1.260
Factor 4: Political activity	889	0	1	-2.596	1.622
Married	1,768	0.605	0.489	0	1
Employed	1,489	0.619	0.486	0	1
Education	1,777	7.778	1.723	0	11
Student	1,847	0.239	0.426	0	1
Age	1,733	34.070	11.509	18	75
Foreign born	1,495	0.479	0.500	0	1
Black	1,486	0.082	0.275	0	1
Asian	1,480	0.386	0.487	0	1
Mixed race	1,486	0.066	0.248	0	1

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