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# On the Psychodynamics of Wearing a Headscarf Among Young Muslim Women Living in Germany—New Heterogeneous Poles of Subjectivity

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## Abstract

The wearing of a headscarf and the veiling especially of the female face or the whole body is a universal phenomenon that occurs in different eras and in different regions and cultures. Today, wearing a headscarf has become a symbol of Islam, especially in Western countries, and is often met with Islamophobic rejection. In our study, using a qualitative interview, we questioned 25 young Muslim women of Turkish origin (between 18 and 25 years old,  $n=25$ ) living in Germany about their reasons for wearing or not wearing a headscarf and their experiences on account of this decision. The majority ( $n=16$ ) of the predominantly academically educated female participants do not wear a headscarf, primarily for reasons of female attractiveness, an internalized religiosity, and as an expression of the disintegration of the family hierarchy. All female respondents ( $n=7$ ) from families with divorced parents do not wear headscarves, while for the other female respondents ( $n=9$ ) who do not wear headscarves, the family seems to have a more liberal mindset. Reasons for wearing a headscarf are especially a religious attachment to Islam, fashionable self-confidence, and the wish to combine Western emancipation with the traditional dress code (in the form of a hybrid identity). These findings are considered against the background of a psychoanalytic reading of the Quranic suras on veiling (according to F. Benslama) and the Lacanian dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic phallus. The diversity of personal reasons can be described with the concept of a heterogeneous subjectivity, which arises from the clash of Western secular and Turkish-Islamic notions.

**Keywords** Headscarves · Veiling · Islam · Migration · Imaginary phallus · Symbolic phallus

## Introduction

Today, about 4.5 million Muslims live in Germany, who make up 5.5% of the total population (Migration Report of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2015, no more recent survey). Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were close political and military ties between Turkey and Germany. After World War II, however, the focus was on economic and trade relations (Boos-Nünning & Karakasoglu, 2004, p. 73ff.). Labor migration from Turkey on a larger scale began with the bilateral recruitment agreement in 1961. The immigration of Muslim workers is also reflected in the fact that Islam is now the third largest denomination in Germany, after Catholicism and Protestantism. The Turkish migration generations living in Germany have different motives. Within the first generation, it was economic stability, while within the second generation, the primary interest was social and economic advancement. Our participants usually represent the (second or) third generation, for whom themes of identification and integration are of central importance. In comparison to other non-Turkish Muslim women in Germany, the practices of headscarf-wearing among Turkish Muslim women reflect a distinct cultural and historical context. Turkish German communities trace their roots to mid-twentieth century guest worker programs and subsequent family migration, shaping a unique socio-cultural identity. Noteworthy is the contemporary shift in migration dynamics, with third generation Turkish Germans displaying evolving perspectives on integration. The decline in importing Turkish wives for Turkish German men signifies changing attitudes towards maintaining traditional cultural norms. Importantly, a growing acceptance of a diasporic Turkish German identity is observed in response to Germany's evolving societal landscape. The study focuses on northern (West) Germany, where Turkish Germans are notably concentrated, providing insights distinct from other regions and contributing to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dynamics within this community. Further, it is evident that a close connection to family structures can reduce the possibilities for social integration (Erdheim, 1992). The inner dilemma that arises from this is neither being able to live up to family expectations, nor to the expectations of German society. This balancing process leads to an inner struggle, which is often mentioned. The decision regarding veiling or unveiling leads to new perspectives on that inner struggle. Furthermore, it seems important to mention that there is a significant difference between the regions of origin and the proportion of women wearing headscarves. Our study only presents participants from a Turkish background. According to a study conducted by the German government, in comparison only 7% of Muslim women coming from Southeastern Europe wear a headscarf (Pfündel et al., 2021). With a share of 47% and 46%, respectively, Muslim women from the regions of origin of North Africa and the Middle East wear a headscarf disproportionately often, followed by Muslim women from the Middle East (40%). Contrary to other countries in Europe, some federal states in Germany have introduced an official headscarf ban for teachers at schools and universities. In addition, there is a so-called "burka ban" in public institutions in some federal states. In addition, since

2017, it has been forbidden to wear a face veil when driving. There is no general headscarf ban in Germany. The legality of wearing a headscarf in various German social institutions differs from other Western European countries like France. Unlike France, Germany generally allows headscarves in public spaces and institutions, acknowledging the right to religious expression. Protections for headscarf-wearing women stem from Germany's commitment to religious freedom and anti-discrimination laws. The notion of "integration" into German society is evident among migrants and members of minoritized communities. Some interviewees internalize this concept when discussing their decisions about headscarf-wearing, aligning their choices with perceptions of integration. This reflects a complex interplay between personal identity, religious expression, and societal expectations within the context of Germany's evolving cultural landscape.

In the context of the experience of integration, an internal and external experience of integration can be differentiated. In the face of healthy early childhood, development experience of integration matures, which puts a stop to everyday frustrations and creates reassurance. From the point of view of young Muslims, an experience of social integration has increasingly proven to be difficult in recent years. In German society, xenophobia and discrimination are more frequent and openly more aggressive.

The covering of the human face, the crown, or the hair, even the whole body, seems to have a temporally and territorially universal dimension. Various authors within social sciences have already been able to identify motives regarding wearing or not wearing the headscarf. Religious motives have been identified by Ahmed (2011) and Elver (2012), who explored the religious significance of wearing the headscarf, highlighting how it can be a manifestation of faith and religious identity. Cultural and societal motives were explained by Ciftci (2012) and Gök and Altınay (2015) researching the influence of cultural and societal norms on headscarf-wearing as well as illustrating how it can be a reflection of cultural heritage and social expectations. The intersection of gender and headscarf-wearing was emphasized by Scott (2007) and Tønnessen (2015), who discussed the headscarf as a symbol of empowerment, challenging gender norms and expressing agency. The political and social dimensions of headscarf-wearing have been investigated by scholars like Ahmed (2011) and Gök and Altınay (2015), highlighting how it can be associated with political ideologies, social movements, and debates on secularism and religious freedom. The individual motivations and personal choices behind headscarf-wearing have been explored by researchers like Ciftci (2012) and Tønnessen (2015), recognizing that individuals may have diverse reasons such as personal beliefs, fashion preferences, or a desire for modesty. Further, wearing a headscarf can serve various functions depending on the location and context. It may be due to religious reasons, political implications, practical simplifications, or a social affiliation, even though our introduction only includes the first two categories. Therefore, specifications for the covering and veiling of women as well as men can be found in almost all world religions: in Judaism, it is the *tichel* or *mitpachat*; in Hindu traditions, the *sari*; among the Sikhs, the *dastar*; in Islam, the *hijab*; and in Christianity, the *veil*. The covering of the hair seems to have a similar function in all religious traditions, even if it is weighted differently: the headscarf or the veil is supposed to indicate

reverence for the divine, moral modesty, personal respectability, or membership of a social group.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the veiling of the head is related to the significance of the human head, which acts as the “carrier of the brain” and as the seat of the life and soul forces (Şahin, 2014). In Islamic scriptures, a veil of light separated Adam and Eve from the mutual perception of their gender, and only when they tasted the forbidden fruit did this veil of light lift and they discovered their nakedness. From that moment on, clothes were necessary (sura 7). Benslama (2015, p. 133–135) sees in this a typical triad (“veiled, unveiled, veiled again”) that structures the Islamic theology of the veil. On the Arabian Peninsula, the veil or headscarf was already part of the female dress code in pre-Islamic times, i.e., before the seventh century. In Islamic tradition, there are now various narratives in which the veil or headscarf occupies a theologically prominent position:

That year, leaving the mountain, Muhammad went to Khadija and said: ‘Oh Khadija, I am afraid I am going mad.’ –‘Why?’ she asked. ‘Because’, he said, ‘I see in myself the signs of the possessed. When I walk along the road, I hear voices from every stone and every hill; and at night I see a giant being being in front of me in my dreams, a being whose head reaches the sky and whose feet touch the earth; I do not know it and it approaches me in order to take me [ . . . ]. Khadija said to him: ‘tell me if you see such a thing’ [ . . . ]. One day, when he was together with Khadija at his house, Muhammad said: ‘Oh Khadija, this being is appearing to me, I see it.’ Khadija approached Muhammad, sat down, pressed him to her chest and said: ‘do you still see it?’ –‘Yes,’ he said. Then Khadija uncovered her head and her hair and said: ‘Do you see it now?’, ‘No’, said Muhammad. Khadija said: ‘Rejoice, it is not a demon but an angel’.

(Benslama, 2009, p. 207)

Benslama (2009, p. 207 et seqq.) asks: What does this scene reveal? His answer is: nothing other than that in Islam the story of truth begins with the unveiling of a woman. An angel speaks to the prophet and announces God. But Mohammed fears that he is crazy. He cannot believe what he hears and sees. Only when his wife uncovers her hair, proving that it was an angel Muhammad had beheld, is faith established in this divine fact. For the angel withdraws because he, in his divine angelhood, must avoid the sight of Khadijah’s hair. A demon, on the contrary, would not have withdrawn and would not have respected the intimacy of this scene. This angel—it is the angel Gabriel who teaches the Quran, is the divine “truth” that hides from the unveiling of the woman. But the withdrawal, according to Benslama, functions precisely as a confirmation of the truth. Thus, the woman’s situation seems to be originally tied to the condition of “not seeing” of the divine, the truth: “So while

<sup>1</sup> In ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire, upper-class women wore a veil over their hair as a sign of propriety (Hase, 1979). While this custom was temporarily relaxed in the secular Augustan Empire, the wearing of the veil or headscarf became more common again with the spread of (Pauline) Christianity. But men also wear headscarves, albeit less frequently: practicing Sikh men wear the so-called “dastar” to cover the “dasam duar” (“tenth gate”), which is a spiritual energy center located in the area of the vertex (Singh, 2010). The turban, according to the Sikh self-image, expresses worldliness, freedom of belief, nobility, and respect for creation (Uberoi, 1996). In the Arab world, men often wear a kufiya, which is used today primarily as a political symbol, e.g., for Palestinian autonomy.

the woman believes what she does not see, the man does not believe what he sees. He must therefore come to believe through her" (Benslama, 2009, p. 218). When the woman unveils herself, the angel of truth flees. She must wear a veil so that truth can be present: the woman, Benslama says, seems to have a negativity that can prove the truth of the other. She is the truth and the lack of truth, and between them is the veil. The lack of truth: she does not see what the prophet sees. The truth: she recognizes (for Muhammad) the angel by revealing herself. Thus, only the woman gives the man the certainty of judgment regarding truth and lie, angel and demon. Benslama (2009, 2017, p. 208) speaks of a "scene of de-monstration." Only through Khadijah does the certainty of God open up for Muhammad. However, Benslama emphasizes here an essential change of position that takes place in this narrative: the woman who helps the Prophet to believe becomes a person who has to believe in the Prophet. "Veiled, unveiled, veiled again," these are the three "female action elements" in Islamic theology (Benslama, 2017, p. 209): originally (i.e., pre-Islamic) veiled, then unveiled to reveal divine truth, and veiled again through the social order of a theology of that original truth. This is the way which leads to the veil commandment. Man is transformed from a doubter of his reason ("Am I crazy?") to a theological reasoner, and in turn, the woman appears as a being who suddenly "lacks reason and religion" (Benslama, 2017, p. 211). From the imaginary splendor ("the imaginary phallus"), from which the angels of heaven turn away their faces, the status of the woman changes to the status of the symbolic phallus, in which the veiling equates to a symbolic "castration," which is founded in law.<sup>2</sup>

Benslama (2009, 2015, p. 137) elaborates on this changeable development by means of two further stories: the first is about the so-called "Aisha affair": Aisha is considered Muhammad's favorite wife, whom he jealously accuses of having an affair (when she went for a walk in the desert at night). Subsequently to this story, the strict demarcation between public and private life developed. Social contact was heavily regulated for women, including the circle of people to whom they were allowed to show themselves at all. Another regulation was issued after Muhammad married the wife of his adopted son. Benslama (2009) speaks here of the "scandalous affairs in the first Muslim community": when the Prophet entered the house of his adopted son Zayd one day without being noticed, he met his wife Zainab (one of Muhammad's cousins)—who, according to tradition, was evidently only lightly dressed. He is stunned and falls in love. It is said that Zayd, his adopted son whom Muhammad had freed from slavery, was well aware of both the Prophet's wish and God's intention and immediately divorced his wife. God not only authorized the marriage to the Prophet but also had the angels celebrate it. Nevertheless, a prohibition was now issued that Muhammad was not allowed to take any more wives (in the 5th sura of the Quran). At the same time, adoption was forbidden as an anti-Islamic practice. On the one hand, these genealogical maneuvers eliminated all the

<sup>2</sup> There is a third thing in common with "phallus." Phallus is a faculty that can be unrestricted or restricted, unlimited or limited. In Lacanian terminology, the unrestricted faculty is called "imaginary phallus," and the restricted faculty is called "symbolic phallus." The restriction occurs through the linguistic, i.e., symbolic law. The level of subjectivation of the imaginary phallus is narcissism; the level of subjectivation of the symbolic phallus is the oedipally structured object relation.

complaints made against the Prophet; on the other, however, the law countered the root of the risk by extending the veiling requirement to *all* wives and daughters of the faithful in the aforementioned 5th sura. Thus, mandatory veiling went hand in hand with the prohibition of incest (Benslama, 2009; Benslama, 2017, p. 212). The veil or headscarf became a symptom that both blocked and publicly expressed the realization of Oedipal wishes or Oedipal desire. From this perspective, the veil commandment was both a kind of written down paragraph of paternal laws and an expression of maternal laws (in the form of castration), which tradition passed on by example. It could therefore be said that the three referential founding scenes of Islam, as far as veiling is concerned, have the following themes<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) Justification of the (male faith) in God (“Khadijah scene”): at the moment of unveiling, the woman becomes an “imaginary,” i.e., perfect “phallus,” unlimited in its power (insofar as one is willing to apply the term “phallus” to a woman, cf. footnote 2).
- 2) The woman as a possession of the man (“Aisha affair”): through submission to the law, the woman becomes a “symbolic” phallus (“symbolic” means that a submission to the law takes place, and there is a restriction of assets).
- 3) The woman as a forbidden (incestuous) object (“Zainab episode”): here, too, it is about the status of the symbolic phallus.

Through these regulative founding gestures (especially sura 33, cf. Pape, 2005), “the edges of the veil closed over women” (according to the Quranic expression). Islamic veiling was then regulated by law from the ninth century onward. Gender relations in general are defined primarily in the work of the cleric Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Ġazzālī at the beginning of the twelfth century: sexuality was regulated here primarily by certain rules of conduct such as gender segregation and the said mandatory veiling (Mernissi, 1987).<sup>4</sup> In terms of its basic tone, female sexuality was perceived as a threat to the male order: “The association of sexuality with chaos went on to become the guiding idea in Islamic theological gender discourse” (Schneider, 2011, p. 18). The female body was therefore associated with displaying what was taboo, because the veiling meant both an avoidance (“taboo”) and an emphasis (“display”) of the feminine.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan refers to a veil that is located in front of the real of each individual, making it difficult to consciously perceive truths (Lacan, 2021, p. 155–157). Consequently, the question of such a veiling mechanism that protects from truth (thus, let us think of the Qur’anic foundational scenes that Benslama (2009, 2015) highlights: from the truth of God, from the truth of being female, from the truth of incestuous desire) is addressed to all of us.

<sup>4</sup> Traditional patterns in the upbringing of Turkish girls persist to this day, both in Turkey and in Germany: for example, girls are much more regimented in terms of personal leisure time. They orient them more to families than to society (Toprak, 2019, among others). The educational goals of Muslim families relate to their cohesion, especially in foreign countries or against the background of migration (Atabay, 1998), as well as to the professional success of the children (Kelek, 2008). Accordingly, Muslim girls in educational institutions predominantly conform; they are inconspicuous and successful (Toprak, 2019).



From an Islamic theological perspective, veils and headscarves are not symbols, even though they may be involved in further symbolic processes. The Western debate, according to Benslama (2009), is heading in completely wrong direction when it treats veils and headscarves as religious symbols. In Christianity, the crucifix, for example, may be a sign (or a symbol). In the case of the veil or the headscarf, it is rather a matter of a theological logic, which as the first step of an altogether threefold operation refers to the factual handling of the female body. This is followed by a second thought: the veil always supports that which negates the female body. On the other hand, femininity is particularly emphasized by this very negation. Through this negating process by means of veiling, the woman is elevated to something “forbidden-sacred,” i.e., she is brought into the sphere of an ideality that at the same time retains a sensual existence: the veil makes the woman to a symbol of a sensual ideality (“sentient ideality”). Through this dual process, through the use of a material means, and through its indicative-negative effect (analogous to Freudian negation), the woman herself becomes a spiritual symbol: she becomes a complex symbol with the emblem of the veil used for practical reasons. The veil or headscarf, Benslama argues, is not itself a symbol (as the West understands it) but acts in the service of a commandment that creates a symbol in its normative negativity. The headscarf is merely a material support of this symbolism, which makes the woman, by wearing this headscarf, an “imaginary phallus” (i.e., a spiritual symbol). However, the headscarf makes the woman a “symbolic phallus”—and this is the third step—in that her power and attractiveness—based on the authority of scripture—are limited. From this point of view, the headscarf is not a tool of spirituality but an instrument of social suppression. Benslama adheres to a liberal, secular tradition that is considered too one-sided. For example, Massad (2009) criticizes the transformation of psychoanalytic ideas into a normative identity that is clearly oriented towards Western secular liberalism. From this point of view, the wearing of a headscarf could be understood above all as (Muslim) resistance against this Western, secular, and liberal normativity, i.e., as resistance or rebellion against an “adult authority” that represents “reasonable and normative” ideas (Massad, 2009, p. 204).

With the rise of laicist Kemalism, there was a state-initiated change in gender relations in Turkey that was intended to lead to greater equality. Important Muslim intellectuals had paved the way for this change: Qāsim Amīn, for example, published his groundbreaking book *The Liberation of Women* as early as 1899, which called for both the modernization of Egypt and comprehensive equality for women in terms of marriage and divorce rights, the practicing of a profession of their own, and the abolition of polygamy and veiling (Wöhr, 2019). Subsequently, women also publicly advocated their rights. In 1923, for example, the Egyptian Hudā Shaʿrāwī took off her veil in full view of the public. This attempt at secularization also envisaged a ban on headscarves (Göztepe, 2004): consequently, in Kemalist Turkey, Atatürk banned the wearing of the headscarf under the threat of the death penalty, which met with considerable resistance, especially from the female, rural population. The state-initiated “unveiling” was seen by some as a violation of personal integrity and—especially by groups critical of the government—as an exercise of colonial power. The conservative AKP, which is in power today, has in turn abolished the



ban on female head coverings in state institutions (Toprak, 2019).<sup>5</sup> This ambivalence towards the headscarf is also evident in feminist literature: within various feminist movements in Islam, the headscarf is understood as both a symbol of oppression and a symbol of freedom (Schneider, 2011).<sup>6</sup> In this respect, even within feminist movements, as well as in Turkish history and society in general, there is a multitude of attitudes towards the headscarf, which we would like to call, along with Guattari, 2014, p. 15), “heterogeneous poles of female subjectivity.”

This research deals with the experiences regarding the headscarf that young Turkish Muslim women living in Germany, i.e., at the intersection of two cultures, report to us.

We are interested in the meanings attributed to the wearing of a headscarf<sup>7</sup> and to what extent these experiences and attributions of meaning could contribute to a heterogenesis of female subjectivity. In the context of Benslama’s presentation, in our study design as well as its analysis, our framework is determined by the dialectic of the imaginary and symbolic phallus. As another important term, we will introduce the concept of single traits into this dialectic within the framework. In this respect, the background of our study predominantly reflects the Lacanian conception of psychodynamic processes in society.

## Methodology

### Sample and Study Design

In summer and fall 2018, we conducted a total of 50 research interviews with Turkish Muslims between the ages of 18 and 25 as a cross-sectional study. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Lübeck on 10.10.2017. The entire group consisted of 25 male and 25 female participants

<sup>5</sup> But even in the Christian West, the veiling of women, which St. Paul already demanded in drastic terms, remained the norm. Thus, until 1983, Catholic canon law stipulated that women had to wear a head covering during mass. For the papal audience, the protocol still requires a so-called “mantilla.” The bridal veil has survived to this day, partly in more rural areas, but also as a fashionable accessory at aristocratic weddings (<https://www.vogue.de/mode/artikel/prinzessin-diana-brautkleid-hochzeitsschleier-faszinierende-geschichte>).

<sup>6</sup> Fatima Mernissi published the book *Beyond the Veil* as early as 1975, in which she advocated the position of a Muslim feminism. Katajun Amirpur published books such as *The Muslimization of Muslims* (2011) and *Rethinking Islam. The Jihad for Democracy, Freedom and Women’s Rights* (2013). Amina Wadud argues on the basis of the Quran for equality for women both within the family and in the exercise of religious functions (see Wöhr, 2019), for example, in the works *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (1999). Seyran Ates’s engagement includes the writings “Islam Needs a Sexual Revolution: An Argument” (2016).

<sup>7</sup> In Turkish, the designation of the headscarf changes between generations: Women of the older generation tend to use the term *Başörtü* (Baş = head, Örtü = cloth). The younger generation of Turkish women uses the word “hijab.” They also refer to themselves as “hijabi.” Although “hijab” is an Arabic word, it is now integrated in the Turkish language usage. We would like to thank Mr. Necip Yurddas, Essen, for this communication.

**Table 1** Sociodemographic description of the total sample

	Female participants	Male participants
Gender (female, male, diverse)	Female	Male
Age	22.2 (SD=2.12)	22.40 (SD=1.76)
Enrolment at university	19	21
Job (working full time)	6	4
Relationship	11	11
Married	3	3
Children	0	3
Religious background	Islam	Islam
Migration background	Turkish	Turkish
Second generation	20	18
Third generation	5	7
Wearing headscarf	9	0
Not wearing headscarf	16	0
Total	25	25

This table demonstrates the total sample. In the following explanations of our study, only the sample of 25 heterosexual female participants is used. No participant declared themselves diverse

(see Table 1). Concerning this entire sample, our research question was concerned with identity formation and integration experience of young Muslims in the context of gender differences and changing values. In order to achieve the broadest possible social stratification of the sample, we attempted to acquire our subjects both at the university and in Islamic communities, associations, and counseling centers in northern Germany. However, we encountered a reluctance towards our project in Islamic institutions. Only one Islamic community had agreed that members of the community could participate in the study. Despite our efforts to achieve social stratification, nearly three quarters of the participants were students. These unfortunate recruitment difficulties among Turkish migrants are considered quite typical (see Rau et al., 2020).

The following analysis deals exclusively with data of the subsample of 25 female participants (as indicated in Table 1), as we were concerned about the motives of wearing a headscarf. The average age is 22.2 (SD=2.12) for female participants. A minimum residency of 5 years in Germany was mandatory. If the participants were born in Germany, they belong to either the second or third generation of migrants. A Turkish background was described for all parents of the subjects. The sociodemographic data show that 19 participants in our study are enrolled in a university, while 6 participants report being employed full time. When asked about their relationship status, 11 participants report being in a relationship, and 3 participants of this group were already married. Twenty-four of all partners share a Turkish background of first, second, or third migrant generation. One partner lives in Turkey; therefore, no migratory background exists. None of the female participants reported having children, even though one participant told about an abortion in the past.

Exclusion criteria were clinically relevant acute psychotic and/or brain-organic symptoms as well as a residency of less than 5 years, or migration from a Muslim-influenced country to Germany after the age of 15.

A qualitative interview guide was designed to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Gläser and Laudel (2009) explain an essential structuring as well as a necessary openness to be important “for the comparability of findings” (Averbeck-Lietz & Meyen, 2016). The structure of the interview allowed an alternation between structured, explorative-observational, and psychodynamic, narrative-interpretative conversation passages. The participants interviewed were not asked about their knowledge of the history behind the emergence of veiling in Islam and how it influenced their own decision-making. The interviews were audio-documented, transcribed, and imported into the software program ATLAS.ti.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

Structural and open codes were designed, and ideas and observations were recorded in memos during the analysis process. The process was continuously supervised. The structural codes (SC) were derived from social science theory. These were deductively created even before the interviews were coded. During the data analysis of the first ten interviews, open codes (OC) were developed inductively, derived from the respondents’ statements. All codes were described in a codebook with definitions and anchor examples. The additional 40 interviews of the total sample ( $n=50$ , including men and women) were coded using this codebook. Using “memo writing,” all ideas, associations, and mini theories were recorded in *ATLAS.ti* during the coding process (cf. Glaser & Holton, 2004). In the present study, we examined in more detail text segments of our subsample of 25 female participants that were marked with the code “headscarf” ( $n=152$ ). We further included text segments that had been coded with “father” ( $n=320$ ), “mother” ( $n=353$ ), or “family” ( $n=288$ ). Interrater reliability (agreement between two raters) was calculated using the statistical measure “Krippendorff’s alpha.” The codes showed excellent interrater agreement ( $\text{cu-}\alpha=0.99$ ). In addition to qualitative analysis, we present individual case studies to clarify specific psychodynamic aspects. Further explanation of the methodology can be found in Barth et al. (2022). In addition, when designing and analyzing our data, we incorporated the qualitative quality criteria outlined by Steinke (2000), which include intersubjective comprehensibility, an indication of the research process, empirical anchoring, limitation, coherence, relevance, and reflected subjectivity. These criteria further enhance the rigor and reliability of our qualitative analysis. The current paper endeavors to contribute to the symbolism of headscarf-wearing through the utilization of psychoanalytic interpretations of qualitative research methodologies. This approach does not adhere to hypothesis testing; instead, it constitutes an exploratory contribution. Within the confines of our specific sample, it is capable of addressing only one facet of the ongoing discourse surrounding headscarves.

## Results

### Expressions of the Muslim Women Who Do Not Wear Headscarves

The majority of the female respondents ( $n=16$ ) had decided against wearing a headscarf. Nevertheless, the wearing of the headscarf also plays a significant role in these interviews, especially in the explanations of why someone had decided against wearing a headscarf and what personal and social consequences this decision had.

#### Attractive Femininity

The narrative of the participant Ms. A. shows that she consciously wants to stand by her femininity by taking off her headscarf.

I said to my mom: I don't want the headscarf, I would also like to make my hair beautiful, I would also like to make myself more beautiful. So that I then, I think, burst at some point and then said, I don't want that anymore. Whereby the mom then of course said no, do not do that. Yes, well, it was very difficult. On the first day, when I didn't wear it anymore, I went outside with a friend to get used to it a bit. On the second day, I went to a soccer game in our town, where everyone saw me, of course, and that evening my mom was really pissed off and said that it didn't have to be that way... well, she felt a bit strange, it seemed to her as if my dad's family was saying, so to speak, that you don't have your girls under control... which I can understand, of course. But at some point also, so with age comes that, where you can make your own decisions, I think.

The respondent shows her hair at the edge of the soccer field, and the eroticism of the scene seems to be unmistakable: she shows herself to "all" people, including the men on the sports field. About her family, she reports how important their cohesion was to her, especially because the family had broken up in a crisis. The parents' marriage was arranged. The mother was openly rejected by her mother-in-law. The mother demanded that her own family move out—that was the first crisis—and in the end, she had prevailed with her emancipation proposal. When the father entered into an outside relationship, divorce ensued. The mother, herself religious, then raised the children alone. She herself is mainly "pissed off" about her daughter's decision because she fears the judgmental opinion of others.

#### Internalized Religiosity

Some of the female subjects detach wearing a headscarf from religious and moral ideas. They mostly talk about headscarf-wearing in an ambiguous, open, and non-judgmental way. For example, Ms. B says:

In our family, we are very diverse, some wear a headscarf, some don't... my grandfather always said quite honestly, if you want to wear a headscarf, then do it, but then

do it with decency. And if you want to be open, then be open, but with decency. So no matter what you do, do it with decency and everything is okay.

Ms. B. sees herself as a “cosmopolitan,” “determined” woman. In religious terms, she experiences above all her grandfather as a liberal “mentor” who conveyed to her that someone can decide in all freedom for or against religion. For Ms. B., Islam means “tolerance and respect and, above all, inner peace,” and this regardless of whether a woman wears a headscarf. Ms. B. is also a “child of divorce.” She experiences her mother as a strong woman (“such a real lion mom”), and her relationship with her father is much more distant (“not so sparkling”) since he remarried.

### **The Open Hair as a Protest/Rebellion**

Ms. C. also reports that at some point, her parents no longer understood each other and therefore separated. She experiences the removal of the headscarf as a “rebellion” against the (broken) world of her parents; she says that since then, she has had “dizzy spells,” which only improved when she took medication:

At some point my parents no longer got along. So I think an important fact in the whole thing is communication, which is very important in family life and it was communicated too rarely. At some point, an act of defiance actually began to turn into a rebellion: I decide this myself and if I have decided it, everyone has to accept it and respect it. I don’t wear a headscarf as you can see.

### **Among the Families of the Subjects Who Do Not Wear Headscarves**

Almost half of these female subjects ( $n=7/16$ ) come from divorced families. The shattering of the familial-patriarchal structure thus seems to create a free space in terms of lifestyle (even if this is perhaps accompanied by psychosomatic symptoms, such as the bottomlessness of vertigo). In the families in which the parents were not separated or divorced, but the daughters did not wear a headscarf, the parents or the fathers were rather liberal-minded, open to Western society—or the fathers were afraid of the discrimination of their daughters that could accompany the wearing of a headscarf. Against the backdrop of a fading of the “name of the father” (Lacan, 2017), whether due to the absence of father figures or due to (religious) liberality, the daughters are given more leeway with regard to wearing a headscarf, whether they take it off to show their femininity (by means of the openly worn hair), or because religiosity has been internalized—in an act of protestatism, as it were—or whether they understand taking off the headscarf as a gesture of protest.

### **Case Study of a Female Participant Not Wearing a Headscarf: Ms. C**

The participant describes how important family cohesion is to her:

It has always been the case that my family has stood behind me and supported me, and at the points where I said, now I can’t do it anymore, now it’s really

hard for me, they were the ones who picked me up and said, come on, you've accomplished so much up to this point, we can do this together, and I just believe that if it weren't for my family, I probably wouldn't be at this point today.

Both parents are academics, and the participant has a sister who is 5 years older. The older sister was always raised in a "tougher" way. The participant herself reports having been "wrapped in cotton wool," but also having had "no voice" within the family:

In the family, I was never really able to express my opinion if something bothered me. And that only started in college.

The father is described by the participant as a realist who can also become very emotional, especially when it comes to his two daughters. The father came to Germany at the age of 16 and always had to prove himself and at that time had to suffer from massive racism. The patient describes a great pride in her father's diligence. She herself chose the same field of study as her father:

Our father always said we should be strong and not let ourselves be beaten down. And he always conveyed to us that we are not worth less, we are even worth more because we can speak two languages and have the privilege of dual citizenship. At the same time, there was always the expectation that we had to be better and show them... my sister and I always had to give two hundred percent. If our German classmates gave one hundred percent, we had to give two hundred percent to get to the same level. And I think that was also one of the reasons why our parents always insisted that we do our best and be successful, because they knew what life outside could do to us.

The participant's mother is described as the calming influence in the family. She is a clear-headed person who always keeps a cool head. She is a "lion mother" and does everything to protect her daughters. The mother also came to Germany in her 14th year and worked her way up, just like the father. Performance and religiosity were always important to both parents during the participant's childhood; for example, the father went to the mosque every Friday. Due to the political changes in Turkey, the parents have become more critical through the observation that religion was instrumentalized. The parents regret their current distance from religion. The mother has not worn a headscarf since her own migration. After extensive deliberation in her youth, the participant also decided not to wear a headscarf. She made this decision mainly because she did not want to do anything that might be imposed on her. Religion means to her belief in God, religious festivals, and "being a good person," which primarily means treating others respectfully. The parents have been living separately for 4 years. The communication and cohesion that are so important to the participant have broken down. For the participant, this is still a major issue: as soon as the separation is mentioned, she leaves the room. In further elaborations, the participant reports some situations in which she herself has experienced racism. She has an activist approach to it, found a political committee at university, and fights

for justice. She relies primarily on equality and considers, for example, preferential treatment to be positive racism that also needs to be fought:

Whenever I am quiet and let them do it to me, it will not stop.

Therefore, the participant experiences a great deal of pressure and a self-critical attitude in everyday life, which “makes her very unhappy in many situations.” In addition, she has been diagnosed with Meniere’s disease, which doctors have linked to inner stress. However, these experiences have brought her closer to her Turkish culture:

You often hear about two identities, but I would say that my Turkish identity has definitely taken up much more space in recent years.

The participant is in a long-distance relationship. Her partner lives in a major Turkish city, where she also wants to move (after getting married). Above all, she values the openness and good communication that the couple has.

## **Expressions of the Muslim Women Who Wear a Headscarf**

### **Religious Attachment**

It is primarily religious reasons that prompt young Muslim women to wear a headscarf. It is about visibly standing up for the Islamic religion or for faith in God. Ms. D. reports that “For me, the headscarf as a symbol also stands for my religion, faith and also as a protection and boundary.” Ms. E. says that “Religion is actually the core of my life.” The headscarf is like a “part” of her personality, and she describes her need to be able to witness her faith publicly:

I started wearing a headscarf very late, I have to say honestly, but it has become a real part of me. So I started at fourteen/fifteen to learn more about religion and I also did that intensively at that time. But it was always like this for me, you occupy yourself a lot, but you don’t see that on the outside. And somehow, as a person who is actually different, you want to look different. Why not? You want to show it. If I like the color red, then I dye my hair red, too. And if I like Islam, then I show that, too.

Protection, difference, and alterity are further motives that are intertwined with religiosity. Thus, the religiously motivated wearing of a headscarf also has a socio-psychological function, e.g., it creates a group identity: Wearing a headscarf conveys feelings of belonging, which can gain in importance especially against the backdrop of a destabilizing migration process (cf. Kohte-Meyer, 2009).

### **Social Recognition**

The respondents often emphasize that wearing a headscarf gives them a great deal of social recognition in their Islamic community. Only by wearing the headscarf would they be “a real Muslim woman.” For example, Ms. F.’s father was pleased when she decided to wear a headscarf in adolescence: “My father saw me before I



went out and said, Oh, are you wearing a headscarf now? And I was like: Yes. He was happy. He was very happy.” Ms. G. wants to prove that she can be successful as an avowed Muslim:

Now I also want to show that I can also be really successful as a Muslim. And that’s why, I was also diligent before, but always quiet, I was always the one who is actually good, but can never show herself, so is always average, so it’s always these people who get left behind. And then I’m loud, so I was orally very strong, I was also in the subject of politics, where you also have to talk a lot and discuss, and I think I then also noticed my teachers more often, you also stand out and if you are then also so present, that has also always made a very positive impression. And it made me realize that I can do what I want.

### Attractiveness and Self-Realization

Some respondents report that the headscarf in particular emphasizes their own eroticism and thus their female sense of self. Here, the headscarf becomes a kind of fashionable style element. This is what some female respondents (Ms. H, I, and J) report:

Sometimes I find myself more beautiful in the mirror with a headscarf. It’s more of a total work of art.

...so he (the partner) found me very beautiful with the headscarf.

I think that the headscarf in itself, is simply an article of clothing. In that sense... so apart from faith, if you relate it to modernity now, it’s a great style of dress.

Wearing the headscarf is also understood as an expression of freedom of choice, of being able to express oneself, and of realizing one’s own needs. This is what Ms. K. reports:

Then I thought, now the high school starts anyway, you have new teachers, a new class, it’s all different... if you don’t do it now, you’ll never do it, I knew that very well. And then I just got up the next morning, put my headscarf on and went straight out. And then I was at school and so many people saw me there, which meant I couldn’t turn back at all. And then I also got such positive reactions, that made me so happy that day. So already on the second day it was like this for me... I always had the feeling that I was always waiting for, that was such a confirmation for me, now everything is right: Now I am a real Muslim, that was a confirmation for me. And then I was also totally relieved and that gave me enormous self-confidence.

Other female respondents also report that they can express their self-assertion by wearing a headscarf. This is also understood as a means of demarcation from Western authority. Thus, Ms. L. reports:

I had a different headscarf, really every day, but not because I wanted to show anything with it, but because I thought it was nice to put on different colors. At some point my teacher grumbled: Every day she wears a different head-

scarf, I don't know what she wants to achieve with that. I thought: you also change your underwear every day (laughs). I mean, it's clear that you put on something different every day. But then I stuck with it, I was so stubborn and from that moment on it wasn't just for me: I live out my religion or wear this because I think it's beautiful, but actually also a bit out of defiance, because: if I'm allowed to do it, then no one can forbid me to do it, and then I just did it out of defiance, I stuck with it, I've never regretted it, it also became a piece of me.

## Emancipation and Hybrid Identity

The West often sees a contradiction between the Islamic image of women and the normativity of female emancipation (Rommelspacher, 2009). However, some of our participants understand the wearing of a headscarf as an expression of an emancipatory lifestyle. Thus, Ms. M. says:

I had my two aunts. One is a lawyer, the other is a medical doctor. It's exciting: they both also wore headscarves. And it was never outwardly that the headscarf was a discriminatory feature. We didn't have that at all. Because we also grew up in a colorful part of town. So I never had the impression that discrimination could be associated with it. On the contrary, I found it so inspiring from my aunts that I took them as role models, so to speak. And I thought, I'll give it a try (...) It was just like that, I want to do that now too, also because I associated all these qualities from my aunts with it: Intelligence, assertiveness, self-confidence. I attributed that to them. That's why the headscarf was also very visible to me as a characteristic and I thought to myself: I want to become like that!

## The Headscarf as a Transitional Object

In the various contexts described above, the headscarf is often experienced as a Winnicottian transitional object (Winnicott, 1971, p. 3–10). Thus, Ms. E said that "It's really become a part of me. I really couldn't take it off now because it just... I feel so comfortable by now. If I took it off, I would be a different person....". Ms. M. thinks she could only draw herself wearing a headscarf. She could not imagine herself any other way (anymore).

Ms. N. experiences wearing a headscarf as a "commandment" that is left to the individual to obey: "Is the headscarf a constraint? No, it is a commandment, like many commandments. There are many commandments in Islam and whether you fulfill them is ultimately up to you." She explains:

I don't see any obstacle between the headscarf and modernity. For me, modernity is that someone is always adapting to the circumstances, which means technology and all kinds of things, always educating themselves... not necessarily holding tightly to old principles, so not necessarily being conservative...

and I think that the headscarf in itself, is just an article of clothing. In that sense...so faith aside, if you relate it to modernity now, it's a great style of dress." - "And now I also want to really show that I can also be really successful as a Muslim.

Thus, Ms. N., combining the motives of headscarf and career, also says:

My wish, what I have in mind for the future, so to speak, is that as a young Muslim woman, even with a headscarf, I stand in a position where one can say... that is, where one already thinks from the outside that she has made it...

### **Among the Families of the Subjects Who Wear a Headscarf**

All female respondents who wear a headscarf come from families in which the parents live together (e.g., Ms. M). On the whole, the parents have a close or good connection to their Turkish roots, and faith and family form important values for the parents (mostly religious dimensions). Often the mothers in these superficially intact marriages are described as rather reserved and concentrated on the inner family life, while the fathers are professionally engaged and are experienced as more strict and distant in their demeanor. The mothers are mostly religious and in some cases more religious than the fathers. Religion also seems to keep the family together as a unit.

Both the women who wear a headscarf and the women who do not wear a headscarf experience themselves as emancipated and equal in their partnerships. This is what Ms. P., who wears a headscarf, says: "For me it is important that he helps me in the household and that it is not a matter of course that I cook, but that he also cooks and also vacuums sometimes, that is a matter of course for me and I have told him that and for him it is also like that." Ms. O., who does not wear a headscarf, says: "For me, a woman is just as much a leader as a man... everything a man can be, a woman can be too." And Ms. P., who also does not wear a headscarf, says: "I think man and woman, they belong together and together they are a team, that's how I imagine it."

### **Case Study of a Female Participant Wearing a Headscarf: Ms. M**

The participant says that her mother comes from a Kurdish family and her father from a Turkish family. She grew up in rural Turkey for the first 7 years of her life and describes her childhood as very sheltered. However, her parents' bicultural relationship was strongly criticized and opposed by both families, Turkish and Kurdish. The parents stuck together despite this criticism. The participant describes both parents similar as "caring, dominant, empathetic, loving, helpful. Sometimes too cautious." But the mother seemed to be more present within family all-day life. The participant was the oldest of a total of six siblings. She had always been involved in the care of her younger siblings. After graduating from high school, she embarked on an academic career. Religion has always been a source of stability for both parents, playing a major role in the family's everyday life, and it also plays a very important role in the participant's life. She wears a headscarf and has already tried to represent

this choice to others at school. Every day she performs all the essential “deeds,” i.e., the religious rituals:

I have to do my deeds consciously. Normally, one is required to behave in a morally correct manner in order to comply with the law. Or even the social norms. But I behave in a morally correct or conscientious way because I am convinced that I am being forced by a listening power, which always sounds so funny, but I don't know how to explain it any other way. So, being held accountable throughout. So, in my behavior, I'm not correct, I'm not a super-human, but I make an effort to renounce the bad habits.

On the one hand, the participant understands Islam as a set of rules that provides advice on how to lead a life but also offers the opportunity for meditative self-reflection:

Islam means for me, so it's a habit of life for me, for self-reflection. So, to have something different from the everyday, the mundane. Something that you can't explain. That is everything for me. And Islam has many commandments. For example, how shall I say, rules that permeate my life. And to hold on to them or to shimmy along them, so to speak, on a daily basis, that is my purpose in life. And one of the needs of me personally, a basic need, is to get back to myself. And contact with a higher power, if you want to translate it that way.

The participant's family lives in a big city neighborhood with a rather German population. But it is not a problem either for the parents or for the participant herself to maintain good relations with the neighbors and to engage in conversation about the different cultures.

My father taught me, never forget where you come from and always say from where you come, because that is the special thing, you are two-sided. You have the German side and you have our Kurdish culture despite all that.

The participant's mother as well as most of her female siblings decided to wear a headscarf. The participant herself explains the emancipatory role of her two aunts who additionally inspired her to wear a headscarf. She further explains that it was not primarily motivated by religion (see comment on page 20).

Thus, headscarf, meditation, and following the rituals are one side in the life of the participant; another side is the Western career as an emancipated woman. The headscarf therefore not only has a religious meaning but also stands for professional emancipation.

## Discussion

The debate about the Muslim headscarf repeatedly comes to the fore in Western society. These images and, in some cases, stereotypes of Islam often prove to be projections of Western subjectivity upon closer analysis (von Braun & Mathes, 2007). It makes all the more sense to give a voice to Muslim women themselves in order to

find out their subjective experience regarding the headscarf issue. Muslim women exhibit diverse and often overlapping rationales for wearing a headscarf. Qualitative research reveals that Muslimas articulate motivations driven by autonomy, alongside factors tied to cultural traditions, religious convictions, and community expectations (e.g., Hoekstra and Verkuyten (2015), Howard (2012), Legate et al. (2020), Ruby (2006), Saba Safdar and Jassi (2022), and Wagner et al. (2012)). Notably, all cited studies incorporated participants from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, even though some investigations focused on the hijab rather than a headscarf, or included participants primarily within predominantly Muslim countries. A recent quantitative survey states that currently about 70% of Muslim women in Germany have decided against wearing a headscarf; the proportion of headscarf wearers is tending to decline (Pfündel et al., 2021, p. 117–120). In this study, the reasons for not wearing a headscarf include (1) the lack of relevance of the headscarf for practicing the faith and (2) fears of being discriminated against or disadvantaged, e.g., at school or at work. Reasons for wearing a headscarf are (1) faith, (2) older age, (3) migration history (Muslims who grew up in their country of origin are more likely to wear a headscarf), and (4) regional and denominational origin (especially women from North Africa and the Middle East wear a headscarf, as do Shiites and Sunnis). The results of our own qualitative study show that for young Turkish women (at least from the academic milieu), there are multiple and highly individual reasons for or against wearing a headscarf, leading to the emergence of new and heterogeneous poles of subjectivity that point far beyond the horizon of Western (often stigmatized) projections. Interestingly, the decision for or against wearing a headscarf goes much further than the religious or political dimensions explained in our introduction. Our findings seem to be in line with Şahin (2014), who writes about a similar hybridity in the dress style of her study participants in her book *The Significance of the Muslim Headscarf*. In her study, Şahin (2014) describes both the social and individual levels of meaning of the headscarf, which have a hybrid connection. She differentiates the social meaning of the headscarf according to the religious Islamic meaning, the traditional Islamic meaning, as representative of the community of Turkish origin, the political Islamic (Islamist) meaning, and the meaning as a fashion accessory (see Ciftci, 2012; Tønnessen, 2015). She breaks down the individual level of the headscarf as a Muslim female sexuality symbol, as a Muslim-German integration symbol, as a Muslim-German emancipation symbol, and as a Muslim patriarchal symbol. Wearing a headscarf often has a multi-layered and hybrid meaning, which is respectively individually linked to conscious and unconscious motives and intentions. Ambitendencies that already exist in modern Turkey (e.g., between Kemalism and Islamism, between secularism and spirituality, and between emancipation and traditional gender order) are repeated for Turkish German Muslim women in an accentuated way in the context of their life in a Western European country (cf. Meurs & Cluckers, 1999).

### On the Statements of Muslim Women Who Do Not Wear Headscarves

A major motive for not wearing a headscarf is to enjoy female attractiveness. For example, Ms. A. wants to enjoy her uncovered hair, which she shows to all the world

on the sports field. Basically, she wants to (re)transform the “symbolic-phallic” into the imaginary: she takes the step from “veiling” to “unveiling.” Ms. A. reveals herself in her imaginary-phallic entirety. In the formulas of sexualisation, Lacan (2015, session of March 13, 1973) shows that not all—in this special Islamic case: not all women—are subject to the “castration” by the headscarf (cf. footnote 2). If one follows Benslama’s view of the “Khadija episode” (Benslama, 2009; 2017, p. 207), the angels up above would have to have turned their faces away, and against this background, Ms. A.—like all women who no longer wear a headscarf—would be the cause of the man’s wavering faith in God. But why does Gabriel, the messenger of God, turn away? It must surely be on account of the prohibition of incest (which the God in the mythologems of Christianity did not follow). Surprisingly, none of the women who come from a broken family wears a headscarf (though some women who do not come from families with a divorce do not wear a headscarf either). The question of veiling, or an irresolvable dispute on that issue, has never been put forward as the reason for the divorce. Some of the participants describe an increased feeling of loneliness and frustration in their mothers which the participants often attribute to the absence of their fathers. On the other hand, the fathers are stated to be more integrated and involved in German society. Perhaps the connection to German society could be made easier through work experiences, resulting in varied and multicultural interactions. Therefore, a reorientation of values combined with an increasing distance to their Turkish homeland might further strengthen paternal views on a more liberal interpretation on veiling. Paternal turning away from a marriage vow concluded in Turkey might further explain a greater turning away from seemingly Turkish values, causing lower expectations of their daughters’ religious interpretation.

Thus, it seems to us that Ms. A. had identified herself with the emancipatory gesture of the mother who had separated from her husband, and in this move, she had transformed the symbolic phallus, that stands for the prohibition of the traditional culture, into the splendor of the imaginary. From this perspective, the step into the splendor of the imaginary would be an act of emancipation from the traditional Big Other (e.g., the traditional culture). The consummation of unveiling, as it took place in the Khadijah scene, served to constitute the male faith. By unveiling, modern Muslims purportedly therefore not only revealed their worldly, emancipatory power but at the same time alluded to their ability to justify men’s faith in God and in the scripture of the Quran. Presumably, however, the motive of the angel turning away is no longer so powerful because the fathers—at least in the families with divorced parents—are absent. Or else the fathers have a more liberal attitude and have revised their position of power, which made the prohibition of incest in Islamic tradition—most strikingly in the “Zainab episode” (Benslama, 2009)—particularly necessary.

Some of the female respondents decouple wearing a headscarf from religious and moral ideas. Instead, they practice an *internalized religiosity*, as became evident in the survey cited above (Pfündel et al., 2021). A process of internalization also takes place regarding the second episode, namely, the “Aisha affair.” The (external) headscarf is no longer necessary to ensure religiosity, morality, and decency; these belong more to an internalized value system. In addition, a protestanized internalization becomes evident, in which the headscarf or veil is freed from the function of

testifying to faith. Another motive for removing the headscarf is to rebel or protest against one's parents. Taking off the headscarf is understood as a "rebellion/protest" against the (broken) world of the parents. At least in our sample, taking off the headscarf is not a rebellion against the religiosity and traditionality of the parental generation—this motive is not mentioned at all—but a protest against the failure of the parents who divorced.

Not all female subjects who do not wear headscarves, however, come from broken families. But all of those who come from broken families do not wear a headscarf (anymore). It seems that family breakup is accompanied by a *disintegration of the patriarchal, symbolic phallic structure*—in terms of obligatory rites and behaviors. Therefore, the failure of a traditional family situation (in the scene of a symbolic phallus) enables an act of emancipation to eventually take off the headscarf. With the disintegration of the family, the patriarchal imperative regarding female attractiveness in public, at least in terms of the headscarf, breaks down: the woman is transformed from a spiritual symbol or a culturally repressed being who establishes the man's faith ("Khadijah scene") into a liberal individual who to a certain extent is allowed to enter the desert (as in the "Aisha affair"), because there is no longer a father at home watching over her. On the other hand, we have the impression that in families that at least seem intact, i.e., families without divorce, it is precisely the liberality of the fathers (or grandfathers) that gives the daughters the freedom to wear a headscarf or not to wear a headscarf. In any case, if the father or the name of the father is "absent," i.e., no longer as effective as in traditional patriarchal society, there seems to no longer be sufficient reason to wear a headscarf. Neither does the father's faith have to be justified, nor, with the actual or symbolic "departure of the fathers," is the dialectic of claim to possession and the prohibition of incest still as virulent as it was in the times of patriarchal presence.

However, in a 2006 survey, three quarters of the participants (Muslim women in Germany) stated that their father had not played a significant role in their decision to wear or not to wear a headscarf (Jessen and v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, U. , 2006). On the other hand, 40% of respondents said that their mother had played a comparatively greater role in this decision. According to these survey results, wearing a headscarf was based on a "personal decision" that had been influenced only "to a relatively small extent by external persons." According to the authors, the decisive factors were not so much coercion by members of the family as religious convictions. Nevertheless, we suspect that preconscious or even unconscious influences may have contributed to shaping these decisions: on the one hand, the religious commandment to veil could have been conveyed by the mother, in the sense of a "law of the mother" (cf. Morel, 2018, incl. p. 24). On the other hand, commandments and prohibitions might have been unconsciously mediated by the "name of the father" (Lacan, 2013). From Benslama's Western, secular point of view (2009, 2017), the headscarf commandment originates from the patriarchal territory and might therefore have also implicitly structured the laws of the mothers, which they pass on to the daughters. If this patriarchal structure loosens, the veiling and unveiling gradually lose their importance—both in terms of the justification of faith and the securing of property and the prohibition of incest. The fading or modification of the name of the father would also decenter its passing on the part of mothers. The parental



dynamic that had resulted from the circle of the status of the father's name and the maternal law would then lose momentum and gradually dissolve the hierarchy.

### On the Statements of Muslim Women Wearing Headscarves

First and foremost, it is the *religious attachment* to Islam that prompts young Muslim women in Germany to wear a headscarf. With the headscarf, the Muslim woman publicly acknowledges her faith. However, it also serves as a way of feeling that she belongs to a group and of being able to distance herself from another group in a protected way, as Ms. E. describes. The headscarf as a medium of symbolic phallus (i.e., submission) thus ensures contact with both God and the faith community. Contrary to the view that the headscarf is meant to conceal a woman's erotic attractiveness, some female respondents report that it is precisely the headscarf that supports their own *attractiveness, eroticism, and self-confidence* (see Scott, 2007; Tønnessen, 2015). Here, the headscarf is used more as a kind of fashionable, furthermore typical Turkish style element, and less—or only secondarily—with a religious meaning. Wearing the headscarf is understood as an expression of freedom of choice, of being able to express oneself, and of realizing one's own aspirations. The negativity of the headscarf, which is quite clear in the Aisha and Zainab episodes, is inverted here into an imaginary positivity that stands for eroticism, autonomy, and individuality. Since even those women who understand the headscarf as a fashion accessory are by all means religious, the headscarf can basically be understood as a visible element of a hybrid, to a certain extent postmodern identity formation. The symbolic phallus becomes—under the influence of the fashion motif—an imaginary-symbolic hybrid. This “dynamic structuring” of headscarf-wearing (cf. Lacan, 2015, p. 192) appears as the formulation of a compromise (with regard to the Oedipal prohibition or the maternal castration threat): although one's own hair is concealed, the headscarf no longer serves solely as a defense, as in the first, religious case, but at the same time also serves to enable a return of the repressed (i.e., the imaginary, powerful, and seductive perfection).

For some of the respondents, the headscarf is *a way of gaining recognition in their religious community*. They have the feeling that they are “a real Muslim” only when they wear the headscarf. Where this recognition is denied—especially in an educational or professional, i.e., Western, context—wearing a headscarf is understood as youthful self-assertion and a conscious demarcation from Western social “authority.” Especially in this context, when the headscarf is used as a means in the search for recognition or self-assertion, it is experienced as a kind of Winnicottian transitional object that belongs both (as an object) to the environment and (as a partial object) to one's own personality (Winnicott, 1995, p. 10 et seq.). The headscarf is transformed here from a medium of the symbolic-phallic into a practical means that can be used as an imaginary “prosthesis” in a society that is both religiously and secularly determined (cf. Freud, 1930, p. 450); the headscarf thus complements and completes the subconscious imaginary body image (Dolto, 1985; Hamad, 2021). It is a transitional object that is shared with the maternal (or also divine) sphere and supports the young Muslim women in functioning well in the respective society, including the secular one. With the help of such a transitional object, they can then transform Western society into a more familiar living environment (precisely in the sense of a transitional space), i.e., into a transitional space in which the headscarf functions

as a kind of transitional navel. This seems to be very important, as earlier studies reveal that women with headscarves in Germany receive systematically worse treatment. Even though our research group could not find any proof either of systematic advantages of wearing a headscarf, many of our female subjects understand the headscarf—in the context of the development described above—as a sign of a *progressive and emancipatory lifestyle*, often in the form of a *hybrid identity*. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the group of young women who are able to take advantage of the Western education system and who want to pursue their own career aspirations and live a self-determined life. The hybrid configuration of identity aspects combines loyalty to Islam with a secularized lifestyle (e.g., in the transitional space described above). In addition to striving for equality as a Muslim-German woman, the focus is also on equality aspects within the gender order: in partnerships, the women—who, however, are predominantly academically educated—feel that they have equal rights without restriction, quite independently of the use of a headscarf. The headscarf is seen here as more of a sign of Muslim female emancipation, which stands for the right to shape one's own, usually also religious, lifestyle. The headscarf here is a means of defining oneself as a professionally successful Muslim woman. The headscarf therefore becomes a hybrid of an imaginary phallus confirming wholeness and a symbolic phallus following religious prohibition, which determines the sense of self of many Muslim women.

The Muslim women describe solutions oriented towards a hybrid identity, which unfolds in a heterogeneous diversity of polypolar subjectivity, regardless of whether they wear a headscarf or not. We note that the concept of hybridity might also refer to or even cause the opposite, as Çağlar (1997) demonstrates. She argues that the term refers on the one hand to overlapping cultural identities but on the other hand to a clear separation, e.g., of the terms “German” and “Turkish,” which ultimately excludes other additional forms of identity (e.g., Kurdish). Contrary to Western fears, the headscarf stands here for a tolerance of ambiguity, which enables the respondents to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty and to transform what appears contradictory into a new, lifeworld context. The headscarf not only conceals but also helps to “show one's face.” Therefore, Turkish Germans can be understood within the broader context of ongoing changes in Germany, recognizing processes of racialization that shape minoritized communities, particularly those with a “migrant background” within the larger BIPOC and POC categories. The authors highlight that some Turkish German women wear headscarves as a way to emphasize their connection to a minoritized, ethnicized, or racialized community in Germany. For women interested in a career, particularly those interviewed in the article, wearing a headscarf might not necessarily be an obstacle. In fact, it could serve as a means of signaling their affiliation with minoritized communities, fostering connections with others who share similar experiences. Rather than hindering career aspirations, the headscarf may even signify an affirmation of German “multiculturalism,” especially as practiced in the liberal strata of German society. It becomes a symbol of diversity and a statement of cultural identity within the framework of Germany's evolving societal landscape. Benslama's series of “veiling, unveiling, and revealing” continues insofar as unveiling (“showing oneself”) becomes an inherent rupture of veiling as long as the parental domination dynamic is operative. In such processes, whether a headscarf is worn or not worn, what Guattari calls “heterogeneous subjective

poles” manifest themselves in postmodern society. It is therefore about a continuous process of a “resingularization”: people, Guattari (2019, p. 71) hopes, should, in the course of this heterogenesis, become more solidary (with Islam, with the West) and at the same time increasingly different, i.e., more autonomous and more individual.

The decision for or against wearing a headscarf might also be linked to the idea of identification with a single trait, as Freud and Lacan describe.

Freud distinguished between primary and secondary identification: primary identification is the identification with a parent, along with the introjection of the object, which here is a step in the imaginary register. Secondary identification, on the other hand, is a partial identification with a single trait or signifier that is unconsciously borrowed. This single trait emerges through an act of negation by omitting all further incidental attributes of the object with which one identifies (Friedman, 2016, p. 163).

On the other hand, Lacan understands the “single” trait to be a symbolic term which is introjected to produce the ego ideal. It becomes a signifier when incorporated into the signifying system.

Identification with a single trait was often observed in our interviews, as illustrated in both case studies. In the first case study, the participant decided not to wear a headscarf. Hereby, the identification with a single trait enables a close contact to her mother that provides stability in the context of disintegration within the family. Therefore, the decision against wearing a headscarf symbolically represents various aspects: identification with her mother, the breakdown and disintegration of her family, and freedom and finding her own emancipatory path.

In the second case study, wearing a headscarf seems to be equally explicable through the identification with a single trait. In that case, the single trait represents identification (again) with her mother, closeness to the entire family, and the freedom to navigate two worlds to find one’s own path.

It is our impression that this form of identification with a single trait, as Freud and Lacan explain, is essential in deciding for or against wearing a headscarf. In both case studies, regardless of whether the decision was made for or against wearing the headscarf, a single trait is identified. Emancipation seems to be the driving force behind both decisions.

Our study attempts to incorporate psychoanalytic interpretations on veiling. This study exploratively seeks to debate and extend these early psychoanalytic interpretations with impressions from everyday life through the eyes of Muslim women. We argue that early psychoanalytic interpretations as well as public impressions in German society lack the idea of a hybrid notion of veiling or unveiling.

## Limitations

A major limitation of the study is the selection of our subjects. Despite our efforts to create a social stratification, there is still a social bias (almost three quarters of the subjects come from an academic context). These difficulties in attracting subjects from less socially integrated backgrounds to participate in the study are described as typical (cf. Rau et al., 2020). Our results are therefore limited to a group of young, rather educated migrants, who predominantly come from classic triadic family

structures. Furthermore, our study did not differentiate other social positions such as race, gender, and class which might have influenced our results. Further, we did not collect systematic data on parental educational status. According to Morse (2000), saturation of our sample with 25 female participants would be efficient due to resource limitation. A larger sample would, of course, result in higher precision of the results to increase the accuracy of the estimated effects.

## Conclusion

Summarizing, we argue that identification with a single trait, as Freud and Lacan explain, is essential for the decision for or against wearing a headscarf. In both case studies, regardless of whether the decision has been made for or against wearing the headscarf, a single trait might be identified. Emancipation seems to be the leading force behind both decisions. Remarkably, ambivalence regarding the practices of veiling and unveiling appears to be evident in both Turkey and Germany in a parallel manner. Our study tries to associate psychodynamic interpretations on veiling. We understand the concept of psychodynamic teaching as an interplay between conscious and unconscious processes that shape our experience. As evidenced by the case presentations, we assume a dynamic interplay based on developmental perspectives as well as specific defense mechanisms thus does justice to the complexity of human experience and behavior. Exploratively, we try to debate and extend these early psychoanalytic interpretations with impressions from everyday life through the eyes of 25 Muslim women. We argue that early psychoanalytic and public impressions in German society lack the idea of a hybrid formation for veiling or unveiling.

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**Data Availability** The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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