

Outgroup Attitudes Toward Muslim Feminist Women in Türkiye: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Muslim feminist women embody two identities that public discourse in Türkiye frequently treats as contradictory, yet the attitudes literature has largely examined Muslim and feminist identities as separate targets of evaluation, leaving perceptions of their intersection unexplored. This exploratory qualitative study examined how outgroup members in Türkiye perceive them. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants across three outgroups defined by the target's constituent identities (Muslim non-feminists, non-Muslim feminists, and non-Muslim non-feminists) each comprising five women and five men. Reflexive thematic analysis, conducted separately for each group with an inductive, semantic, and experiential orientation, indicated that attributions were ambivalent in every group, combining favorable descriptors (questioning, brave, educated) with delegitimizing ones (hypocritical, manipulated, lacking autonomy). Findings also revealed that all groups construed the two identities as incompatible and that the headscarf served as the most salient visual marker of the category, most uniformly among Muslim non-feminists. The groups diverged, however, in how they used this incompatibility, Muslim non-feminist participants framed it as a normative violation threatening religious and family values, whereas both non-Muslim groups engaged empathically with its social consequences, and non-Muslim non-feminists questioned the category's very existence. Gendered patterns were also evident: the most negative accounts came from Muslim non-feminist men, whereas Muslim non-feminist women expressed understanding, at times evaluating the target more favorably than non-Muslim feminists did. These findings suggest that evaluations of Muslim feminist women are organized by perceivers' own identity positions and gender, and identify perceived identity compatibility, symbolic threat, and religious interpretation as potential antecedents for quantitative examination.

Keywords: ambivalence, intergroup perception, intersectionality, reflexive thematic analysis, stereotypes