



The Reception of Frozen among Young Women in Turkey: A Feminist Film or Not?

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Abstract

This article focuses on the reception of Frozen by young Turkish women, posing three major questions: (1) How did young women in Turkey describe Elsa? (2) What are the differences between Frozen and other princess movies? (3) Do young Turkish women think Frozen is a feminist movie? The most interesting findings of this research have to do with the third question. Here a superficial view of the responses would suggest that the research participants agree with those critics of Frozen who claim that it is not a feminist film. However, once one takes a closer look at their responses, one can see that this agreement holds only in form, and not in content, as the research participants recognize feminist qualities in the film but without being willing to label them as feminist. The reason for this has to do with the negative connotations of the terms "feminism" and "feminist" in Turkish mainstream language. Here, a feminist viewpoint has to be expressed in terms of "women – men equality" instead. This particular finding points to the more general need in any cross-cultural research to ascertain the translatability of central terms having evaluative connotations, like "feminism" and "feminist" in this case.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Frozen, young women in Turkey, reception studies.

Frozen'ın Türkiyeli Genç Kadınlar Tarafından Alınlanması: Feminist Bir Film mi?

Öz

Bu makale, Frozen'ın genç Türk kadınları tarafından nasıl algılandığına odaklanarak üç ana soruyu gündeme getiriyor: (1) Türkiye'deki genç kadınlar Elsa'yı nasıl tanımladı? (2) Frozen ve diğer prenses filmleri arasındaki farklar nelerdir? (3) Genç Türk kadınları, Frozen'ın feminist bir film olduğunu düşünüyor mu? Bu araştırmanın en ilginç bulguları üçüncü soruyla ilgili. Burada yanıtlara yüzeysel bir bakış, araştırmaya katılımcılarının, Frozen'ın feminist bir film olmadığını iddia eden eleştirmenleriyle aynı fikirde olduğunu göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, yanıtlarına daha yakından bakıldığında, araştırmaya katılanların filmdeki feminist nitelikleri fark ettikleri, ancak bunları feminist olarak etiketlemeye istekli olmadıklarını göstermektedir. Bunun nedeni, "feminizm" ve "feminist" terimlerinin ana akım Türkçedeki olumsuz çağrışımlarıyla ilgilidir. Buradaki genç kadınlar feminizmi "kadın – erkek eşitliği" olarak ifade etmişlerdir. Bu özel bulgu, herhangi bir kültürler arası araştırmada, "feminizm" ve "feminist" gibi, değerlendirici çağrışımlara sahip merkezi terimlerin çevrilebilirliğini araştırma ihtiyacına işaret etmektedir.

Keywords: Frozen, Türkiyeli genç kadınlar, alımlama çalışmaları.

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Introduction

The animated Disney film *Frozen* (2013) not only won an Oscar for best animated film and earned the title of "the top-grossing animated film of all time" (McClintock, 2014). The plot of *Frozen* can be briefly summarized as follows. Elsa, Princess of Arendelle, possesses magic powers that she cannot always control. Having accidentally injured her sister Anna, Elsa isolates herself from her sister, causing her sister further distress in the process. Out of fear that she will be perceived as a monster, Elsa withdraws from court and takes refuge in an ice palace. Unbeknownst to her, her very fear has brought an eternal winter to Arendelle. Anna tries to find her sister, but once again Elsa inadvertently hurts her, freezing her heart. We are told that Anna will turn into solid ice unless an act of true love can save her. However, Anna is betrayed by Prince Hans, with whom she has fallen in love. Hans intends to have both sisters killed and take control over Arendelle. In the end, Anna prevents Hans from killing Elsa by placing herself between them and allowing herself to freeze solid. Heartbroken, Elsa hugs Anna, who begins to thaw, returning to life. Reunited with her sister, Elsa banishes Hans from Arendelle and dispels the eternal winter. The two sisters' love for each other has saved them as well as the world they live in.

Frozen was heralded by critics and viewers as a feminist movie. The feminist writer Theresa Basile called it "the most feminist Disney movie to date" (Basile, 2014). The storyline of the film has been described by one reviewer as embodying a "'hell hath no fury' feminism" and as expressing a kind of "isolationist feminism – who needs men when you can create your own ice kingdom?" (Groskop · 2019). Likewise Shira Feder, writing for the online publication *The Feminist Wire*, claimed that the main characters of *Frozen*, Anna and Elsa, "display agency in ways that past princesses have not", and went on to argue that "Elsa's struggle to accept her tremendous powers is a feminist one because Elsa, like many young women today, was raised to see her strengths as weaknesses" (Feder, 2014). Alexandra Bick, reviewing *Frozen* for *Jewish Women's Archive* found it to be "a very empowering, moving story with feminist overtones" (Bick, 2013). And Marnie Ann Joyce, reviewing for *Depth of Field Magazine*, found *Frozen* to be "nearly flawlessly feminist" (Joyce, 2013). Not fearing superlatives, Darren Paul Fisher, Head of Directing at the Department of Film, Screen and Creative Media, Bond University, in a contribution to the independent online news site *The Conversation* claimed that "*Frozen* is perhaps the most important feminist film ever made" (Fisher, 2019).

At the same time, academic scholars have disagreed, arguing that *Frozen* is far from being a feminist trail blazer. Michael Macaluso,

while recognizing that the film has indeed been celebrated as a feminist achievement, objects to this praise. Instead, he argues, *Frozen* should be viewed as *postfeminist*. According to Macaluso, postfeminism involves “characteristics and sensibilities that displace or replace feminist ideals or entangle them with anti-feminist sentiments”, and relies on discourses that “conflate feminism with femininity and the maintenance of feminine beauty culture” (Macaluso, 2016). In a similar vein Maja Rudloff argues that *Frozen* reduces “feminist ideals of equality, empowerment and female agency ... to postfeminist ideals of looks, self-discipline and strongly gendered notions in how the characters look and act” (Rudloff, 2016). Madeline Streiff and Lauren Dundes perceives Elsa, the main protagonist of *Frozen*, as “just a variation on the archetypal power-hungry female villain whose lust for power replaces lust for a mate” and who “finds redemption through gender-stereotypical compassion” (Streiff and Dundes, 2017). In a similar vein it has been pointed out that “Elsa’s salvation comes in the form of stereotypically feminine tears that reverse her magic malfunction” and that her weeping and empathy “restore her humanity – or more specifically, her femininity”, thereby replacing “her masculine, castrating persona” (Dundes, Streiff, and Streiff, 2018).

These critical scholars align themselves with researchers who for a long time has criticized Disney films for repackaging and representing heteropatriarchal family values (Dundes and Dundes, 2005; Garlen and Sandlin, 2017; Streiff and Dundes, 2017; Zurcher, Webb, and Robinson, 2018) and for promoting stereotypical gender roles (Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson, and Birkbeck, 2016; Dundes and Streiff, 2016; England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek, 2011; Rudloff, 2016). Wiersma in a study of sixteen Disney films found that the gender representations were not up to date (Wiersma, 2000). Towbin et al. analysed twenty-six Disney films and found many instances of stereotypes, including gender-related ones, although to a lesser extent in later films (Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, and Tanner, 2003). In a similar vein, a more recent study by England, Descartes and Collier-Meek (2011) of nine films belonging to the Disney Princess line concluded that all of these films contain at least some stereotypical representations of gender. Here we should note that all of these studies were made on Disney films being produced before *Frozen*. To what extent *Frozen* and its female protagonists Elsa and Anna differ from earlier Disney films is a matter of controversy, as we have already seen.

Now, given that there is a causal relationship between, on the one hand, the use of various stereotypes in films and on television and, on the other hand, the perpetuation of social norms and values

reflecting these stereotypes (Thompson and Zerbinos, 1995; Graves, 1999; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1994), it is not irrelevant to ask whether or not *Frozen* is a feminist film with an emancipatory message, or just another stereotypical way of representing women. However, before we can answer that question, we need to understand how the very concept of feminism is perceived by the audience. The present study, based on interviews with young female Turkish students, points to the possibility that an audience may well think of *Frozen* as promoting women – men equality and still refuse to apply the term “feminist” to the film or to its female characters. The reason for their unwillingness to apply the term “feminist” to a film that they could still perceive as empowering of women seems to be that this term has come to be associated with female domination rather than with equality between men and women. Hence, on the surface it might appear as if the Turkish students agree with those Western scholars who reject the idea of *Frozen* being a feminist film, when in reality they may well be closer to those Western reviewers who celebrated the film as truly feminist. One significant contribution of this study is to underline the possibility of misunderstandings as one makes cross-cultural studies about gender and gender stereotypes.

Frozen ran in Turkish cinemas for 35 weeks and had an audience of 1.220.468 people according to Box Office Turkey; 177.255 watched it during its first weekend. In the category of highest-grossing animated films in Turkey it ranks as number 11. In this article, the focus will be on the reception of the main female characters of *Frozen*, Elsa and Anna, by young Turkish female university students. Given the divided opinion among reviewers and scholars as to whether or not *Frozen* is a feminist film, it should be of interest to find out how young Turkish women perceived it. Being university students, these women could be expected not only to be familiar with the concept of feminism but also to have an understanding of women’s agency and what it means to have or lack support for that agency. Hence, they could be expected to have a keen understanding of whatever messages of empowerment and gender equality that can be found in a film like *Frozen*.

Background: Women in Turkey in a Statistical Nutshell

It is a well-known social fact that there exist huge gender inequalities in Turkey, and that these inequalities, dating back to the time before the foundation of the Republic in 1923, have continued to persist up to the present time (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1986; Toprak, 1999).

The below table provides statistics from the year 2019 about education levels of women in Turkey aged 25 and above. According to these figures 6.9 per cent of women are illiterate while 7.4 per cent

have not finished even primary school, and 29.4 per cent have only four years of mandatory schooling. (According to the corresponding figures for men, 1.2 per cent of them are illiterate, 2.4 per cent lack primary school diploma, and 20.5 per cent have only four years of mandatory schooling.) Hence, more than 40 per cent of all Turkish women have no or only minimal education.

Table 1: Formal education completed for Female Population of 25 years of age and over, 2019 (per cent)

Total	Illiterate	Literate without diploma	Maximum 4 years of mandatory schooling	Maximum 8 years of mandatory schooling	Maximum 12 years of mandatory schooling	Higher education up to 4 years of undergraduate studies	Master	Ph.D.
100.0	6.9	7.4	29.4	20.3	17.5	16.3	1.9	0.3

Source: TurkStat, National Education Statistics Database, 2008-2019

A second important criterion indicating women's status in a country is employment rates. Only 28.7 per cent of all women in Turkey are employed and this is less than half of the employment rate for men. Even for the group of women with the highest level of education, more than 40 per cent are not employed.

Table 2: Employment rate, 15+ age (In per cent)

	Total	Illiterate	Less than high school	High school	Vocational high school	Higher education
2019						
Female	28,7	14,5	24,2	26,3	31,3	58,3

Source: TurkStat, Household Labour Force Survey, 2018, 2019 / TurkStat, Women in Statistics, 2020.

The official statistics about the level of feeling safe among women when they are walking alone at night in their neighbourhood in 2020 is as follows: Feeling secure: 48.7 per cent, feeling neither secure nor insecure: 24 per cent, feeling insecure: 27.3 per cent (İstatistiklerle Kadın, 2020). As a measure of women's involvement in politics and of their access to modern technology, we can note that the rate of women representatives in the parliament is 17.3 per cent. As an indication of computer literacy, the rate of women who order or buy products on the internet in 2020 was 32.7 per cent; the corresponding

rate for men ordering or buying products on the internet was 40.2 per cent (İstatistiklerle Kadın, 2020).

In addition to the above key data about women in Turkey provided by official statistics, there are also other interesting data about women, produced by various research companies. In 2019 Konda Research and Counselling released a report on gender in Turkey, based on lifestyle research made in the previous year. According to this report, 66 per cent of women in Turkey describe themselves as housewives (Konda Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyet Raporu, 2019). Moreover, according to the Konda report 54 per cent of the Turkish population believe that a woman should have her husband's permission to work outside the home (p. 37). 50 per cent of the women wear a traditional headscarf, while 9 per cent wear a religious turban (p. 135); 67 per cent of Turkish women (80 per cent when it comes to the group that identify themselves as housewives) describe themselves as religious or devoutly religious (p. 28).

The Research Participants

The research participants are university students and they are also the first generation university students in their respective families. All research participants were between 18 and 22 years of age at the time of the interviews. They had either watched *Frozen* in 2013, when they were about 11–14 years old, or at some point a couple of years later. Most of them were from İstanbul or studied in İstanbul. Nine out of the 20 research participants wore a headscarf; in this respect, the present study can be said to be based on a representative selection of Turkish women, given the Konda report mentioned above.

However, from another angle the participants in this study represent an elite minority among Turkish women. Not only are they university students, but they are also familiar with modern communications technology, as is evidenced by the fact that they were interviewed on Zoom. Hence, it can be safely inferred that the research participants have a computer literacy above the average for Turkish women.

Materials and Methods

This article relies on an eclectic approach which brings together qualitative research methodology with phenomenology within the frame of reception studies. The study is based on a qualitative research design focusing on the experiences and perceptions of the informants.

The phenomenological design was used to explore the experiences of individuals to clarify phenomena of which they might be aware but of which we do not have a detailed or deep

understanding. "The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions (...). The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, 1994: 13). Hence, the focus of this qualitative research is to study the research participants' perceptions and experiences of and about *Frozen* from their own perspective.

The data gathering instrument used in this research is the semi-structured interview. The analysis of the data collected focuses on conceptualization and on uncovering thematic structures. Phenomenologically designed studies, like other forms of qualitative research, do not lend themselves to generalizations or representative quantification; however, they help us recognize and understand the phenomena studied, aided by the testimony and lived experience of the informants (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008: 72–75).

In this research, it was initially planned that the researcher would make one interview with research participants who had watched the film earlier in their lives. Here, the meaning of the phrase "earlier in their lives" ranges from 2013, when the film was first out, to a few years before the interview took place. However, when the researcher made the first interviews with the research participants, she noticed that they did not remember the contents of the film very well. For this reason, the researcher decided to make two interviews with each research participant, the first one being based on the participant's recollection of her original experience of the movie, and the second one being made immediately after the participant had watched the movie a second time. The main questions posed to the research subjects are as follows:

1. Could you tell me something about yourself?
2. How did you decide to watch *Frozen*?
3. Could you tell me about the day you went to see the film?
4. Could you tell me the storyline of the movie?
5. What are your views of Elsa?
6. What are the similarities and differences between *Frozen* and the previous princess films that you have watched?
7. What aspect or feature of the film made the biggest impact on you?
8. How would you define the characters Elsa and Anna?
9. What do Elsa and Anna mean to you and how did these characters affect you?
10. What would you say is the message of the film?

The answers given to these questions were then further explored in the interviews. In the second round of the interviews, the opening

question was (11), "Did you notice anything new in your recent watching of *Frozen*?" Moreover, the following question was added: (12) "By some reviewers *Frozen* is regarded as a feminist movie. Do you agree with this? Please explain". The reason for this question was that it became clear during the first round of interviews that *Frozen* was not automatically associated with feminism by the research participants.

A mix of snowballing sampling and convenience sampling was used to reach the research subjects. The snowballing method is often used in qualitative research and involves the researcher's being led from one research participant to another, benefiting from the first participant's personal network. In this research, twenty research participants were recruited. Although in the snowballing process, both female and male audiences were invited to the research, it became clear that almost only female audiences watched *Frozen*. Thus, in the end 20 females participated in this research. The research participants were interviewed twice; thus in total 40 interviews were made. The interviews were made from July to November, 2021. The interviews were made over Zoom, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviewer and interviewees could see each other during the interview, but only the voices were recorded with a digital voice recorder for interpretation purposes and were then selectively transcribed. The interviews were made in Turkish and then a selection of the transcribed parts were translated into English by the researcher. The analysis carried out in this research can best be defined as descriptive. The present article does not make any claim as to generalizability.

Results

The first series of interviews were made many years after the respondents had first watched *Frozen* and the second series of interviews took place after the research participants had watched *Frozen* once again and so refreshed their memory. The conclusion derived from the first series of interviews is that those research participants who watched *Frozen* as children, at the age of 11–14, did not have an accurate recollection of the contents of the film. While there were a few respondents who remembered some fragments of the film (for instance, that Elsa and Anna were sisters), others could not remember neither minor nor major details from the film or how the film ended. Hence, a need emerged for a second series of interviews after the participants had watched *Frozen* once again. The findings below come from this second series of interviews, with a focus on answers to questions 5, 6, and 12 as being particularly relevant to a discussion of feminism in *Frozen*.

How Do Turkish Young Women Define Elsa?

As mentioned above, some reviews of *Frozen* suggested that the character Elsa is depicted as feminist and as empowering of women, while some academic scholars were highly critical of this view and more inclined to dismiss the Elsa character as postfeminist or even antifeminist. Given this conflicted account of Elsa, it becomes a matter of curiosity how she was received by the Turkish audience.

In the present study, 14 research participants out of 20 define Elsa in terms of negative or weak qualities such as being scared or frightened by her own powers, as being a coward, as growing up under oppression with fear, as being full of fears and concerns, not being able to control her own powers (seven women), as diffident (two women), as introvert and timid (two women), as very pessimistic (one woman), as not being in peace with herself (one woman), as cold and distant (one woman), as panic stricken (one woman), as stubborn (one woman), and as running away from her own problems (one woman). Only six research participants defined Elsa as strong, and of them only three ranked strength as Elsa's number one quality. Five research participants evaluated Elsa as self-sacrificing while two defined her as protective; one defined her as altruistic.

These results seem to suggest that the reception of Elsa by women in Turkey is closer to the views of the critical scholars. However, as the Turkish audience criticizes Elsa for being fearful rather than for not conforming to feminist ideals, it would be premature to assume that the Turkish audience agree with the critical scholars as to the exact nature of the deficiencies of Elsa.

Differences Between *Frozen* and Previous Princess Movies According to Young Turkish Women

13 research participants out of 20 responded that *Frozen* stood out compared to other princess movies in its focus on sisterhood ties or sibling ties. Now the term "sisterhood" has played an important role within feminist theory, referring to "the idea and experience of female bonding, and the self-affirmation and identity discovered in a woman-centred vision and definition of womanhood" (Humm, 1995: 268). In spite of later criticism that the term "sisterhood" can be used to censure some women as "bad sisters", feminist theory still recognizes that "the excitement it generated as an early feminist rallying cry cannot be denied" (Code, 2002: 448). Here, it is important to note that while only five of the research participants used the phrase "sisterhood ties", the rest (eight of them) used the phrase "sibling ties". Thus it is possible to say that there is a certain tendency among the young women in this research to give their response in gender-blind words. This gender-blindness seems to be not only about

the choice of words, but reflects more deep-seated views. Hence, to the extent the creators of *Frozen* aimed at addressing a specific notion of sisterhood, they appear to have faced a barrier in Turkey that is not only linguistic but also cultural.

Four out of the above mentioned 13 research participants ranked *Frozen's* focus on sisterhood or sibling ties second in their list and instead prioritized other differences, such as the extensive use of music, the use of a snow theme, or Elsa's powers relating to snow as being the major differences compared to other princess movies. Eight research participants out of 20 perceived that the most significant difference between *Frozen* and other princess movies was that *Frozen* focused on the importance of being at peace with oneself, on the value of family, on bad parental treatment, on unconventional princess figures, including a princess figure with supernatural powers, and on the importance of love being extended to target the whole society.

Do Young Turkish Women Think *Frozen* is a Feminist Movie?

The last interview question was formulated as follows: "By some reviewers *Frozen* is regarded as a feminist movie. Do you agree with this? Please explain." After the participants had answered this question, the researcher asked them whether they had thought about the possible feminism of the movie before the question was asked. When the researcher felt that it would not be too invasive, she asked some of the participants additional questions about the meaning of feminism and whether they defined themselves as feminists.

13 out of 20 research participants reported that they did not agree with the opinion that *Frozen* is a feminist movie. Twelve of these 13 young women added that they had not thought of the possibility that *Frozen* could be a feminist movie before they were being asked by the researcher. One of the 13 participants who said *Frozen* was not a feminist movie indicated that she indeed had thought *Frozen* could be a feminist movie before she was asked about it.

One of the research participants who thought *Frozen* is not a feminist movie expressed her opinions as follows: "*I don't think it is a feminist movie. I didn't see much about women's rights in Frozen. The theme is only love and passion between siblings. I couldn't see anything about women's rights or about defending women's rights*".

Another young woman, sharing the same opinion, explained herself in these words: "*Some might call the movie feminist because in Frozen the princess does not wait to be saved by a prince as in other princess movies. There is not a prince for Elsa in the movie. But it is wrong to label the movie as feminist just because of this.*" When the

researcher asked this interviewee to explain herself, she responded as follows: "Feminism is not anything like this. It is not about being men's enemy. I don't think the movie is related to feminism. It wants to tell about siblinghood. There is no need to philosophize too much about it."

Although young Turkish women can see that the *Frozen* is about sisterly love and solidarity, they do not regard the movie as feminist. The interview material suggests that this could be due to two factors. One of them is a certain gender blindness in the research participants, manifesting itself in their use of the word *sibling* instead of *sister* as mentioned above. The other factor, which is overlapping with the first one, has to do with how feminism as an ideology is understood in Turkey. The young women in this research distinguish between two kinds of feminism, namely "real feminism" and "misunderstood feminism". According to them, the real meaning of feminism is women – men equality. However, also according to them, in Turkey feminism is widely misunderstood as denoting a belief in women's superiority over men. This view comes out in the following sentences of a research participant: "There are two different feminist views in the world. One of them defends the idea of women – men equality. This is the real feminist view and it is as it should be. The other one believes in women's superiority."

That the term "feminism" indeed has such a connotation in Turkey is confirmed by another recent study, in which the researcher observed that women were unwilling to make use of this term as it had come to be associated with being an "enemy of men" and with "women who want to resemble men", that is, as a term connoting challenging and aggressive behaviour and attitudes (Berber 2011: 220).

The young women interviewed in this research support the ideal of women – men equality, but they are reluctant to present themselves as feminists since they believe that in the wider society the term "feminism" is understood as advocating women's superiority over men or taking only women's side. In other words, while they accept women – men equality, they reject the term "feminism". The "misunderstood feminism" – believing in women's superiority over men or taking only women's side – is not a position that they want to identify with. In order to exemplify this chain of thought, I would like to quote from one of the interviews, in which the interviewee thought that women – men equality should be the norm but also held that *Frozen* is not a feminist movie:

- *I don't agree that Frozen is a feminist movie. Why should it be? Is it feminist just because women have two lead roles? Does it have to be one man and one woman all the time? It makes*

me think like this: Can't we have two strong women characters? I did not agree with the idea that the movie was feminist. There can be two strong women characters in the movie and still we don't have to call it feminist just because of this.

- *How did you make the connection? I didn't understand.*
- *In the other movies, men, too, were having lead roles. Generally, men have to do something, such as waking up the princess from eternal sleep. However, here the movie is about women's strength and their agency. For instance, Anna goes on a quest to save Elsa on her own or Elsa makes use of her own agency. In fact, I could label all this as "support for equality", but not as feminism. I don't think that here there is a tendency to defend women more than defending men. It is more about emphasizing equality. Because up to now, there were always expectations about men's agency, but here this movie gives young children the message that girls can act independently, on their own.*

In this dialogue, we can see that the research participant prefers to use the term "equality" instead of feminism to describe what is going on in *Frozen* and the depiction of strong women and gender relations. She overtly implies that she defines feminism as "defending women more than men" rather than as women – men equality, and that for this reason she does not consider *Frozen* a feminist film. Next the researcher explicitly asked the research participant to reflect on the term "feminism":

- *What is feminism?*
- *Women – men equality. The idea that women should have the same rights as men in social life.*

Hence, the interviewee is also aware of the concept of feminism as including the idea of women – men equality. Now the interviewer asks the interviewee to connect and compare what she implied before (that feminism is about defending only women) and what she has just said (that feminism is about women – men equality), relating her ideas about feminism to the context of *Frozen*.

- *You think that there is women – men equality in the movie, but it is not feminist?*
- *Yes, this is what I think. Because equality should be normalized. Equality doesn't have to mean feminism.*
- *Do you identify as a feminist?*
- *I think feminism is misunderstood in our country. Feminism is about overtly defending women. To me, it is like, if there are women in an incident, feminism means defending only the women in that incident. In the world, feminism is not like this. It*

is women and men having equal rights in their social life. For instance, I love Harry Potter. In the Harry Potter movies, there is a feminist actress called Emma Watson. I follow her closely. She is the reason why I first learnt about feminism. I can define myself as feminist but unfortunately, in Turkey, people misunderstand this label.

Based on the above quote, it becomes possible to understand that the interviewee wants to separate the idea of women – men equality, which she indeed wants to defend, from the term “feminism”, which she believes to be a liability, given a widespread misunderstanding of the term as denoting women's superiority over men or a one-sided support of women against men. On the other hand, she would welcome the opportunity to call herself a “feminist” if that term could be cleared of the negative connotations it has in the present Turkish context.

The problem faced by the interviewee is known from philosophy as the difference between *concepts* and *terms*. We can have a concept of something without having a corresponding term for it. For instance, children can have a concept of a candle in the sense that they can distinguish a candle from all objects that are not candles but without yet having acquired the corresponding term, that is the word “candle” (Hospers, 1997: 29–30). In a similar manner, the interviewee has a *concept* of feminism as women – men equality, but is unwilling to use the *term* “feminism” to represent that concept, since this term, as it is actually used in Turkey, denotes completely different norms and values.

The widespread use in Turkey of the term “feminism” to signify defending women's superiority over men, or being the enemy of men has thus created a major obstacle for those who believe in women – men equality to identify themselves as feminists. In order not to have to pay the social cost of being labeled as “enemies of men”, they prefer to call themselves supporters of women – men equality rather than feminists. Along these lines, one research participant said that “*I defend women – men equality, but when we say feminism... I don't like what people do on behalf of feminism. It feels like they are off base...*” This interviewee hence seems to have adopted for herself that notion of feminism that the previous interviewee called misunderstood.

Five out of 20 research participants said that the movie might be regarded as feminist but they did not think of it as feminist before the researcher asked the question. One of these women explained herself as follows: “*Yes, in fact we could say that Frozen is a feminist movie. In many other princess movies, the one who saves the princess is a prince. Here two sisters act on their own. Maybe this is because the*

movie is feminist. There is no need for men in the movie. Two strong girls could save the country. They could be queens and can use their powers in a good way. Yes, I agree that *Frozen* is a feminist movie." Another young woman said: "Yes, it could be a feminist movie. But this did not occur to me while I was watching it. Elsa becomes a queen and they don't see it as a problem."

However, these five women do not describe themselves as feminists. While one of them describes herself with the self-invented label "humanist feminist", the others say they believe in women – men equality without calling themselves as feminists. Here again it seems as if the Turkish understanding of the term "feminism" plays a role in the responses of the interviewees, as they either invent a new term to describe their feminist beliefs or simply avoid using the terms "feminism" or "feminist" altogether.

One young woman in this research came closer to the views of the scholars critical of the feminist credentials of *Frozen* by arguing that the movie was feminist only at the surface level. A closer look would reveal that its message is that women cannot do anything on their own, that they are scared of their power, that they feel it necessary to hide it and that they must isolate themselves from their loved ones in order to protect them.

However, although a majority of the research participants seems to agree with those academic critics who claim that *Frozen* is not a feminist film, this agreement may well be superficial, depending on the Turkish understanding of terms like "feminism" and "feminist". It might well be an agreement only in *form*, but not in *content*, in that Turkish women may share with the critics a reluctance to apply the word "feminist" to *Frozen*, but actually disagree with them when it comes to the *qualities* of the film narrative, which they can see as supportive of women – men equality. The reluctance of Turkish women to label such qualities as "feminist" should then be understood against the background of the negative connotations terms like "feminist" and "feminism" have acquired in the Turkish language.

Discussion

The present study posed three major questions: (1) How did young women in Turkey describe Elsa? (2) What are the differences between *Frozen* and other princess movies? (3) Do young Turkish women think *Frozen* is a feminist movie? The findings show that the young women in this research perceived Elsa as weak and fearful, but without connecting this to any anti- or postfeminist qualities. The major difference noted between *Frozen* and previous princess movies was its focus on sibling or sisterhood ties. Here, it is significant to note the

gender-blind character of the phrase “sibling” which was used by most of the research participants – that is, the more specific quality of sisterhood seems to have been overlooked. The most interesting findings of this research have to do with the third question, concerning the feminist qualities of *Frozen*. Here a superficial understanding of the responses would suggest that the research participants agree with those critics of *Frozen* who claim that it is *not* a feminist film. However, once one takes a closer look at their responses, one can see that this agreement holds only in form, and not in content, as the research participants recognize feminist qualities in the film but without being willing to *label* them as feminist. The reason for this has to do with the negative connotations of the terms “feminism” and “feminist” in Turkish mainstream language. Feminist qualities have to be expressed in other terms even by those who take a favourable view of them. In this research, participants preferred to talk of “women – men equality” instead. When one allows for this difference in terminology, it becomes more doubtful whether or not young Turkish women would side with the critics who deny that *Frozen* is a feminist film or with those reviewers who are convinced about its feminist qualities.

Whether or not the interviewees thought of *Frozen* as a feminist film, several of them accepted that it portrays Elsa and Anna as two strong princess characters, capable of saving each other without the intervention of any prince; in this respect, *Frozen* differs from more traditional fairytales. One reason why the interviewees yet do not think of *Frozen* as a feminist film could be that they simply take it for granted that women can be strong and successful agents in their own right. As one interviewee commented, “Does it have to be one man and one woman all the time?” This points to an interesting possibility, namely, that a feminist understanding of gender equality might be accepted by young Turkish women to a far greater extent than is suggested by their reluctance to use the word “feminism”. The findings of this study hence point to a more general need in any kind of cross-cultural research not only to consider the translatability of central terms with evaluative connotations, like “feminism” and “feminist”, but also to conduct interviews in a way that enables interviewees to clarify their viewpoints.

More generally, the findings of this study should serve as a reminder of the distinction between terms and concepts, that is, between the words people use and the ideas and beliefs they have in their minds when they use these words. A refusal by an informant to use certain terms in the way the researcher uses them does not necessarily imply a rejection of the ideas and beliefs that the researcher associate with these terms.

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