

# CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research Background

Gender fluidity is a change in a person's gender expression or gender identity, or both periodically (Sabra L. Katz-Wise, 2020). Someone who is gender-fluid will feel feminine at one time and then masculine at another. So, someone who is gender fluid is quite flexible in identifying their gender, because of the belief that gender is non-binary, which means that not everyone fits into the categories of male or female. So, someone who is gender-fluid may admit their gender is different, depending on when they are asked and how they feel internally. The term gender-fluid was first mentioned in a book by Kate Bornstein entitled *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and The Rest of Us*, which was published in 1994. Gender fluidity has a stigma that is quite taboo in society because not many people understand about it. gender fluidity concept.

Transgender is a person's change from one gender to another. Transgender and gender fluidity can be said to have a close correlation. If someone who feels gender-fluid decides to change their gender permanently, they will become transgender. There are quite a few cases where someone feels uncomfortable or unsure about the gender they were born with, therefore there is a possibility that the person will change their gender. Some transgender people identify as neither male nor female, or as a combination of male and female. There are various terms used by people who are not strictly male or female to describe their gender identity, such as non-binary or genderqueer (Understanding transgender people, gender identity and gender expression, 2024)

Gender identity is not seen based on a person's gender. Gender identity refers more to what a person feels, both in terms of their characteristics and behavior. Even though someone is said to be female, if someone feels that they are more masculine or usually called a tomboy rather than feminine, then that is the person's gender identity. Everyone—transgender or not—has a gender identity. Most people never think about what their gender identity is because it matches their sex at birth (Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender People, n.d.).

In recent years, themes of gender identity and transgender experiences have received increasing attention in popular media, including films and animated series. One work that stands out in this context is *Nimona*, which aired on Netflix on June 23 2023. *Nimona*, which is a science fantasy genre film with a medieval background, tells the story of a teenage character named Nimona who has the ability to change shape, reflecting the fluidity of gender identity. and explores complex themes of identity. In the story, Nimona changes her form into various people and animals, giving rise to many speculations that there is transgender discourse in her character.

This film not only offers an interesting adventure story, but also touches on deep issues about self-acceptance, social norms, and the struggle against stigma. The character Nimona, who can change her form, becomes a powerful symbol to depict the dynamics of gender identity that is not tied to traditional binary categories. In this context, *Nimona* becomes a relevant medium for discussing the fluidity of gender identity, while also providing space for a broader exploration of the concept of transgender.

The animated movie *Nimona* (2023), which is based on a graphic novel by ND Stevenson, is set in a futuristic medieval kingdom where traditions, heroism, and strict rules control everything. The story follows Ballister Boldheart, a knight who is unfairly blamed for the Queen's death. He used to be a loyal member of the Institution, the main group that runs things with order and distrusts people who are different. But after he's framed for a crime, he did not commit, he becomes a runaway, abandoned by the society he was supposed to serve. Then Nimona, a wild shapeshifter with a secret past and a funny, defiant personality, offers to help him. Ballister is unsure and needs things to be clear and controlled because the world around him feels too confusing. Nimona's ability to change and her unpredictable nature clash with his need for order, creating a big theme in the story.

As the story goes on, Nimona's ability to change her shape becomes a big symbol for how identity can be flexible and ever-changing. People around her are scared of and don't understand this power. The Institution, which pushes the idea that good and evil are clear-cut, also believes in fixed views of identity, like how people are supposed to be male or female. Nimona doesn't fit into these labels — she can shift between different animal forms, different human forms with different genders, and

even monstrous shapes, which makes it hard for others to define who she is. The movie shows how identity, especially gender, can change a lot and isn't something that should be controlled or fixed. Over time, Ballister starts to question the values of the Institution and the beliefs it teaches, not just about himself but also about Nimona, who becomes both a friend and a sign of freedom.

The main part of the story is about the dynamics between Ballister and Nimona. At first, they do not trust each other, but over time, they build a strong bond of trust and feelings. This relationship is important because it shows how people can learn to understand and accept queer and trans identities in a world that often follows strict rules about what is normal. Nimona starts off as someone feared, called a "monster," because of her wild behaviour, but she really has deep hurts from being rejected by society. Her ability to change shape isn't something scary—it's just who she is, a part of her that is natural, strong, and real. Her struggle to be seen as more than a monster reflects how transgender and gender nonconforming people are often treated as different, labeled as wrong, or ignored when their identities go against the usual way things are.

By the time the movie ends, it makes people think again about what it means to be normal, to be a hero, and to know who you really are. Nimona's big change at the end is a strong and emotional moment that makes everyone question their wrong beliefs and gives Ballister a chance to fight not just for what's right, but also for the chance for people to choose who they are. The movie ends on a hopeful note, showing the strict system breaking down and a better future, one that is more accepting, being created. Through this, Nimona uses stories from science fiction and fantasy to talk about real issues like control and unfair treatment, especially how people view gender. Because it's full of symbols, Nimona is a great example of how pictures and stories can show the strong and changing nature of being transgender in a world that often tries to ignore it.

Amid increasing attention to gender issues, this research aims to analyze how "Nimona" represents the fluidity of gender identity and how the visual elements in the film convey messages about the complexity of identity. By utilizing semiotic theory, this research will explore the visual signs and meanings contained in film characters and narratives. In popular culture, a character's shapeshifting abilities are often used

as a metaphor for a particular identity, such as a villain or superhero. This metaphor is commonly found in literature and film to describe physical changes related to a character's strengths or weaknesses. This ability to change shape is rarely used as a reflection of identities that fall outside binary norms, such as transgender or gender fluid experiences.

In this context, the character of Nimona, who could change shape, provides a unique opportunity to explore how the fluidity of gender identity can be displayed in the medium of fiction. Analysis of Nimona's shapeshifting abilities can open new perspectives in understanding the experiences of individuals with fluid and dynamic gender identities. Nimona depicts a character who is not tied to a fixed gender identity. Nimona's ability to transform reflects the experiences of many transgender and non-binary individuals, who often face pressure to conform to conventional gender norms. Semiotic analysis can reveal how this film represents this struggle, as well as how society reacts to unconventional identities. It is hoped that the results of this research will provide deeper insight into the role of media in shaping society's understanding of gender identity and the challenges faced by individuals in navigating their identities in a world that is often tied to traditional norms.

## **1.2 Problem Formulation**

Based on the explanation outlined in the background, this research has a main problem formulation, which is, what is the meaning of gender identity fluidity through transgender representation in the character Nimona?

## **1.3 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to unpack the meaning of gender identity fluidity through the representation of transgender in the character Nimona in the film.

## **1.4 Research Benefits**

Based on the explanation that has been given, the researcher hopes that this research will be useful in academic and practical aspects.

### **1.4.1 Academic**

Academically, this research will be useful in the following discussion:

- a) **Gender Theory Development:** This analysis can enrich understanding of the fluidity of gender identity in media contexts, as well as broaden discussions about how transgender representation can be shaped and accepted in popular culture.
- b) **Interdisciplinary Studies:** Encourages collaboration between media studies, gender studies, and other social sciences, allowing for a more comprehensive perspective on how gender identity functions in visual narratives.
- c) **Research References:** Provides useful reference material for further research in gender studies, film, and pop culture, as well as paving the way for discussions about more inclusive representation.

### **1.4.2 Practical**

Practically, this research will be useful in the following uses:

- a) **Social Awareness:** Increase awareness and understanding of issues related to gender identity and transgender, which is important in human rights education and advocacy.
- b) **Inclusive Education:** Provides a basis for the development of a more inclusive education curriculum, which includes learning about diverse gender identities.
- c) **Content Creation:** For filmmakers and writers, this analysis can serve as a guide to creating characters and stories that are more representative and accurate in depicting transgender experiences.
- d) **Community Dialogue:** Facilitate discussion and dialogue in the community about acceptance and understanding of gender identity, which can reduce stigma and discrimination.