

# AN ANALYSIS OF THE GENDER DEVIATIONS FROM HAYAO MIYAZAKI'S MOVIE PRINCESS MONONOKE

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## Abstrak

Princess Mononoke adalah film animasi yang mengambil latar akhir era Muromachi Jepang dengan tambahan elemen fantasi di dalamnya. Film ini menceritakan kisah yang berkisah tentang seorang pemuda bernama Ashitaka, orang luar yang mendapati dirinya terlibat dalam hubungan rapuh dan perlahan-lahan runtuh antara roh hutan dan populasi manusia. Penelitian ini berfokus pada penyimpangan gender pada karakter Princess Mononoke. Meskipun Ashitaka seharusnya menjadi karakter utama cerita ini, dia terlihat lebih pasif dibandingkan dengan karakter wanita seperti dua karakter lainnya, "Putri Mononoke" San dan Lady Eboshi. Biasanya, perempuan dalam karya fiksi dan kehidupan nyata distereotipkan sebagai makhluk yang lemah lembut dan mungil, terutama dalam budaya Asia. Namun dalam cerita ini, mereka berasal dari norma atau peran gender yang normal dan malah digambarkan sebagai sosok yang kuat, mandiri, dan dominan dibandingkan dengan laki-laki dalam cerita tersebut. Kontradiksi antara stereotip dan penggambaran karakter perempuan Hayao Miyazaki inilah yang mengangkat topik penelitian penyimpangan gender ini.

**Kata kunci:** gender, sastra, norma gender, penyimpangan gender, film.

## Abstract

Princess Mononoke is an animation movie that takes place at the end of Japan's Muromachi era with a twist of fantasy elements added into it. The movie tells us a story that revolves around a young man named Ashitaka, an outsider who finds himself getting involved with the fragile and slowly crumbling relationship between the forest spirits and the human population. This study focuses on the gender deviation of Princess Mononoke cast of characters. Despite Ashitaka being the supposedly main character of this story, he is shown to be more passive compared to the female characters like the two other characters, "Princess Mononoke" San and Lady Eboshi. Normally, women in works of fiction and real-life are stereotyped as meek and dainty creatures, especially in Asian culture. Yet in this story, they derived from normal gender norms or roles and instead, being depicted as strong, independent, and dominant compared to the men within the story. The contradiction between the stereotype and Hayao Miyazaki's portrayal of his female character is what brought this research topic of gender deviation into light.

**Keywords:** gender, literature, gender norms, gender deviation, movie.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When talking about gender deviation, the topic of feminism will also come to surface. Including feminism, gender deviation also comes hand in hand with gender roles or gender norms, which would be one in the many important topics regarding feminism. Hence, all the topics above are all connected like an intricate spider web that links from and another. Gender norms have been ingrained into society's normalcy even since ancient times, be it in our culture, norms, even traditions, etc. Gender norms itself are merely rules or ideas about how men and women should act and/or be.

They are standards and expectations to which women and men are generally upheld, within a range that defines a particular society, culture, and community. If internalized in early life, gender roles can even establish a life cycle of gender socialization and stereotypes, which can lead to a very constricted and even toxic mindset. Gender deviation comes into play because of this set of constrictions. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word "deviation" itself carries the meaning of the action of doing something different from the usual or common way of behaving. In gender deviation, the phrase "something different from the usual" refers to the gender norms or roles that society has upheld. What can be considered as gender deviation may vary, for instance; someone who is a female at birth yet prefers a more masculine sense in fashion and clothing, a male at birth who prefers knitting and flowers rather than cars and sports, and many more. In conclusion, deviation in gender deviation is anything that contradicts what society defines as "normal" when it comes to gender and gender norms.

Despite the negative connotation of the word, by no means the action of gender deviation is wrong or immoral. On the contrary, learning about gender deviation can be valuable in a number of ways:

- 1) Challenging gender stereotypes: By analyzing and understanding gender deviation, we can challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. This can help promote greater gender equality and provide opportunities for individuals to express themselves in ways that might not conform to traditional gender norms.
- 2) Encouraging diversity: Learning about gender deviation can encourage diversity and inclusion, both in terms of gender and other identity categories. By promoting diverse representation in media, for example, we can help break down barriers and encourage acceptance of individuals who might not fit traditional gender roles.
- 3) Empowering individuals: By promoting gender deviation, we can empower individuals to express themselves in ways that feel authentic and true to themselves, rather than feeling constrained by societal expectations. This can help individuals feel more confident and empowered in their identities.
- 4) Fostering empathy and understanding: By learning about gender deviation, we can foster empathy and understanding for individuals who might not fit traditional gender roles. This can help create a more inclusive and accepting society, where individuals are judged based on their individual merits and not by their gender or other identity categories.

In summary, learning about gender deviation can help promote greater diversity and inclusion, challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, empower individuals to express

themselves authentically, and foster empathy and understanding for individuals who might not fit traditional gender roles.

Hayao Miyazaki's movie titled Princess Mononoke shows that men and women are equal despite the gender and biological traits that were given to them. According to society's "normal", men are supposed to dominate in various areas in society, yet in the movie the two main female characters, which are Lady Eboshi and San a.k.a Princess Mononoke, made the whole story revolved around them, being the leaders of the human population and the forest spirits respectively in the movie's conflict. Not only the two leaders but the movie made even the other women in this story the superior gender one might say. This influence of women's strength in this movie managed to break the traditional gender culture in Japan.

Princess Mononoke takes place in the Japanese era where gods and demons existed and lived alongside normal human beings. The movie was officially released in the year of 1997 but the movie itself however is set in the late Muromachi period (approximately around the year 1336 to 1573) according to Wikipedia. The movie tells us a story that revolves around a young prince named Ashitaka, who was exiled from receiving a curse from a corrupted demon and he will slowly but surely die from the said curse. In hopes of finding a cure, the young man went on a journey to the lands of the west. Within his journey, he met a variety of characters and among them are the Princess of the Wolf Spirit— San, and also the ruler of a town that does iron work— Lady Eboshi.

The movie Princess Mononoke contains many depictions of gender deviations which can be seen within the cast. Lady Eboshi as not only the Irontown's leader but also as the antagonist of this story; San as Lady Eboshi's rival, Ashitaka's love interest and also the human leader for the forest spirits when butting heads with the human population led by Eboshi; the female citizens of Irontown being the pillar of the town's work. The women showcased their masculinity traits by their strength and also their leadership skills; both being characteristics that society had inherited specifically to men. Yet in this movie, it shows the viewer how dominant and hero like the women are unlike how most movies would make the men as the strong and capable heroes who swoops in and saves the day whereas the women would be regressed into a more passive role or a mere accessory for the male lead. This highlights the capability of women outside of society's norm.

Numerous reviews and articles could be found talking about how Hayao Miyazaki, the director of this movie, more often than not uses women as either the main character or a prominent character in his works, showing subtle yet prominent, feminism representation. Shanna F. Jones said in her article, *Hayao Miyazaki: the great feminist filmmaker of his time*,

*that in contrast to popular culture's traditionally accepted idea which denotes the value of a female character on good looks and sex appeal – all viewed through the binoculars of the male gaze - Miyazaki's choice of strong female characters throughout his work provides an alternative portrayal of women. It is a good movie to analyze as this movie is chosen because of the radical feminism depicted quiet strong in the movie.*

The purpose of this research is to bring front the characters' behavior or actions that can be classified as gender deviation, showcase the strength of the female cast and see how gender deviation was portrayed within the movie.

With this, the researcher hopes that the result of this research can be used as a reference for learning gender deviation using Princess Mononoke as one of many references.

## **2. METHOD**

The type of study conducted by the researcher is descriptive qualitative. The descriptive qualitative approach is used to explore a phenomenon in-depth to identify patterns and themes concerning life events when the researcher has a specific inquiry about the phenomenon.

The material object of this research is the movie "Princess Mononoke" directed by Hayao Miyazaki. The movie is released on July 12, 1997. The duration of the movie is 134 minutes. The formal object of this research is the gender deviation that is seen through the characters in the movie "Princess Mononoke" directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

The data sources in this study are categorized into two which are the primary data and secondary data sources:

### **1) Primary Data Source**

The primary data source of this research is the movie "Princess Mononoke" directed by Hayao Miyazaki. The movie is released on July 12, 1997. The duration of the movie is 134 minutes.

### **2) Secondary data sources**

The secondary data sources of this research are journals, books, and websites that discuss the formal object of this research.

In this research, the analysis process was done by answering the problem formulated in the first chapter. The first problem is about characters and how they be considered "gender deviation". The theory was combined with the event which occurred in the movie. Then the second problem was answered by focusing entirely on the portrayal of gender deviation that is presented in the movie. After that, the researcher concludes. This process was done by summarizing the answer to the problem formulation and selecting the important point of the research.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the film *Princess Mononoke*, a major element that contributes to the discussion of gender deviation is its characters –whether it is its gender deviation characteristics or portrayal. The characteristics of gender deviation was discussed in a previous section of this study however, within *Princess Mononoke* itself, the ones that could be found are a few; nonconforming gender expression, challenging gender roles and lastly androgyny. These characteristics were found and portrayed by the characters within the movie, mainly the women of the story.

The nonconforming gender roles in the film were shown by how the characters express themselves in ways that are not typical for their assigned genders, be it from their looks and/or their mannerism. Using the same data from the previous chapter, several points of discussion can be explored as follows:

- 1) Quoting Hofstede in *Culture Consequence* (2001), “Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success”. Throughout the story of *Princess Mononoke*, the characters that have these traits are dominantly women; San, Lady Eboshi, and the women of Iron Town. Although it can be said as well for the male characters, the movie emphasized on showcasing the masculinity of the female characters more.
- 2) According to Sherrie in *What It Takes to Be a Perfect Woman in Today's Society* (2017), society expects that women must be pretty, beautiful, sexy and hot, and they should not work, they should be able to cook. She also must be “ladylike”, and then should be a great mother. Despite the differences of eras, the expectations for a woman of that time are more or less the same, maybe even far stricter. Yet none of the women in the movie *Princess Mononoke* have the appearance of what “ladylike” should be. They fight, they shout, they show case aggression and not scared of using violence in conflict.
- 3) According to Hofstede in *Culture Consequence* (2001), femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. And although it is expected of everyone to have these traits according to Hofstede, the term femininity leans more towards women in society’s eyes. Yet, in the movie, the character that shines the most when it comes to their femininity characteristics, it is not the women but Ashitaka, a man. Ashitaka’s character throughout the movie can be described as gentle, emphasizing his concern with the quality of life that surrounds him.
- 4) The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) is a widely used psychological instrument for measuring individual sex roles and stereotypes made by Sandra Bem. The table below will

show the comparison of the traits of the important characters in Princess Mononoke with Bem's instrument.

Table 1. Important characters in Princess Mononoke with Bem's instrument.

Character's Name	Prominent Character Trait(s)	Assigned Gender Stereotype (BSRI)
Lady Eboshi	Strong, influential, dominant, authority, focused on material success, ambitious	Yielding, cheerful, shy, warm, tender, feminine, gentle, gullible, etc.
Women in Irontown	Loud, rowdy, work in labor, strong, skilled in weaponry	Yielding, cheerful, shy, warm, tender, feminine, gentle, gullible, etc.
"Princess Mononoke" San	Strong-willed, skilled in combat, assertive, ambitious, aggressive	Yielding, cheerful, shy, warm, tender, feminine, gentle, gullible, etc.
Prince Ashitaka	Pacifist, calm, gentle, never resort to violence	Assertive, leadership ability, dominant, competitive, individualistic, analytical, etc.

From this table we can see how each character in the movie Princess Mononoke contradicts the gender stereotype and committed the act of gender deviation.

Similar to the previous statement, the characters also challenges the traditional gender roles by engaging in activities or occupations that are not typically associated with their assigned gender, specifically the women of this story. In the Japanese culture of that era, most women are expected to be docile, delicate and elegant, living as a stay at home wife, be only a mother and a wife that serves her husband.

According to Dalton's (2013) research, he exposes that there is still a trend regarding traditional gender role expectations in Japan such as women being homemakers or, even more importantly, mothers, despite obtaining employment outside or positions in Japan's government.

Throughout the movie, San is shown to be a fierce warrior with incredible skills, power, and agility. Lady Eboshi has an authority role, being the leader of Iron Town and its people. Neither of the two women were implied to be married, and although San and Ashitaka are intended to be a pair, San does not pander for his attention, depend on him nor does she serve him.

The women in Iron Town, despite being women, are actively participating in industrial work that includes metalwork and contributing to the town's defense teams. They work labor in making iron, are trained and well-adjusted to wield firearms and weapons.

Lastly, androgyny in the film is represented by not the characters that were previously mentioned, but more minor characters such as the Kodama and the Forest Spirit. In this context, androgyny means blurring or challenging traditional gender distinctions. Characters exhibit qualities of both genders or challenge conventional gender norms. The Forest Spirits, such as the Deer God and the Kodama, often display ambiguous gender traits. Their mystical and otherworldly essence blurs traditional gender lines, highlighting a more fluid and mysterious portrayal.

The way Princess Mononoke portrays gender largely depends on its characters. When it comes to portraying gender deviation in Princess Mononoke, the characters are the ones that contribute the most. Each character has their own attributes that showcase gender deviation such as follows:

#### 1) San

- a. Warrior Princess: San's role as a warrior challenges the usual expectations for female characters and the traditional portrayal of princesses.
- b. Rejecting Traditional Femininity: San's looks and behaviour shun the conventional princess image by adopting a tougher and more untamed look.
- c. Independence and Self-Reliance: San relies on no one for protection or support, challenging the conventional portrayal of women needing male rescue or assistance.

#### 2) Ashitaka

- a. Empathy and Compassion: Ashitaka openly expresses emotion and seeks understanding, challenging traditional expectations of masculinity rather than adhering to stereotypes of male characters as stoic or aggressive.
- b. Mediator and Diplomat: Ashitaka acts as a mediator and diplomat in the movie. Going against the usual portrayal of male characters as just warriors or attackers.

#### 3) Lady Eboshi

- a. Leadership and Authority: Lady Eboshi leads Iron Town, a position of great power in a society dominated by men. Her influential role challenges long-held gender norms, where women were usually placed in inferior positions.
- b. Defense of Iron Town: Lady Eboshi actively defends Iron Town and its residents, challenging the notion that women are passive or incapable of participating in the defense of a community.

- c. Practical Attire: Lady Eboshi's clothing is practical and utilitarian, emphasizing functionality over adherence to traditional notions of femininity.

#### 4) Women of Iron Town

- a. Engagement in Industry: the women in Iron Town take part in work that is normally done by men. This goes against conventional beliefs about gender roles in the workplace.
- b. Defense of Iron Town: The women of Iron Town actively participate in the defense of their community, challenging stereotypes that position women as passive or incapable of contributing to the protection of a settlement.

Other aspects like plot, setting, theme, etc., do play a part in it but not as much. For instance, the setting of this movie that contributes to the exploration of gender deviation is the era where it was taken place. During the Muromachi period (1336–1573), Japan experienced significant social, political, and cultural changes. The era was marked by rigid social hierarchies and gender roles. Traditional expectations for women included domestic roles and adherence to societal norms.

Overall, this study adds to the discussions that were brought up in previous studies surrounding the topic of gender and the movie *Princess Mononoke* by Hayao Miyazaki; Dhea Anggraeni Rachmi's (2019) and Angelia's (2012) journal regarding gender equality, Karen Olowu's (2014) article regarding gender norms and how the characters deviates from them, and many more.

## 4. CLOSING

### 4.1 Conclusion

Gender deviation stems from the want to break loose of the restricting norms that society built regarding people's genders. What can be considered as gender deviation can vary depending on culture, but the baseline for defying society's gender norms are more or less the same. The characteristics of gender deviation can be simplified into seven points; nonconforming gender deviation, gender identity, sexual orientation, challenging gender roles, androgyny, gender dysphoria, and social stigma.

Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* has three out of seven of the gender deviation characteristics and those are nonconforming gender expression, challenging gender roles and androgyny. The nonconforming gender expression trait was found within the characters; San, Eboshi, and the women of Iron town expressing more of a masculinity trait, despite being women, by showcasing more of their assertiveness rather than stereotypical docile female characters we see in stories. There is also Ashitaka, having a dominant trait of being the



opposite of the female cast. The next characteristic is how the female characters of the movie challenge the typical gender roles by having occupations that are typically done by men; San being a warrior, Lady Eboshi being in a position of authority, and the women of Iron town working in labor making iron. Lastly is androgyny which was shown by the spiritual beings in the movie such as the Forest God and Kodama, who blurs the line between masculinity and femininity.

Gender deviation in Princess Mononoke was portrayed mainly by the characters and their roles, behavior, and appearances. Although the other factors like the plot and setting, etc., within the story did not directly contribute in reflecting gender deviation, it does help in building the world and emphasize the gender deviation that the characters did.

#### **4.2 Implication**

This study talks about Gender theory and Gender deviation which has the following implications:

1) For researcher:

This study can serve as a reference for others who are particularly studying about gender deviation

2) For students

Students can utilize the movie Princess Mononoke as a tool to study more about literature, gender, and gender deviation

3) For Instructor

The instructor can use this movie as teaching material for literature and gender deviation

#### **4.3 Suggestion**

1) For other researcher

The movie Princess Mononoke is a good recommendation for those who want to have a deeper understanding about gender. Additionally, the movie is able to highlight many conflicts and issues, be it taken from the characters, plot, etc.

2) For viewers

The viewer can get a deeper understanding about Princess Mononoke from this research.

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