

## Deconstruction of Gender and Sexuality in the I Told Sunset About You Series

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the representation of gender and sexuality in the Thai series *I Told Sunset About You* using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. Unlike previous studies that focus on identity affirmation or audience response, this research offers a new perspective by examining narrative ambiguity, emotional uncertainty, and symbolic silence as representational strategies. The research was conducted over six months (January-June 2025) by analyzing all episodes of the series, focusing on scenes that display the dismantling of masculine-feminine hierarchies, the application of *différance* in character relations, and the portrayal of gender identity as a fluid entity. Data were collected through dialogue transcription, scene marking, and recording of characters' gestural-emotional dynamics. The results show that this series represents queer identity not through labels, but through cues, revealing representational strategies as a form of symbolic propaganda. By emphasizing how the reproduction of space through popular media becomes a discursive space for ideological resistance, particularly related to heteronormativity. These findings contribute to the development of queer media studies in Southeast Asia, especially in reading gender politics in BL narratives critically and contextually.

**Keywords:** Boys' Love; Deconstruction; Fluidity; Gender; Sexuality.

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## Introduction

In contemporary cultural and sociological studies, researchers understand gender and sexuality not as fixed biological categories, but as social constructs shaped by cultural norms and social expectations. Contemporary cultural and sociological studies, researchers understand gender and sexuality not as fixed biological categories but as social constructions shaped by cultural norms and social expectations. [Butler \(2002\)](#) explains that individuals perform gender through repeated social and symbolic actions that align with dominant norms, rather than express it as something inherent or natural. Within this view, people negotiate gender expression in ways that are fluid and dependent on context. [Connell \(2005\)](#) notes that in patriarchal societies, people construct hegemonic masculinity as the dominant and rational ideal of manhood. This dominant form of masculinity pushes aside other expressions, including homosexual masculinity, which many view as deviant from the accepted standard ([Messerschmidt, 2018](#)). These gender hierarchies not only create divisions between men and women but also cause inequality among men. Individuals express gender in social interactions through gestures, clothing styles, and visual behaviors that shape how others perceive them in public. These expressions show that gender and sexual identities result from social processes rather than fixed essences. This understanding allows scholars to critically examine gender through representations in popular culture and visual media ([Goffman, 1979](#)).

Popular media play a crucial role in shaping and negotiating understandings of gender and sexuality in public spaces. As widely accessible cultural products, media not only represent existing identities but also shape how these identities are understood, accepted, or rejected in society. The development of queer discourse globally cannot be separated from political, economic, and cultural dynamics that shape how non-heteronormative identities are understood and mediated in various local contexts. [Rahman \(2014\)](#) highlights that queer identities develop within relations of global inequality, where neoliberal flows and transnational popular culture heavily mediate expressions of and resistance to heterosexual norms. Building on this observation [Bosia, et al 2020](#), emphasize that LGBTQ+ globalization is not a homogeneous process but results from negotiations between local activism, national political structures, and global discourses. In this context, popular media such as the Boys' Love genre play an essential role because they can reach broad audiences and shape alternative narratives regarding gender identity and sexuality. In Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, many interpret Boys' Love as a tool for shaping queer representation in ways that reflect both resistance and adaptation to dominant norms. The development of queer discourse globally cannot be separated from the political, economic, and cultural dynamics that shape the way non-heteronormative identities are understood and mediated in various local contexts. [Rahman \(2014a\)](#) highlights that queer identities develop in relations of global inequality, where neoliberal flows and transnational popular culture heavily mediate expressions of and resistance to heterosexual norms. Further observation, [Bosia et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasize that LGBTQ+ globalization is not a homogenous process but the result of negotiations between local activism, national political structures, and global discourses. Popular media, such as the Boys' Love genre, play an essential role. They can reach a broad audience and shape alternative narratives regarding gender identity and sexuality. In the context of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, many interpret Boys' Love as a tool for shaping queer representation in ways that reflect both resistance and adaptation to dominant norms.

The Boys' Love genre first emerged in Japan in the late 1970s. It was initially produced and consumed by heterosexual women as a form of emotional and aesthetic fantasy about male relationships ([McLelland, 2000](#)). Although it does not directly represent the lived experiences of queer individuals, the Boys' Love genre provides a symbolic space that enables the negotiation of the boundaries of masculinity and femininity and opens up the ambiguity between heterosexuality and homosexuality. [Pagliassotti \(2008\)](#) calls Boys' Love a fantasy space that can disrupt traditional gender norms. This flexibility of representation also opens up the possibility of a more fluid identification for its readers ([Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017](#)). In Indonesia, the popularity of the Boys' Love genre has increased with the expansion of digital access and online communities that support the distribution of alternative content. The genre can be read as a form of soft resistance to heteronormative norms, presenting emotional, gender ambivalent, and psychologically complex narratives of same-sex love. Through inclusive representations, Boys' Love creates space for broader identity exploration in a conservative society ([Jirattikorn, 2023](#)). As a transnational genre, Boys' Love shows how global cultural flows mediate representations of gender and sexuality. At the same time, the genre continues to negotiate with local contexts laden with patriarchal values ([Baudinette, 2021](#); [Schmitt & Sofer, 2013](#)).

However, LGBTQ+ discourse in Indonesia faces significant challenges, both socially and legally, due to conflicts with deeply rooted religious values and conservatism, even resulting in the cancellation of public events due to pressure from religious groups. Despite the emergence of organizations such as GAYa Nusantara and Lambda Indonesia, as well as national congresses championing queer existence, identity expression remains hampered by stigma, symbolic violence, and criminalization ([Khoir, 2020](#)). Rotten in

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Kamm (2013) states that the development of digital media and the consumption of transnational popular culture have opened a new space for the Boys' Love genre as a symbol of soft resistance to heteronormative norms. One of the most prominent series is *I Told Sunset About You*, which presents the emotional journey of two teenage boys, Teh and Oh-aew, in the face of an identity crisis and social pressure. With its intimate cinematic approach and complex narrative, the series offers an alternative reading of gender and sexuality that challenges binary structures and dominant norms (Shavira & Prastuty, 2020). In the Indonesian context, where public attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues remain ambivalent, viewers and scholars actively engage with *I Told Sunset About You* to examine how queer representations unfold within a culturally restrictive environment.

In a social context that still limits the expression of LGBTQ+ identities, *I Told Sunset About You* presents a form of queer representation that moves through ambiguity rather than direct declaration. Rather than explicitly defining gender and sexual identities, the series constructs them through emotional uncertainty, silent dialogue, and gestures that resist fixed meaning. This narrative strategy reveals a complex negotiation between queer expression and the pressure to conform to heteronormative norms that remain dominant in Indonesian culture (Setiawan et al., 2025). This uncertainty of meaning is essential to note because it opens up space for forms of representation that are not frontal but still have the critical potential to challenge binary structures of gender and sexuality. This phenomenon underscores the need to understand how emotional and symbolic ambiguity shapes the meaning of identity in restrictive social conditions, and how these subtle representational strategies interact with existing cultural boundaries.

Previous studies have tried to read gender representations in the Boys' Love genre. Niko (2022) and Daniswara et al. (2023) examined *2gether: The Series* as an alternative narrative form that addresses the fluidity of sexual orientation and the coming out process amidst dominant Southeast Asian norms. However, these studies focus on audience response and have not fully explored the narrative potential in the Boys' Love genre as a form of critique of gender structures. Cioffi (2023) offers a more critical perspective by analyzing how the Boys' Love genre can reproduce patriarchal power dynamics and perpetuate misogynistic practices. He argues that queer representations in Boys' Love narratives do not always promote utopian ideals. Instead, they frequently remain embedded within dominant structures that reinforce existing hierarchies. Her study underscores the need for affirmative, analytical, and reflective approaches when scholars engage with the Boys' Love genre as a cultural text.

From different angles, Azzahra & Nugroho (2024) show that the film *Call Me by Your Name* represents LGBT identity symbolically and empathetically through gestures and dialogue, and highlights the fluidity of sexual orientation in a supportive environment. From a different perspective, Dhaenens (2021) argues that queer media does not always adopt radical representational strategies. Instead, creators often craft narratives that subtly challenge dominant structures by embedding critiques within stories that combine political messages with commercial appeal. Baldwin (2021) also shows that exposure to films with humanized LGBT characters can increase support for pro-LGBT policies, although it does not completely shift conservative attitudes. All three emphasize that popular media has the potential as a space for representation and cultural intervention in shaping public understanding of queer identity.

Despite the contributions, a significant research gap remains. To date, there has been little research examining the Boys' Love genre through a deconstructivist lens, reading meaning instability as a deliberate narrative strategy. Most previous works have positioned queer representation as a form of identity affirmation without examining how the narrative works through ambiguity, delay, and visual tension that breaks down the binary structure of masculine and feminine. Furthermore, no research has paid particular attention to *I Told Sunset About You* as a widely recognized text for its cinematic depth. However, academic studies of this series remain limited to general assessments of queer representation and have not examined how its narrative structure and symbolism function as deconstructive mechanisms that disrupt the stability of heteronormativity. This gap is particularly significant because understanding how ambiguity operates as a representational strategy can reveal alternative forms of queer resistance that function not through explicit declarations but through the systematic destabilization of meaning itself.

Drawing on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction approach, this study examines how *I Told Sunset About You* constructs representations of gender and sexuality through the instability of meaning. Deconstruction views binary oppositions such as masculine and feminine or heterosexual and homosexual as cultural constructs that appear stable but harbour internal contradictions. Meaning is never final because it always depends on differences and delays called *différance*, thus opening space for the formation of fluid identities that are not bound to fixed categories. Using this framework, the study examines three critical aspects of gender representation: the narrative's presentation and disruption of binary oppositions, the production of gender *différance* through character relationships, and the emergence of identity fluidity from constantly shifting meanings. This deconstructive perspective enables a critical reading of representation

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strategies in Boys Love while showing how texts such as *I Told Sunset About You* reveal heteronormative structures through their unstable meanings.

## Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis to examine gender and sexuality representations in *I Told Sunset About You*. The researcher chose this method because qualitative content analysis enables an in-depth reading of audiovisual texts, including their unstable dynamics of meaning, emotional ambiguity, and narrative symbolism, which characterize the Boys' Love genre (Harwood & Garry, 2003). Adopting a qualitative approach, this method moves beyond counting occurrences and emphasizes how representations are formed, negotiated, and interpreted in specific social and cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method provides flexibility to integrate film studies literature with empirical findings and is particularly suited for examining texts that rely on symbolic expression and narrative ambiguity key characteristics of *I Told Sunset About You*.

This research was conducted over six months, from January to June 2025, to ensure sufficient depth of reading and to verify data. The researcher analyzed the visual and narrative elements of all episodes in the series *I Told Sunset About You*, including scenes, dialogue, gestures, and character relationships that contribute to the formation of gender and sexuality. While the study examines all episodes, it emphasizes scenes that highlight three central aspects: the construction and disruption of gender binaries, the operation of *différance* through the deferral of meaning, and the fluidity of gender identity and sexuality. The researcher collected data through dialogue transcription, scene marking, and descriptive recording of gestural and emotional dynamics.

The analysis proceeded in three main stages. First, the researcher identified scenes that revealed tensions in meaning or shifts in identity. Second, the researcher categorized these scenes according to three theoretical foci: binary opposition, instability of meaning in *différance*, and identity fluidity. The third stage involves interpretive analysis, in which findings from the series are compared with insights from previous studies to assess how *I Told Sunset About You* shapes and negotiates gender representations. In the final stage, the researcher conducts a reflective-critical reading by connecting the emerging patterns of representation to a broader socio-cultural context. This approach allows the researcher to reveal how the series produces and limits meaning through symbolic expression, language, and emotional dynamics, thereby providing a discursive space for a more fluid understanding of identity.

## Result and Discussion

This section presents the results of the analysis on gender and sexuality representation in the *I Told Sunset About You* series by applying Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory alongside Judith Butler's queer theory. The study primarily focuses on how the series constructs narratives, characters, and visual elements that dismantle binary structures and highlight the performativity of fluid identities. The researcher organizes the discussion into three main sections to guide the interpretation. The first section explores the binary opposition between masculine and feminine. The second section examines identity through the lens of *différance*, which introduces delays and shifts in meaning. The third section investigates the fluidity of gender and sexuality by analyzing how the series resists fixed identity categories. These three sections work together to explain how the queer representations in *I Told Sunset About You* challenge heteronormative norms within the broader landscape of Indonesian popular culture.

Throughout the five episodes, their relationship develops through intense interactions that often remain unresolved verbally. The series emphasizes restrained emotional expression, silence, and small, meaningful gestures. This pattern creates a slow, reflective narrative rhythm, with emotional tension at its center. The dynamics of the relationship between Teh and Oh-aew follow a pattern of closeness and withdrawal that recurs throughout the series. In several scenes, Teh shows affection through attention, jealousy, or physical presence, yet refrains from an open emotional confession. As their relationship develops from friendship to emotional closeness that demands emotional clarity, Teh often responds with silence, changing the subject, or maintaining emotional distance.

This interaction pattern occurs repeatedly across various situations, indicating that the central conflict lies not only in the romantic relationship but also in the uncertainty of the characters' positions. The series actively constructs tension through nonverbal expressions and silence as narrative devices. Many key scenes end without clear verbal resolution, leaving audiences to interpret the meaning of characters' gazes, pauses, or physical distance. Rather than defining gender and sexual identity as fixed categories, the series frames them as evolving processes shaped by emotional changes and social pressures. This representation places

uncertainty as an integral part of identity formation. Overall, preliminary findings show that *I Told Sunset About You* constructs queer representation through narrative that delays certainty of meaning and avoids explicit identity declarations. The series creates a narrative space of continual negotiation of gender and sexual identities through relational dynamics, restrained emotional expression, and unresolved conflict.

### Masculine vs. Feminine in the *I Told Sunset About You* Series

The series *I Told Sunset About You* depicts the dynamics of character relationships that do not fully align with conventional gender stereotypes. Oh-aew, who is visually associated with femininity, appears as an active subject in emotional relationships. At the same time, Teh, who at the beginning of the narrative represents dominant masculinity, shows identity doubts and affective dependence. The interactions that develop between the two produce relational tensions that blur the boundaries between masculine and feminine positions, so that gender differences never appear as clear-cut and stable categories.



**Figure 1. Oh-aew Shows Emotional Rejection of Teh.**

Source: *I Told Sunset About You*, 2020

Oh-aew's emotional rejection scene is a key point for understanding how the masculine-feminine opposition fails to function as a hierarchical structure in the narrative. In Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, binary oppositions such as masculine and feminine do not function as neutral pairs of meanings, but rather as hierarchical structures that presuppose the superiority of one position over the other (Critchley et al., 2005). However, this hierarchy is never completely stable because meaning is not essential, but instead formed through differential relations that make these oppositions always vulnerable to shifts (Al-Fayyadl, 2005). Oh-aew's emotional rejection is not expressed through confrontation or symbolic domination, but rather through silence, which determines the direction of the relationship. In this situation, the masculine position lacks the authority to control the meaning of the relationship unilaterally, because the relationship's meaning in this scene depends on Oh-aew's emotional response. This pattern reflects Derrida's critique of logocentrism in binary opposition structures, in which the center of meaning never truly stands alone but rather depends on what is conventionally considered a secondary position in the gender hierarchy (Pringle & Adams, 2025). In this context, masculinity acquires meaning only insofar as femininity confirms it, a dependence that exposes the instability of the oppositional hierarchy. When femininity withdraws this confirmation, the hierarchy no longer functions consistently, and the boundaries between masculine and feminine positions collapse.

These findings also align with the study Chang & Tian (2020), which shows that representations of gender and sexuality in the Boys' Love genre often operate through strategies of emotional ambiguity and indirect conveyance. In this context, the narrative does not convey resistance to dominant gender norms through an explicit reversal of hierarchy; instead, it articulates resistance through role blurring, relational tension, and semantic uncertainty that operate from within the representational system itself. Accordingly, *I Told Sunset About You* employs a narrative strategy characteristic of the broader Boys' Love genre, in which affective practices gradually weaken gender opposition rather than confront it directly, rendering claims of dominance contingent and unstable. This finding also reinforces the view that femininity does not automatically signify subordination, just as masculinity does not always guarantee dominance. Instead, social and emotional relationships continually negotiate between the two positions (Mendie & Udofia, 2020).

When read alongside the scene of Oh-aew's emotional rejection, the scene in which Teh cries after kissing Oh-aew on the beach shows how the narrative consistently undermines the claim that masculinity is the center of meaning. This scene does not merely represent an outburst of personal emotion, but marks the failure of hegemonic masculinity to maintain its claim to self-control and affective stability. Narrative silence and close-ups on Teh's face shift the focus from assertive masculine actions to fragile affective conditions, making emotions impossible to suppress or remove.



**Figure 2. Teh's tears express a crisis of masculine identity that is beginning to falter.**

Source: *I Told Sunset About You*, 2020

Derrida emphasizes that meaning arises not only from presence, but also from absence and the gaps that accompany it (Stocker, 2006). Teh's crying functions as a trace that reveals cracks in a masculine image long sustained by self-control. This scene demonstrates that masculinity's claim to emotional control is not natural but emerges from the continuous denial of affection. When this denial fails, masculinity no longer operates as a self-contained center of meaning. Instead, it becomes dependent on what it has positioned as secondary, namely emotion, vulnerability, and the need for recognition from others (Segarra, 2024). Thus, the masculine-feminine opposition loses the foundation that has long placed masculinity in a superior position, because the masculine position only appears dominant as long as it succeeds in removing the elements that are actually necessary for its functioning.

Chahbane (2023) research on gender representation in popular Moroccan music videos reinforces this reading by showing that contemporary visual media increasingly portray men in emotionally vulnerable positions, including crying, dependence, and open expressions of affection. This representation does not aim to reverse the gender hierarchy explicitly, but rather to weaken the association of masculinity with control, strength, and emotional stability. Studies of masculinity in *Boys Don't Cry* and *The Mask You Live In* reveal a similar pattern in which emotional denial and demands for self-control function as central elements in the formation of hegemonic masculinity while also constituting points of vulnerability that trigger identity crises when such control fail (Jayakody, 2024). Both studies reinforce a deconstructive reading of *I Told Sunset About You*, in which representations of masculinity are constructed as a center of meaning that is always dependent, fragile, and open to shifts.

Oh-aew's character change also proves that femininity can be a source of strength and agency. In the scene where Oh-aew hugs Teh and seriously asks, "So what now?", he shows emotional initiative and the courage to solidify their relationship. This move shifts Oh-aew from the passive feminine stereotype to an active subject capable of defining his relationship and emotional reality. In a deconstructive reading, the feminine position is not always synonymous with obedience, but can be an arena for articulating meanings that challenge dominant structures. Femininity, in this framework, is understood as a discursive position that can challenge hierarchical binary logic. The poststructuralist feminist approach emphasizes the importance of deconstructing and rewriting discourses in which masculine oppositions such as men versus women still dominate, thereby opening space for symbolic resistance within structures (Liu et al., 2020). In this context, the representation of Oh-aew serves as an important symbol in challenging normative gender boundaries and power relations.

Through the emotional relationships and inner conflicts these characters face, *I Told Sunset About You* not only narrates the romantic relationships of teenage boys. The series also reveals the symbolic struggle over the meaning of gender itself. In this context, Derrida's deconstruction serves as a critical tool, showing that gender identity in the text is not stable. Instead, the narrative continuously produces gender identity through unstable meanings that actors and symbols can disrupt, shift, and redefine. The series invites viewers to question and reflect on their understandings of gender and sexuality by engaging with this open and exploratory space.

Finally, *I Told Sunset About You* offers a new perspective in the study of gender and sexuality, especially in a conservative cultural context. The series challenges established norms through complex character representations and in-depth narratives, opening up space for broader discussion. A deconstructive reading of *I Told Sunset About You* shows that the binary opposition between masculine and feminine does not work as a fixed structure of meaning. The series consistently challenges this hierarchical logic by showing characters shifting between dominance, vulnerability, and power and tenderness. In Derrida's deconstructive theory, the concept of *différance*, the meaning of gender in this series is present through unstable, changing relations rather than essential definitions. These dynamics take shape through emotional interactions, expressive gestures, and visual symbols that present masculinity and femininity as flexible and contingent roles.

The popularity of *I Told Sunset About You* is a sign that this deconstructive project also resonates widely in popular culture. With over 208,000 fans in China, a score of 9.5 on the Douban platform, and a win at the 2021 Seoul International Drama Awards, the series demonstrates its strong global appeal and influence on cultural and tourism policies in Thailand (Fan & Supalakwatchana, 2025). This reception shows that queer representations that challenge conventional norms can open up reflective and discursive spaces among cross-cultural audiences. Researchers also observe a similar phenomenon in K-pop fandom studies. In this realm, popular media in Asia serve as platforms for queer expression and identity formation. The unconventional gender practices displayed by K-pop idols, such as soft masculinity and androgyny, inspire LGBTQ+ fans to re-imagine their identities outside of heteropatriarchal frameworks (Baudinette & Scholes, 2024). Media like *I Told Sunset About You* and similar cultural products act as representational tools that facilitate the dismantling of gender binary structures. They create a more inclusive and progressive space for discussion in interpreting identities and social relations that dominant norms have limited.

### Gender Différance and Sexual Orientation in the Series *I Told Sunset About You*

The concept of *différance* introduced by Jacques Derrida refers to the mechanism of delay and difference in meaning in the sign system, where identity is never stable or final (Critchley et al., 2005). Language users construct meaning through oppositions, yet these oppositions never remain permanent because they are always susceptible to shifts and deviations. About gender and sexual orientation, *différance* suggests that identity does not arise from a fixed essence. Instead, individuals shape it through an ongoing, iterative signification process involving tension and contradiction. The series *I Told Sunset About You* exemplifies this idea by portraying characters whose identities remain in flux and resist binary classification. Through the emotional struggles of Teh and Oh-aew, the narrative illustrates how social constructions of gender and orientation evolve in response to normative pressures and resistances. These representations strengthen the theoretical view that individuals should interpret gender and sexuality not as standardized categories, but as ongoing negotiations between dominant norms and subversive possibilities (Al-Fayyadl, 2005).

This mechanism is evident in the scene where Teh and Oh-aew converse on a hammock, expressing emotional closeness without ever verbally confirming the meaning of their relationship. The series deliberately withholds certainty about meaning by maintaining ambiguous, paused dialogue, such as “I don’t know” or “You already know who he is,” which do not lead to a single interpretation. In the context of *différance*, this kind of language does not represent mere confusion but functions as a narrative strategy that delays the presence of meaning, so that love and identity never appear as definitive but are always referred to other signs that are also temporary (Stocker, 2006).



**Figure 3. Teh and Oh-aew express their feelings to each other with doubt and ambiguity.**

Source: *I Told Sunset About You*, 2020

Through *différance*, sexual identity in the scene does not appear as a fixed category, but as a rotating process in the play of signs. The characters do not express desire through heterosexual or homosexual labels. Instead, they communicate desire through ambiguity and unresolved emotional tension (Pavanini, 2022). The space between the statement and its meaning becomes a critical field in which subjectivity emerges through delay, contradiction, and incompleteness. Teh’s tension between his normative relationships and his closeness to Oh-aew shows that self-meaning does not exist singularly or authoritatively, but rather as a series of traces that are never stable. The absence of labels in Teh and Oh-aew’s relationship is the most concrete form of *différance* in the narrative. *I Told Sunset About You*, consciously refusing to give a definitive name to the relationship, whether gay, bisexual, or any other category. This refusal to name does not create a void of meaning. Instead, it operates as a deconstructive strategy that opens a productive space for ambiguity and reflection because identity does not remain locked within a system of signs that demands certainty (Sebbah & Marchesini, 2019; Sitorus & Sitorus, 2024). This dismantles the assumption that sexual orientation is

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present as a whole and final, because in a deconstructive reading, its incompleteness opens up space for the emergence of diverse and flexible meanings. As a result, the narrative prioritizes emotional experience over rigid sexual categorization.

This approach distinguishes *I Told Sunset About You* from many other queer representations that tend to resolve identity tensions through explicit declarations. In queer literature and media representation, scholars such as [Ashari et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Mustika et al. \(2021\)](#) note that representations of male relationships often emphasize competition for dominance or visual affirmations of masculinity. In contrast, the series maintains ambiguity as a structural element of the narrative, slowing down the rhythm of identity affirmation and allowing meaning to remain suspended. In this context, *différance* functions not only as a theme but as a narrative mechanism that shapes the overall storyline. This finding is also consistent with research by [Amalia & Adlina \(2023\)](#), which shows that gender stereotypes in patriarchal societies contain internal contradictions that create space for symbolic resistance. However, *I Told Sunset About You* goes further by making ambiguity its main aesthetic, through slow camera work, contemplative music, and character expressions conveyed in silence. This visual strategy represents *différance* as an affective experience lived by the characters, rather than merely an abstract concept.

After the previous scene introduced affective ambiguity, in which the meaning of the relationship emerged as initial doubt and uncertainty, *I Told Sunset About You* continues its *différance* strategy through the meeting scene at Oh-aew's house. In this scene, *différance* operates as a deliberate delay in articulating meaning that has already taken shape emotionally. The increasing affective intensity is not followed by a final verbal statement or symbolic action, so that the identity of the relationship never reaches full presence, but is continually suspended through silence, physical closeness, and withdrawal. Thus, the narrative does not move towards resolution, but instead maintains meaning in an open state, emphasizing that *différance* in this series is not a momentary occurrence, but a structural principle that governs the development of relationships between characters.

The scene of intimacy between Teh and Oh-aew in this domestic space shows how *différance* works not through language, but through the postponement of meaning produced by gestures and the suspension of action. The absence of dialogue articulating feelings, as well as of final actions such as a kiss or a confession, leaves the emotional relationship in a delayed, unfinished form. Within Derrida's framework of *différance*, meaning is never fully present at any one moment, but is constantly shifting and deferred through a series of mutually referential signs without an endpoint ([Critchley et al., 2005](#); [Al-Fayyadl, 2005](#)). Physical closeness in this scene serves as a signifier of affection, yet the narrative never fixes its meaning to a definite relational meaning. This delay functions as a narrative strategy that maintains identity and relationships in an open state. The affection between Teh and Oh-aew is neither rejected nor validated. Thus, the meaning of their relationship remains in an in-between space, neither entirely present nor absent. This pattern reflects the principle of *différance*, in which meaning appears only as a trace that continually refers to other possibilities without ever reaching certainty ([Ranker, 2024](#)). In this scene, the emotional relationship does not move toward resolution but remains a process that continually delays the definition of self and relationship.

This finding aligns with [Zhao \(2024\)](#) study of queer female representation in contemporary Chinese media, which shows that queer narratives often work through the postponement of meaning, relational ambiguity, and a temporal logic that suspends the certainty of identity. In this context, identity is not produced through explicit declarations, but rather maintained in an open state through non-frontal narrative strategies. [Theo \(2021\)](#) identifies a similar pattern by demonstrating that queering practices in texts operate through liminal silences and the deferral of meaning. As a result, relationships and identities never fully present themselves but instead function as traces that are continually referenced without reaching a final resolution. Although these studies emerge from different media, contexts, and subjects, they reveal similar representational mechanisms. Specifically, they show how queer identity is produced through narrative strategies that withhold certainty, sustain ambiguity, and keep meaning in an in-between space rather than becoming fixed within definitive categories.

In the context of Indonesian society, which is full of heteronormative and religious norms, this strategy presents an essential potential for symbolic resistance. A study by [Wijaya \(2025\)](#) shows that queer discourse in Indonesia develops through creative and alternative pathways that are not always institutionalized, such as online communities, independent discussions, and popular media productions. The series, with its cross-national popularity and positive critical response, is an example of how queer representations can emerge in reflective and non-confrontational narrative forms, while still disrupting the dominance of rigid discourses on identity.

Furthermore, the experiences of Muslim gay men in Indonesia as described in [Boellstorff \(2005\)](#) study show how *différance* operates practically in everyday life. These individuals do not always reconcile religious and sexual identities harmoniously, yet they also do not treat them as rigid opposites. Instead, they actively navigate these identities within threshold spaces, creating alternative practices that sustain productive

tensions in meaning. Thus, *différance* is not only a tool to read cultural works, but also a principle to understand how queer individuals in society shape their space of existence amidst the pressure of dominant norms. The ambiguity displayed by *I Told Sunset About You* opens up the possibility of understanding identity not as a definite answer but rather as a process that is constantly moving and open.

### **The Fluidity of Gender Identity and Sexuality in the Series *I Told Sunset About You***

In Jacques Derrida's deconstructive view, the fluidity of gender identity and sexuality reflects the freedom to move from one category to another and more deeply results from the sign system's tension and delay of meaning. The concept of *différance* establishes that identity never achieves full presence or stability. Instead, individuals construct identity by relating to other signs (Al-Fayyadl, 2005). In *I Told Sunset About You*, the narrative presents fluidity not as absolute freedom but as a discursive field. In this field, characters negotiate identity through symbols, language, and narrative tensions. As such, fluidity becomes a deconstructive process that dismantles the essential boundaries between masculine-feminine and heterosexual-homosexual.

In one symbolically significant scene, Oh-aew appears in front of a mirror wearing a red bra and shorts while photographing himself. The scene does not present a definitive statement about a particular gender identity. Instead, it stages a moment of self-exploration that leaves the matter uncertain. Oh-aew's body is not depicted as shifting from masculine to feminine, but rather as a space where various gender markers intersect without producing a definitive identity. In a deconstructive reading, the use of feminine attributes on a body socially read as masculine is not intended to negate either category, but rather to reveal the tensions that already exist within the gender-signifying system itself. In this scene, gender identity does not appear fixed or consistent, but rather as a symbolic practice that is always open to reinterpretation. The bra does not function as a definitive marker of femininity. Instead, it operates as a trace of meaning that acquires significance only through its relation to other signs and the surrounding narrative context. In this way, the fluidity of identity functions as a deconstructive process that slowly undermines the assumption that masculine and feminine are rigid, stable opposites (Critchley et al., 2005).

The visual narrative in *I Told Sunset About You*, therefore, does not present gender identity as a definitive answer. Instead, it frames gender identity as a possibility that remains constantly shifting, suspended, and open to diverse readings. This finding aligns with the study by Inayah & Fauzi (2024), which analyzed the film *The Danish Girl* and found that gender expression through costumes and body gestures functions as a performative practice rather than a final marker of identity. In the movie, Lili Elbe's use of feminine clothing does not necessarily function as a declaration of stable identity, but rather as a repetitive process of negotiating self-meaning. Although the narrative context and subject of representation differ, both works place the body as a symbolic space in which gender meaning is produced, deferred, and reopened. As the emotional climax and resolution of their deconstructive identity journey, the scene when Teh looks at Oh-aew and asks, "Can I be your boyfriend?" affirms that relational choices are no longer subject to the stable opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Such declarations do not emerge from a linear process, but rather from identity crises, affective vacillations, and social tensions that constantly disrupt binary structures. In terms of fluidity, this moment is not simply an affirmation of love, but the formation of a new subjectivity that is transient, open-ended, and always subject to change (Mendie & Udofia, 2020). Teh's identity is not summarized as "gay" in a final sense, but rather as a subject that is constantly moving in a landscape of difference and deferral of meaning. As such, the series does not close identity as a label, but elevates it as a constantly negotiated process, in line with Derrida's idea that meaning is always delayed and formed through the traces of other signs. The choice to love Oh-aew becomes a performative act that does not resolve, but instead perpetuates the openness of meaning in the differential field of gender and sexual identity.



**Figure 4. Teh asks Oh-aew to be his girlfriend, marking a moment of emotional affirmation that reflects fluid and open identities.**

Source: *I Told Sunset About You*, 2020

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In Derrida's theory, fluidity never exists as an opposition to stability, but rather as a constant disruption to the wholeness of meaning. Scenes that do not result in resolution or affirmation of identity, such as when Teh and Oh-aew are silent in a closed space after a conflict, display a form of presence through absence. Silence and doubt become part of the play of meaning that shapes identity as a process, not a product. Thus, fluidity is not arbitrary, but the result of the tension between signs that continue to shape and postpone meaning.

This analysis is in line with [Baudinette \(2021\)](#) findings on the representation of gay men in Asian popular culture, that queer identities do not exist as one final form, but as a result of negotiations between norms, space, and performance. In the context of *I Told Sunset About You*, these negotiations take place in transitional spaces such as libraries, beaches, and bedrooms, which become arenas of fluidity of meaning. [Adunnawakit et al. \(2022\)](#) also noted that the private spaces in the series allow characters to express their identities more fluidly and honestly. Thus, fluidity becomes not only personal but also spatial and symbolic.

In this framework, readers must interpret gender performance regarding the social structures that shape and constrain it. [Butler \(2002\)](#) states that gender results from repetitive actions that form the illusion of essentiality. Teh and Oh-aew perform a constantly changing performance: from competition to mutual support, repression to expression. This dynamic suggests that fluidity is not only the result of individual choice but also due to the mismatch between bodies, language, and social expectations. Identity is present as something that never occupies a central position and is constantly displaced by the presence of other signs.

Meanwhile, [Shavira & Prastuty \(2020\)](#) show that *I Told Sunset About You* successfully obscures the dominant role in male couples through narrative structure and character portrayal. The series avoids explicitly assigning the roles of "top" or "bottom," thereby challenging the idea that dominance and subordination naturally characterize queer relationships. Viewers can recognize that such hierarchies stem from social constructions rather than inherent traits and may disregard these labels entirely. This narrative strategy supports Derrida's concept that binary oppositions rely on repetitive reinforcement to appear stable. Once the pattern of repetition breaks down, the binary structure loses its coherence.

By blurring the lines between masculine and feminine, and rejecting a definitive sexual orientation, *I Told Sunset About You* shows that characters actively negotiate gender identity and sexuality as open and evolving processes. Fluidity in this context does not mean directionlessness, but existence in motion. Derrida calls this "writing under erasure," a concept that suggests that a meaning remains in use even though it is never entirely true or certain. Therefore, the series not only represents queer as a theme, but also as a method of dismantling dominant structures. Intimacy, conflict, and silence in the series break down binary oppositions. There is no final meaning in the world built by the series. Everything is in the play of signs that mutually abolish and reshape identities through the rhythm of *différance*. Thus, a deconstructive reading of fluidity in *I Told Sunset About You* allows us to see that identity is not a stable center, but a textual event that is always open to other possibilities.

## Conclusion

Based on a deconstructive analysis of gender and sexuality in *I Told Sunset About You*, this study concludes that the series constructs gender and sexual identities not as essential or fixed attributes. Instead, it presents them as meanings that remain constantly negotiated through narrative ambiguity, emotional tension, symbolic silence, and inter-character relationships. Rather than presenting explicit declarations of identity, the series consistently undermines binary oppositions and heteronormative assumptions by presenting identity as something relational, unstable, and open to interpretation. In this way, *I Told Sunset About You* shows that masculinity and femininity do not operate as rigid categories, but rather as positions of meaning that are constantly shifting within affective and symbolic dynamics.

The findings of this study have important implications for the development of gender and media studies, particularly in the context of Southeast Asian popular culture. This study shows that the Boys' Love genre can function as a discursive space that produces symbolic resistance to dominant norms without relying on confrontational or directly affirmative representations. Representation strategies based on ambiguity and the postponement of meaning open up new possibilities for reading queer representations, emphasizing the role of silence, visibility, and affect as the main mechanisms of identity meaning production.

This research has limitations: it focuses on text analysis and does not yet address audience reception or the life experiences of queer communities in Indonesia. Therefore, further research could expand on this study through reception studies, cross-cultural comparisons with other Boys' Love series, or intersectional approaches that address issues of class, ethnicity, and religion. Thus, future research can broaden our understanding of how queer representation in popular media interacts with broader social and political realities.

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