

Till Bisexual Ambiguity: A Multimodal Study in *Alien Stage* Animation Project

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Abstract: Representation of bisexuality remains underexplored in contemporary media, particularly when sexual identity is implied rather than explicitly stated. Previous studies have examined gender performativity and queer identities in literary works; however, few have investigated how bisexuality is constructed through multimodal narratives. This study aims to analyze the implied bisexuality of Till in *Alien Stage* using Judith Butler's theory of Gender Performativity (1990; 1999; 2004) and Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). Employing a qualitative descriptive method and multimodal analysis, the study examines visual, verbal, and auditory elements across the series. The findings reveal that Till maintains a consistent masculine gender performance despite emotional attachments to both Mizi and Ivan, while his sexuality is communicated through narrative ambiguity, subtext, and emotional interactions. The study concludes that *Alien Stage* represents bisexuality through implication rather than explicit identification, challenging heteronormative assumptions about gender and desire.

INTRODUCTION

Beyond biological sex categories, gender refers to socially constructed attributes shaped by cultural norms and meanings (Rosyidah & Nurwati, 2019). Gender is not an innate trait but a performative process produced through repeated actions and social interactions (Butler, 1990). Meanwhile sexuality is similarly shaped by cultural norms, language, and power relations rather than biology alone (Foucault, 1978). Consequently, gender and sexuality operate within the same performative framework and jointly shape identity formation (Butler, 1990). Sexuality is a fundamental aspect of human experience influenced by social, cultural, moral, and religious factors (Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2010; SIECUS, 2014), and has increasingly been viewed as a source of personal freedom following the "sexual revolution" (Giddens, 1992). This shift has encouraged recognition of queer identities, including bisexuality, which refers to romantic, emotional, or sexual attraction to more than one gender (Cavarra et al., 2023; Gamache & Lazear, 2009, as cited in Ikawati, 2020).

Despite the growing visibility of LGBTQ+ identities, bisexuality continues to face unique challenges within both heterosexual and homosexual contexts (Yoshino, 2000). Bisexual individuals are often miscategorized as either lesbian or gay, a tendency that obscures the distinctiveness of bisexual identity (Maylya & Wedawati, 2022). When asked to define their

sexuality, many people focus solely on sexual behavior, while bisexual individuals understand their identity through a combination of emotional and behavioral attraction (Flanders, 2018). This issue is frequently misunderstood, leading to the false assumption that bisexuality represents confusion or indecision rather than a valid sexual orientation that resists both heteronormative and homonormative expectations. Within media representations, this misunderstanding often manifests as *bisexual erasure*—the tendency to exclude or simplify bisexual identities in favor of monosexual narratives (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021). Stereotypes further reinforce this invisibility; for example, bisexual men are perceived as rare (Bailey et al., 2000), and bisexuality as inherently unstable (Burke & LaFrance, 2018). As Morgenroth and Ryan (2021) argues, “such erasure stems from a monosexist belief that only heterosexual, gay, and lesbian identities are authentic”. Hence, bisexuality occupies a marginalized position both in society and in media, where its representation remains limited or entirely absent.

In addition to reflecting social values, literary and audiovisual works can challenge cultural norms and encourage audiences to critically examine dominant social assumptions (Kamila, 2025). “Film, as an artistic medium, not only represents social realities but also questions normative constructions of gender,” as stated by Aprilianny & Hermiati (2021). Similarly, music videos, which combine songs with short visual narratives, function as a form of mass media capable of communicating meanings, symbols, and social messages effectively (Sanjaya et al., 2025; Karunia, 2022; Wiratirta & Adim, 2023). Like films, music videos provide a space where gender identities can be constructed, performed, and redefined, reflecting the fluid and socially influenced nature of gender (Sirait et al., 2025). Their popularity among younger audiences further enhances their potential to represent and challenge socially accepted gender norms (Oktaviani et al., 2020).

Gender identity is formed and expressed through performative acts within discourse, appearance, and sexual behavior (Butler, 1990). This study analyzes the gender performance of Till, an implied bisexual character in the Korean animated music video series *Alien Stage*, created by Vivinos in collaboration with QMENG and published by STUDIO LICO (Vivinos, 2022). Through the use of multimodal approach, the research examines how Till expresses gender, sexuality, and emotion through visual, verbal, and behavioral elements embedded in his actions and relationships within a post-apocalyptic society governed by aliens. Through this analysis, the study explores how his attachments to both male and female characters contribute to gender trouble and challenge heteronormative expectations.

Bisexual individuals often conceal their sexuality by performing either heterosexuality or homosexuality to avoid marginalization and gain social acceptance (Sedgwick, 1990). Sedgwick’s concept of the *Epistemology of the Closet* explains how bisexuality is erased through binary classifications, a process reinforced by people’s preference for those perceived as similar to themselves (Renata & Mustofa, 2023). Drawing on Sedgwick (1990) and Butler (1990), this study examines how Till’s bisexual identity and gender performativity are shaped by social silence, marginalization, and heteronormative expectations.

Based on the phenomenon above, there are some previous studies that has analyzed similar topic using Judith Butler’s theory of “Gender Trouble” (Judith. Butler, 1999). For example, the first previous study is the research conducted by Maylya and Wedawati (2022) with the title “Bisexuality in Bohemian Rhapsody: A Queer Study”. This research utilizes queer theory and Judith Butler’s concepts of performativity to examine how Freddie Mercury’s bisexual identity is represented and constructed within the biographical film *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Maylya and Wedawati employ a qualitative method to analyze how the protagonist’s sexual identity is depicted as a fluid and conflicted process rather than a fixed essence. The findings support Butler’s (1999) assertion that gender traits and behaviors are performative, meaning there is “no prior identity by

which an act or attribute may be assessed." The study reveals that Freddie's identity is shaped through a continuous negotiation between personal desire and the heteronormative pressures of the music industry.

The second previous study, *Gender Performativity in Becky Albertalli's Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (Qonitah & Mustofa, 2022), employs Judith Butler's theory to examine how Simon Spier constructs his queer identity through repeated actions and social interactions within a heteronormative environment. Using qualitative textual analysis and Butler's framework (1990; 1999; 2004), the study argues that identity is not fixed but continuously negotiated through performance, as shown by Simon's differing gender expressions in public and private contexts. The findings suggest that identity is shaped by personal desire, social surveillance, and bodily expressions that vary across individuals (Butler, 2004).

The third previous study, *Gender Performativity: Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games Trilogy and the Construction of Gender Identity* (Thibordee et al., 2018), employs Judith Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity to examine how Katniss Everdeen challenges traditional masculine and feminine roles within the oppressive society of Panem. Using a qualitative approach grounded in Butler's concept of gender as a "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1999), the study argues that identity is strategically performed rather than naturally fixed. The findings reveal that the performance of both masculine and feminine traits enables resistance to gender binaries, demonstrating how alternative gender configurations can function as tools of empowerment and political agency within restrictive social systems.

The fourth previous study, *Gender Performativity in Adam Silvera's They Both Die at the End* (Desabrina & F., 2023), employs a qualitative approach and Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity to examine the construction of homosexual identities in the novel. Focusing on the protagonists Rufus and Mateo, the study analyzes how their gender and sexual identities are expressed through performative acts as they confront their imminent deaths. The findings suggest that identity formation is a continuous process shaped by social interactions and self-discovery, demonstrating the role of performativity in the development of personal identity.

The fifth previous study was conducted by Cahyaningsih Pujimahanani, Rommel Utungga Pasopati, and Flora Anasisa in (Pujimahanani et al., 2022). The title of this study is *Gender Performativity as Asserted on Kate Chopin's A Respectable Woman* (2022). This study uses Judith Butler's theory to analyze how the protagonist, Mrs. Baroda, defines her self-identity through her actions and decisions rather than biological traits. The research focuses on the "stylized repetition of acts" and the concept of identity as a "verb of doing" within the context of marital respectability and personal desire. From this study, it can be summarized that Mrs. Baroda's identity is a social performance that occurs and reproduces meaning through her firm state of not being tempted. The findings highlight that identity is not a fixed essence but is tenuously constituted in time through continuing social performances that create the effect of an internal core. The study ultimately shows that performativity allows identity to remain flexible, suggesting that a woman's sense of self is not fixed. Instead, her identity develops over time through the actions she takes and the choices she makes.

However, the aforementioned previous studies have not specifically examined *Alien Stage*, particularly how the series implies bisexuality through the character of Till using Butler's theory of Gender Performativity. They have also not combined Butler's framework with Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and multimodal into the analysis of visual, verbal, and auditory elements. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by analyzing how *Alien Stage* constructs Till's implied bisexuality through the ambiguous narrative in the form of interactions, visual, verbal, and auditory modes. Through this approach, the research aims to provide new insights into the

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representation of bisexuality in the series.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Performativity from Butler's Perspective

The study of gender and sexuality in media has become a significant area of inquiry within cultural and gender studies, as media texts not only reflect social realities but also participate in shaping understandings of identity. Judith Butler's theory of performativity (1990; 1999; 2004) provides a framework for examining how gender and sexuality are constructed through social practices rather than determined by biology. Butler (1990:23) argues that gender coherence is maintained through the expectation that sex, gender, desire, and behavior align consistently, while repeated performances reinforce what is considered socially intelligible. Furthermore, in quotation to Butler (1990:33), "Gender identity does not exist prior to its expression but is produced through recurring acts, gestures, and behaviors that create the illusion of stability". These perspectives suggest that gender and sexuality should be understood as fluid and continuously negotiated rather than fixed or innate categories.

The understanding is further developed within queer theory, which challenges essentialist assumptions about gender and sexual identity. Jagose (1996:123) quotes, "gender and sexuality are shaped by cultural expectations and social boundaries, emphasizing their fluid and unstable nature." Supporting this view, Butler (1990:184) and Butler in *Bodies That Matter* maintain that the repetition of gender norms is never complete, creating opportunities for disruption and the emergence of alternative identities. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for analyzing how *Alien Stage* represents Till's bisexuality and gender expression through performative acts, emotional interactions, and narrative ambiguity that resist rigid heteronormative categorization.

Epistemology of the Closet by Sedgwick

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Epistemology of the Closet* examines how modern Western society constructs knowledge about sexuality and argues that non-heterosexual desire is deeply intertwined with systems of power, knowledge, and social regulation (Sedgwick, 1990:1). Sedgwick contends that the closet functions not merely as a private secret but as a social structure that governs what can be known, expressed, and recognized about sexuality, particularly through the tension between concealment and disclosure (Sedgwick, 1990:53, 70–73). She further explains that queer individuals often experience a double bind in which they are expected to define their sexuality while simultaneously facing social stigma and exclusion for doing so, making ambiguity, silence, and partial disclosure significant modes of negotiation within heteronormative systems (Sedgwick, 1990:70, 248). Challenging the assumption that visibility guarantees liberation, Sedgwick (1990) argues that the demand to clearly label sexuality frequently reinforces normative frameworks that marginalize queer identities, particularly bisexuality, which is often perceived as unstable or illegible (Sedgwick, 1990:4–5, 54). These arguments are relevant to *Alien Stage*, where the narrative's refusal to explicitly define Till's sexuality can be understood as a strategic use of ambiguity that resists fixed categorization and creates space for multiple forms of queer visibility and interpretation (Sedgwick, 1990:3–8, 53).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a multimodal approach to analyze how Till's bisexuality is implied in the animated series *Alien Stage*. The analysis aims to describe and interpret the representation of Till's bisexuality through Judith Butler's theory of Gender Performativity (1990; 1999; 2004) and

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of Epistemology of the Closet (1990). The analysis focuses on close and repeated observation of the series alongside theoretical interpretation of its visual and textual elements. This method is appropriate because it enables the examination of meaning constructed through multiple semiotic modes, including dialogue, visual symbolism, character interaction, and narrative structure. Creswell (2018) state that qualitative research emphasizes understanding the meanings embedded within data, while Denzin and Lincoln (2018) argue that qualitative approaches are particularly suitable for interpreting literary and audiovisual works due to their symbolic and complex nature.

The source of data for this study is the animated series *Alien Stage*, particularly materials related to the character Till. The data are obtained from publicly accessible official media, including the *Alien Stage* music video rounds uploaded on the official YouTube channel, complementary posts from the official X (formerly Twitter) account, and official Patreon content. The data consist of dialogues, song lyrics, character interactions, visual symbolism, and scenes that depict or contribute to Till's characterization and the implication of his bisexuality throughout the series.

The necessary data are collected through two stages. First, the selected *Alien Stage* materials are observed repeatedly to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative, character development, and visual storytelling while identifying scenes, dialogues, lyrics, and symbolic elements relevant to the research focus. Particular attention is given to Till's interactions with both male and female characters, as well as scenes that suggest emotional intimacy, identity conflict, or narrative ambiguity. Time stamps are documented to ensure accuracy and consistency throughout the analysis. Second, the identified dialogues, lyrics, screenshots, and visual sequences are documented, classified, and selected as the primary evidence for analysis. The collected data are then categorized according to themes related to Butler's concept of gender performativity and Sedgwick's (1990) concept of the closet to examine how Till's bisexuality is implied rather than explicitly stated within the narrative of *Alien Stage*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section comprises the analysis of the selected evidence from the series *ALIEN STAGE* (VIVINOS, 2022). The discussion examines multimodal elements—including visual signs, body language, interactions, dialogue, background music, and character behavior—that visualize and perform a bisexual identity. The analysis is conducted through the theoretical lenses of Judith Butler's Performativity (1990; 1999; 2004) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Epistemology of the Closet (1990) to address the research questions regarding the implications of bisexual identity represented through the ambiguous narrative of the character Till.

Visual Construction of Till's Identity and Bisexuality

While sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are conceptually distinct, they are often interconnected in shaping individual experiences. Gender identity refers to one's internalized sense of being a particular gender (Behavioral et al., 2015; Maylya & Wedawati, 2022). The term gender expression describes how individuals outwardly convey their gender identity through their appearance and conduct, including clothing choices, hairstyles, makeup, and other forms of self-presentation (Maylya & Wedawati, 2022). The alignment, or lack thereof, between gender identity and gender expression is commonly conceptualized respectively as gender conformity and gender nonconformity.

Table 1. Till's Costume and Physical Appearance

Modes	Evidence
Body language, appearance	 Figure 1. Till dressed in a white shirt and red pants in ROUND 2 (Unknown (Till the End), 1:45, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).
Body language, appearance	 Figure 2. Till dressed in black during ROUND 6 (CURE, 1:02, VIVINOS YouTube Channel)
Body language, appearance	 Figure 3. Till dressed in green during the FINAL ROUND (BLINK GONE, 1:11, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).

Through Butler (1990) framework, Till's appearance evolves from the regulated attire in Figure 1 to the aggressive black aesthetic in Figure 2. The evidences above demonstrate that his masculine persona is not innate, but a rehearsed performance that shifts alongside his emotional attachments. This visual transformation reaches its climax in Figure 3, where the close-up composition focuses on his hands and instrument under a vibrant green illumination. While his earlier dark styling marked rigid trauma, this green lighting visually anchors a resurgence of vital creative energy, framing his musical performance as an act of ultimate resistance to reclaim his agency. Moreover, this fluctuating visual style creates the subversive ambiguity of Till's bisexual identity; instead of following a single gendered script, his look alternates between masculine styles that are provoked by both male (Ivan) and female (Mizi) equivalents. Till's fluid visual presentation undermines the rigid heterosexual matrix by including these contradictory feelings into his final performance, illustrating how bisexual desire appears through recurring performances that defy binary attraction.

Table 2. Behaviourals and Body Languages

Modes	Evidence
Composition, body language.	 Figure 4. Till gets reprimanded after being aggressive in the stage of ROUND 2 (Till the End), 2:02, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).

Composition, body language



Figure 5. Till fighting against the guards □ (TOP 3 ALIEN STAGE Promotional Video, 0:53, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).

Composition, body language



Figure 6. Till performance on the final round stage portrays emotional tension (BLINK GONE, 0:28, , VIVINOS YouTube Channel).

The physical aggression displayed by Till is a performance of conventional masculine identity aimed at resisting the oppressive alien system. In Figure 4, a close-up composition highlights Till's sharp, blood-stained facial expression after being reprimanded, where his defiant gaze serves as an affirmation of a masculine subject refusing domestication. This defiance escalates in Figure 5, where his kinetic gestures in fighting the guards reveal a brutal outburst of physical aggression, visually underscored by a chaotic red and purple color palette that radiates danger and internal conflict.

From Butler's (1990; 1999) perspective, the rigid performance of masculinity previously associated with Till undergoes a notable transformation in Figure 6. Following the loss of both Mizi and Ivan, Till is depicted as experiencing heightened emotional distress, which becomes visually articulated through his altered stage performance. The green spotlight illuminates the shift, emphasizing a movement from overt aggression toward a state of emotional tension and frustration. Despite this vulnerability, Till extends his arm toward the audience and the stage space, suggesting an attempt to reassert agency within the competitive structure that governs his existence. This gesture reflects the coexistence of emotional vulnerability and masculine self-assertion rather than a complete abandonment of either position. As a result, his performance reveals the instability of normative masculine ideals and exposes the complex relationship between grief, desire, and identity formation.

Although Till exhibits attraction toward both male and female characters, his outward appearance remains consistent with the masculine norms established throughout the series. This aesthetic renders his bisexuality invisible, a condition that resonates with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1990) conceptualization of the closet—an epistemic structure wherein non-heterosexual desire is obscured beneath the facade of a socially intelligible identity. In addition, Till's constant portrayal of traditional masculinity highlights the contradiction between gender performance and sexual orientation when viewed through Judith Butler's (1990; 1999) perspective. His ability to negotiate the heterosexual matrix while holding non-normative needs serves as an example of how sexual presentation operates as a performance that is neither defined by nor connected to one's orientation.

Interactions and Expressions of Attraction

Within the narrative structure of *Alien Stage*, Till's sexuality emerges through the diverse emotional relationships he maintains with characters across the gender binary. These interpersonal dynamics constitute a critical site of inquiry for interrogating the series' heteronormative

hegemony. Till's disruption of traditional binary interpretations emerges from these recurring interactions, wherein emotional intimacy and somatic expressions function as the primary conduits for his non-normative desire. While gender performance often mediates audience reception of sexuality, an analysis of Till's relational landscape reveals the complexities of a desire that resists simplistic categorization and underscores the tension between affective orientation and socially intelligible identity.

1. Mizi

The analysis begins with Mizi, who functions as the earliest and most explicit object of Till's affection. Till's clear affection for Mizi has been an important part of his character in *Alien Stage*. In general, society tends to see attraction to the opposite sex as normal, linking biological sex, gender identity, and desire in a way that prioritizes heterosexual relationships—this is what Butler (1990) calls the “heterosexual matrix” (Peake, 2017). Within the narrative of *Alien Stage*, Till's profound affection for Mizi is positioned within this framework, ensuring his feelings are immediately understood and validated by the audience. This alignment is clearly illustrated through several key behaviors that demonstrate his internalized attachment.

Table 3. Till attraction towards Mizi in the form of Music Videos Scenes

Moda	Evidence	Additional Context
Composition, body language, background music	 Figure 7 Till get flustered at the proximity of him and Mizi while hiding together (BLINK GONE, 3:24, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).	During the seventh round, a flashback to Till and Mizi's childhood recontextualizes their relationship. The recurring xylophone motif, referencing a past birthday gift, serves as a sensory link between his lost innocence and his final moments.
Composition, body language, music	 Figure 8 Till get more flustered as Mizi pulled him closer (BLINK GONE, 3:33, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).	The xylophone melody slows, mirroring Till's fading consciousness.
Composition, lyric	 Figure 9 Till imagining Mizi smiling at him (Unknown (Till the End), 0:57, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).	Till is first introduced in Round 2 to the audience as a character who displays romantic interest in Mizi, accompanied by visualized fantasies of her smiling at him.

Applying Judith Butler's framework of gender performativity, Till's intense romantic reaction towards Mizi reveals how deeply his subconscious is wired to expected heterosexual norms, even in life-or-death situations. This ingrained response is immediately visible in **Figure 7**, where the harsh lighting of their hiding spot draws attention to the deep red flush covering Till's face as he stands intimately close to her. The dominant heterosexual identity standard is imposed on others by normative heterosexuals (Butler, 1990). Additionally, this tension is triggered by the audio mode, specifically the recurring xylophone motif from their childhood. This background music serves as a nostalgic device that conditions Till's emotional state, reinforcing the innocence of his initial heteronormative attraction and his fading consciousness.

As visually articulated in Figure 8, the emotional and physical stakes rises the moment Mizi deliberately grabs his collar and draws him in. His intense blushing and wide-eyed shock in this vulnerable close-up show how easily he adopts the stereotypically masculine character of being rendered defenseless within the close proximity of a female. Crucially, as Till's consciousness fades, the xylophone melody slows down, auditorily mirroring his psychological submission to this overwhelming moment. It is evident from examining this amorous escalation through Butler's concept of the "heterosexual matrix" that his physiological and auditory response serves as an unconscious performance to confirm his male identity. In the end, although Till identifies himself by fiercely opposing the system, his textbook love reactions demonstrate that his masculine identity is nonetheless closely tied to the very social norms he believes he is challenging.

In Figure 9, Till's attraction to Mizi is mediated through a synthesis of lyrical content and internal visualization. The appearance of the lyric "*Error: No better option*" linked to his mental projection of Mizi's expression, suggesting a conflation of romantic fixation and cognitive distress. The minimalist visual composition characterized by a blank singular colored background isolates Mizi, effectively framing her as the sole object of Till's psychological attention. This aesthetic choice underscores the ephemeral, constructed nature of his imagination. Moreover, Mizi's white attire functions as a semiotic anchor, representing both her perceived innocence and the sanitized quality of Till's longing. It characterizes her not merely as an external figure, but as an idealized manifestation of his own affective state. Drawing on Butler's (1990; 1999) ideas of performativity, Till's imagined projection of Mizi can be understood as a constructed enactment of desire, in which romantic affect is not a transparent expression of an inner self but is produced through visual and affective repetition.

Table 4. Till's attraction towards Mizi in the form of artworks

Moda	Evidence	Description
Composition, body language		Till is shown as protective over Mizi despite looking terrified himself.
Composition, body language		A cover picture of Mizi and Till's duet of ' <i>Unknown till the end</i> ' for the 1 st ALIEN STAGE Anniversary.
	Figure 10. Till holding Mizi (Vivinos, 2023, Official X post).	
	Figure 11. Till holding Mizi's hair (ALIEN STAGE OFFICIAL MUSIC, 2025, Alien Stage Official Music YouTube Channel).	

In Figure 10, Till shields Mizi with his body, positioning himself as a protective barrier despite his own visible fear. The blank black background sharpens the focus on this interaction, where Mizi's face is obscured from the audience. Visually, this arrangement reinforces Butler's (1990) gender binary; Till's protective gesture instinctively assumes a traditionally active masculine role, while Mizi is reduced to a passive, protected subject. This automatic response demonstrates how normative gender roles are continuously reproduced through repeated

performances rather than being innate. Till's physiological reaction validates a conventional masculine identity structured around Mizi's perceived vulnerability.

On the other hand,, Figure 11 depicts Till tightly gripping Mizi's hair which presents a visual emphasis on possessive masculine expression. His hand is isolated against a dark background, drawing attention to a singular act of control that conveys a desperate grasp rather than mutual interaction. This gesture reflects how gender meaning is produced through repeated bodily performance, as suggested by Butler's (1990) concept of performativity. The composition indicates that traces of normative masculinity persist in Till's portrayal, especially in relation to his emotionally charged connection with Mizi.

Table 5. Till's attraction towards Mizi in the form of Comic Panels

Moda	Evidence	Dialogue	Narrative Context
Dialogue, language	body		
	 Figure 12. Mizi asks Till why he likes her (The True Face – p. 51, VIVINOS' Patreon)	"Why do you like me so much anyway?" - Mizi	During their early year in Anakt Garden, Mizi approaches Till with the hope of knowing his reason to like her.
Dialogue, language, composition	body		
	 Figure 13. Till answered Mizi's question (The True Face – p. 52, VIVINOS' Patreon).	"Because...you're pretty..." - Till	Till spills out his true reason as he is unable to look into her eyes while doing so.

From the perspective of Judith Butler's (1990; 1999; 2004) gender performativity, Till's attraction toward Mizi reflects how heterosexual affection is constructed to be socially recognizable and intelligible. Figures 12 & 13 demonstrate this normativity through a distinct interplay of dialogue, composition, and body language. In Figure 12, Mizi is positioned above Till with her face obscured by her hair, visually symbolizing her ignorance regarding his feelings. Conversely, Till's body language—becoming visibly flustered as she approaches—indicates an automatic, uncalculated emotional reaction.

This heterosexual matrix is further articulated in Figure 13 through a compelling compositional tension. As Mizi asks, *"Why do you like me so much anyway?"*, her shadow partially covers Till's face. Gesturally, Till glances away from her shadow while delivering his sincere, hesitant dialogue: *"Because... you're pretty..."* This visual and verbal avoidance highlights his stubborn devotion despite knowing his feelings are unrequited. Rather than being a purely organic emotion, Till's admiration is performatively rendered natural because it aligns with normative heterosexuality, providing him with a localized source of warmth and stability. Additionally, Mizi is constructed into an idealized figure that validates his male identity and motivates him to endure his harsh environment.

The findings indicate that Till's attraction toward Mizi is represented as a natural and emotionally sincere attachment that aligns with heteronormative expectations. His admiration, emotional dependence, and efforts to gain Mizi's attention position his feelings within what Butler

(1990; 1999; 2004) describes as the heterosexual matrix, making them readily recognizable and socially intelligible. However, the analysis also reveals that Mizi functions as more than a conventional romantic interest. She serves as a source of hope and motivation that enables Till to endure his circumstances and maintain a sense of purpose. This finding suggests that Till's attraction is intertwined with processes of identity formation and emotional survival, demonstrating a complexity that extends beyond a simple heterosexual reading of his character.

2. Ivan

In the series of *Alien Stage*, Till and Ivan are one of the important characters. Despite their pull and push nature from their interactions, the two of them are often paired together by the series. This deliberate pairing reveals the subtle queerness within the narrative of Till's ambiguous bisexuality nature, challenging straightforward interpretations of their bond. Through the growth of Till and Ivan, *Alien Stage* creates a complex portrayal of homosexual identity in the series. Meanwhile, the issue challenges the binary normalcy that Till has internalized and maintained since growing up as a human pet. His devotion to Ivan transcends the bounds of traditional masculine friendship without being specifically mentioned, which highlights the volatility of heteronormative categories. In the end, Till and Ivan's relationship growth challenges readers to recognize how queer attraction manifests itself through performative interactions and behaviors rather than explicit confession.

Table 6. Till's attraction towards Ivan in the form of Music Videos Scenes

Moda	Evidence	Additional Context
Composition, body language, music	 Figure 14. Ivan kisses Till during the match, which Till gradually accept (CURE, 3:09, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).	During the match, Ivan kisses Till. Till initially responds with shock and hesitation before gradually accepting the interaction.
Composition, body language, music	 Figure 15. Till hallucinating about Ivan due to their previous round (BLINK GONE, 2:48, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).	Following Ivan's death, Till becomes overwhelmed by guilt and begins hallucinating him, particularly when his new opponent mimics Ivan's movements from the previous round.
Composition, body language, lyrics	 Figure 16. Ivan forced the 'heart' that Till keep refusing but eventually caves in (KARMA, 1:50, VIVINOS YouTube Channel).	Ivan forcefully offers Till a symbolic heart through a kiss, representing his unspoken affection while Till rejects it. The scene functions as a metaphor rather than a literal event.

In Figure 14, Till's initial resistance before his gradual compliance during the kiss illustrates a protective hesitation. In line with Sedgwick's (1990) epistemology of the closet, this moment reflects a complex negotiation between knowledge and ignorance. The loud guitar arrangement portrays Ivan's passion within the kiss that assist Till hesitation. Visually, the composition

reinforces this tension through a dark background and selective, strategic lighting that isolates the interaction. This framing marks the exact moment a previously private aspect of identity becomes subject to public scrutiny, transforming the boundary between the closeted individual and the public gaze into a highly contested space.

Following Ivan's death, Figure 15 marks the explicit presentation of Till's psychological disruption as he hallucinates and relives this unexpected intimacy. Till's emotional response is shown through prolonged close-up shots and trembling body language. Although the musical intensity decreases, the recurring chorus is reinforced by multiple voices that create the impression of collective participation, symbolizing Till's escalating internal conflict and the psychological burden that contributes to his growing emotional instability. To emphasize it, the composition shifts drastically from the previous scene, employing a bright and saturated background while rendering both figures in heavy shadows. This visual contrast suggests that their intimacy is forcefully obscured from public view, subverting the dynamic between private desire and social visibility (Butler, 1990).

Figure 16 presents a metaphorical interaction in which Ivan offers Till a symbolic heart, representing emotional intimacy and affection. The lyric *"When twilight falls and gently embraces us"* suggests a temporary escape from reality, positioning love as a refuge from suffering and uncertainty. Visually, the white background removes distractions and highlights Till's wide-eyed expression, while the vivid red heart between the characters contrasts with the monochromatic composition, symbolizing the tension between desire and heteronormative expectations. By accepting this encounter, Till disrupts rigid assumptions about gender and sexuality, demonstrating that emotional attachment cannot be fully contained within heteronormative frameworks (Desabrina, 2023) and creating a space for queer intelligibility.

Table 7. Till's attraction towards Ivan in the form of artworks

Moda	Evidence	Description
Art composition, body language	 Figure 17. Till blushing when Ivan drops a flower crown at him (Vivinos, 2025, Official X post).	This art is presented as one of the series' pairing artworks, where characters are interacting with their designated person during their moments in Anakt Garden.
Art composition, body language	 Figure 18. Till and Ivan lay down on the grass field, finding comfort in each other's presence (Vivinos, 2023, Official X post).	While Till gazes upward, Ivan looks directly at him as they rest together in a moment of peace. Given Till's typically distant and unapproachable demeanor, Ivan's presence suggests a significant degree of emotional intimacy.

Figure 17 depicts a tender interaction where Ivan places a red flower crown on Till's head within the brightly lit Anakt Garden. Visually, the vivid red flowers contrast sharply with the characters' white uniforms, drawing immediate attention to Till's flushed expression and revealing

a rare emotional vulnerability. Through Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, this scene marks a temporary departure from the defensive, masculine role that Till typically performs. Unlike his usual defiance, Till responds passively to Ivan's gesture without resistance. The flower crown—historically coded with softness and affection—further emphasizes this behavioral shift, presenting an alternative facet of Till's identity that challenges his otherwise rigid, rebellious persona.

In Figure 18, the close-up composition isolates the two characters from their surroundings to emphasizes their intimacy. This framing places Ivan's intense gaze at the center of the frame, while the slight blurring of Till reinforces the focused direction of Ivan's attention. This visual imbalance creates a contrast that heightens their emotional connection. Drawing on Sedgwick's (1990) epistemology of the closet, this serene artwork operates as a visual expression of unspoken desire. Although the attraction remains verbally unuttered within the narrative, it is made visually intelligible through their close physical proximity and shared gestural comfort.

Table 8. Till's attraction towards Ivan in the form of Comic Panels

Moda	Evidence	Dialogue	Narrative Context
Dialogue, composition, body language	 Figure 19. Ivan appears as Till's hallucination few years after his death (Remember Everything – p.16, VIVINOS' Patreon).	"It pissed me off. I'm hurting so bad." – Till (narration) "Do you cut it to look cool?" – Ivan (hallucination)	Years after joining the resistance, Till experiences a poignant hallucination of Ivan that prompts a profound emotional realization.
Dialogue, composition, body language	 Figure 20. Till hugging his hallucination of Ivan Remember Everything – p.41, VIVINOS' Patreon).	"I've never saw him again after that night..." – Till	Till ultimately overcome his guilt, stopping his hallucination all together.

Figures 19 and 20 depict Till's emotional confrontation with a hallucination of Ivan, marking a pivotal moment in his character development. The black-and-white palette and dominant gray tones emphasize the monotony of Till's life, his unresolved guilt, and his deteriorating grasp on reality, where memories and hallucinations begin to merge. This psychological conflict is expressed through Ivan's question, "*Do you cut it to look cool?*", and through the contrast between Till's rigid posture and Ivan's close physical presence, which highlights Till's emotional vulnerability. As the encounter unfolds, Till realizes that his long-standing desire for Ivan's affection had been reciprocated, a recognition that aligns with Sedgwick's (1990) concept of the closet as a space structured by the tension between knowledge and ignorance. However, this realization arrives only after Ivan's death, making mutual acknowledgment impossible. Overwhelmed by grief, Till embraces the hallucination in Figure 20 while reflecting, "*I've never seen him again after that night...*", a moment that signifies both acceptance of his suppressed feelings and emotional closure. The disappearance of Ivan's apparition following the embrace suggests that Till has finally confronted a truth he had previously been unable to acknowledge, transforming the dynamics of concealment and revelation described by Sedgwick (1990).

The findings reveal that the relationship between Till and Ivan is marked by emotional and physical dynamics that transgress the boundaries of conventional masculine homosociality. While Ivan functions as a persistent and stabilizing force in Till's narrative arc, their bond is characterized by an inherent asymmetry of desire. This imbalance suggests that, from Till's perspective, the connection remains anchored in companionship rather than the reciprocal affective recognition sought by Ivan. Though these dynamics remain implicit rather than explicitly defined, they signify a latent same-sex desire that coexists alongside Till's attraction toward Mizi. Viewed through Sedgwick's (1990) concept of the closet, these desires occupy a space of partial visibility, where attraction is signaled through subtext rather than verbal confirmation. Butler's (1990) theory of performativity illuminates how Till's rigorous adherence to normative masculine presentation does not inherently dictate or delimit the object of his desire. The idea that gender performance and sexual desire do not function in a predictable, linear connection is supported by this contradiction between standard gender expression and the mobility of a subjective orientation.

Discussion

Bisexuality as Performativity

The representation of Till's bisexuality in *Alien Stage* challenges essentialist assumptions that equate gender expression with sexual desire. Throughout the narrative, Till consistently maintains a masculine appearance and demeanor despite developing romantic feelings toward both Mizi and Ivan. Till's stable gender presentation demonstrates that masculinity is not altered by shifts in romantic attraction. This portrayal suggests that bisexuality functions independently of specific quantitative distributions of desire and does not require a singular behavioral trajectory (Maylya and Wedawati, 2022).

Accordingly, neither the simultaneous pursuit of multiple partners nor a high frequency of sexual experiences constitutes a prerequisite for validating a bisexual identity. Till's characterization reflects this understanding, as his bisexuality is expressed through emotional and romantic attachments rather than through stereotypical representations of sexual behavior. The series further separates gender identity from the object of desire and avoids framing same-sex attraction as evidence of gender nonconformity. By maintaining Till's masculine self-presentation throughout these relationships, *Alien Stage* resists conventional media representations that associate male same-sex desire with feminized gender expression and presents bisexuality as a natural component of his identity rather than a contradiction of his masculinity.

Drawing on Butler's (1990; 1999; 2004) theory of gender performativity, Till's characterization can be interpreted as demonstrating the relative independence of gender performance from sexual orientation. Butler argues that gender is produced through repeated social practices rather than emerging from an essential inner truth. If gender reality is created by performance, then neither sex nor gender exist outside of that performance (Butler, 1990; Qonitah & Mustofa, 2022). As a result, transvestites' sex expression is just as legitimate and authentic as that of people whose gender expression conforms to prevailing social norms (Qonitah & Mustofa, 2022). Till's masculinity functions as a stable mode of subject formation, allowing for the simultaneous presence of heterogeneous desires. His attraction to Ivan does not result in a transformation of his masculine identity, indicating that gender and sexuality operate as distinct, though interconnected, dimensions of identity. By maintaining this consistency, *Alien Stage* challenges binary understandings of gender and sexuality and broadens representations of masculinity in digital media narratives. The series provides a practical enactment of Butler (1990; 1999; 2004) argument, illustrating that gender expression is not a definitive indicator of sexual orientation.

Ambiguity, Subtext, and the Closet in *Alien Stage*

The findings suggest that *Alien Stage* represents bisexuality through ambiguity rather than explicit categorization. Unlike several other characters whose relationships and attractions are more directly established within the narrative, Till is never canonically assigned a specific sexual identity. Whether this absence of labelling is an intentional creative decision or merely a consequence of narrative focus remains unknown. Nevertheless, the recurring portrayal of Till's attraction toward Mizi alongside his emotionally significant connection with Ivan produces a pattern that cannot be easily reduced to a strictly heterosexual interpretation.

Bisexuality resists fixation within stable cultural identity frameworks, occupying a liminal status that neither fully subverts nor reinforces the gender binary (Maylya & Wedawati, 2022). This theoretical invisibility finds a direct parallel in *Alien Stage*; the series withhold explicit labels and verbal declarations, rendering Till's sexual orientation narratively unmarked. The character's desires thus function as a persistent presence—neither fully disclosed nor definitively hidden—positioning his bisexuality as an interpretative variable rather than a codified identity. Through Sedgwick's (1990) concept of the closet, this ambiguity may be understood as a space in which non-heterosexual desire is simultaneously suggested and withheld from definitive confirmation. Rather than relying on direct declarations, the narrative communicates desire through recurring interactions, emotional investment, and visual symbolism.

Furthermore, the progression of Till's character reinforces this ambiguity. Later narrative developments indicate that Till gradually relinquishes his romantic attachment to Mizi, transforming his perception of both Mizi and Ivan into a familial bond. At the same time, the narrative ultimately allows Till to recognize Ivan's feelings, albeit only after Ivan's death, preventing any explicit resolution of their relationship. This outcome neither confirms nor rejects a bisexual interpretation. Instead, it shifts attention away from fixed identity labels and toward the emotional realities of the characters' experiences. The uniqueness of this representation lies in its reliance on subtext rather than categorical definition. Therefore, *Alien Stage* presents bisexuality as a possibility that emerges through narrative implication and interpersonal dynamics, demonstrating how attraction can be represented without requiring explicit identification or definitive closure.

CONCLUSION

In *Alien Stage*, the bisexual ambiguity of Till is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, including visual composition, musical elements, lyrical content, and character performance. The analysis identifies this ambiguity through Till's emotional and romantic attachments toward both Mizi and Ivan, which are represented across different stages of the narrative. Through visual cues, recurring motifs, and musical expressions, the series presents Till's desire as fluid and multifaceted rather than confined to a singular sexual orientation. The analysis also demonstrates that Till consistently maintains a masculine gender presentation despite experiencing emotional attachment toward characters of different genders. This portrayal aligns with Butler's (1990) argument that gender expression and sexual desire do not constitute mutually determining categories. The findings also demonstrate how the series sustains Till's bisexual ambiguity through narrative openness, reflecting Sedgwick's (1990), in which desire remains suggestive rather than explicitly categorized. The analysis of selected scenes and multimodal elements concludes that *Alien Stage* constructs Till's bisexual ambiguity through a combination of visual, auditory, and textual resources that challenge essentialist assumptions regarding the relationship between masculinity and desire.

Although this study examines the construction of bisexual ambiguity through the character

of Till, it does not explore the representation of sexuality and desire among other characters within *Alien Stage*. Further studies are needed to investigate how multimodal resources contribute to the construction of queer identities through characters such as Ivan, Mizi, Sua, and Luka. Future research may also examine audience interpretations of Till's sexuality and the reception of queer representation within digital animation communities. Such studies may contribute to a broader understanding of LGBTQ+ representation and multimodal meaning-making in contemporary transmedia narratives.

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