

ABSTRACT

THESIS: LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER: AN EXPLORATION OF GENDER EXPANSIVE IDENTITY IN TRANSPARENT

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It is unmistakable that *Transparent* is a project through which Jill Soloway makes an effort to understand gender expansive identity. As noted above, the show serves as a semi-autobiographical narrative of a father's transition and the impact it has on the dynamics of family. Interestingly, while making the show, Soloway's own identity has been profoundly transformed, and the writer now identifies as gender non-binary and prefers to be recognized with singular they pronouns.

In this criticism, I will pay special attention to the juxtaposition of the characters Maura and Ali, her youngest daughter, played by Gabby Hoffman. The relationship between Maura and Ali is an important one in the show, and is made evident in the pilot episode when Maura (still dressed and performing identity as Mort) tells Ali, "You know, out of all my kids, you're the one. You can see me most clearly" (Soloway, 2014). As the series progresses, this bond between Maura and Ali is strengthened as Ali begins to question her own identity, very much mirroring the real-life experiences of Jill Soloway. It is my contention that in *Transparent*, Maura can be

understood as representative of a modernist, thus essentialist, understanding of gender identity while Ali represents a post-modern, constructivist understanding.

By studying each of these characters we can begin to evaluate how effective *Transparent* is in showing its viewers an authentic narrative on gender. Furthermore, we can assess how well the show does in teaching audiences about the true nature of gender and identity, especially in terms of the competing notions of essentialism and constructivism.