Marya, A Life, by Joyce Carol Oates: masochistic behavior as a recovery strategy of the abuse survivor

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Marya, A Life, by Joyce Carol Oates:
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by

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A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty on Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
Major: English (Literature)

Approved:

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1995

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their support of my research: my major professor, Dr. Brenda Daly, for her help in developing and organizing my ideas; for her expertise and insights into the works of Joyce Carol Oates and autobiographical criticism, and for the time and energy she has invested in me and my research; my committee members, Dr. Rosanne Potter and Dr. Theresa McCormick, for their time and valuable feedback; my husband, Dr. Bamshad Mobasher, for his editing assistance and patience while I worked; my friends RF Heynis and Ezra Eisenberg for their feedback, editing assistance, and support; and finally, my "other self," without whom this could not have been written, with hope that in the future, we will be able to be reunited and again become soul mates.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to resolve the internal conflict and tension generated from my reading of Joyce Carol Oates's novel, *Marya, A Life*. Reading a novel about another woman's violent past and its continuing effect on her life demanded from me both personal connection and critical distance because of my own experiences with domestic abuse. Reader response criticism seemed a logical theoretical approach to use considering the powerful effect the novel had on me. Since reader response places the reader in a prominent position, I could draw on my experiences to assist me in the literary analysis of the novel. Reader response theorist David Bleich's theory of subjective criticism allows for the integration of emotions and feelings during the reading process. His theory encourages readers to use those affective elements to enhance their literary analysis rather than hide and deny their effect on the reading process. Jean Kennard developed her reading method, bi-polar reading, to expand the reading possibilities for lesbian readers. Her theory offered me an approach to the text which allowed me to explore the feelings the novel produced while maintaining the critical distance I needed to keep perspective.

My analysis of Marya will begin with our similarities: we are both victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and, as such, we are what Judith Herman, in her book, *Trauma and Recovery*, would call "trauma survivors." Herman asserts that trauma survivors often experience a struggle to define a sense of self and radical change in their relationships with other people and the world. According to Jessica Benjamin in *The Bonds of Love*, the search for self-definition can manifest itself in the masochistic desire to lose one's self in relationships with others. By merging Herman's theories of the trauma recovery process and Benjamin's theories on the motivations for sadomasochistic relationships, I will analyze Marya in order to illustrate how sadomasochistic behavior may be used as a part of the trauma victim's survival strategy, and which may, in time, actually assist in the survivor's recovery process. After
explaining the theories of Benjamin and Herman, I will define and illustrate Marya's position as a survivor of sustained psychic trauma resulting from domestic violence and childhood abuse. I will then demonstrate that Marya's masochistic desire is evident in her search for an omnipotent, idealized male rescuer to avoid facing her abuse. I will then analyze Marya's sadistic ability to use these same masochistic relationships to advance herself and move through the recovery process. Finally, I will show how Marya's attempt to move towards integration in the healing process is triggered by a desire to "know" her mother and a reevaluation of her relationships with women. I will look at this final aspect of the novel, Mayra's "mother quest," using The Mother/Daughter Plot by Marianne Hirsch and Of Woman Born by Adrienne Rich. Both are works which discuss the mother/daughter bond and its importance in women's lives. The conclusion of my thesis will include personal reflections on my relationship with the novel and the ways in which it has caused me to reevaluate my own behavior and my relationships.
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Reader Response

Literary theory has historically been concerned with the reading triangle of author, text, and reader. In reader response criticism, the primary emphasis in the triad has been shifted away from more traditional focuses to how the reader interacts with the text. According to this kind of criticism, readers draw on their own personality, group identity, and experiences to comprehend and interpret what they are reading. The interpretive result of this interaction between the reader and the text becomes the primary focus for analysis, with the emphasis placed on how readers' meanings are elicited and where readers' meaning come from. Theorist Richard Beach states that "various theories of reader response criticism could be loosely characterized as sharing a concern with how readers make meaning from their experience with the text. [These] theories assume that the text cannot be understood or analyzed as an isolated entity" (1). As this area of criticism has grown, multiple forms of reader response criticism have arisen. There are reader response critics from all areas of literary criticism such as feminist, textualist, psychoanalytic, cultural, social, historical, etc. Within the field of reader response criticism, theorist David Bleich has developed a theory that combines influences from psychoanalytic, social, cultural, experiential, and affective spheres. Bleich's work *Subjective Criticism* will allow me to draw on my feelings and use them to help process and connect to the novel rather than struggle to deny and push those emotions aside while reading.

Reintegrating the Reading Process and Feelings

In *Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*, David Bleich postulates a very effective case for the reintroduction of emotions and feelings into literary analysis and places his model of reading and literary analysis in opposition to the more traditional, new-critical search for objective truths. For Bleich, the reading transaction is
conceived as a relationship between the reader and his or her feelings. The role the author plays is either a facilitator of those feelings or one who prevents the reader from having a satisfying experience. Bleich says: "it is not just the 'message' or the expressive essence of a work of literature that is created by the reader. The work itself would have no existence if it were not read" (Subjective Criticism, 3). The reader is then able to create relationships with the text and author because of an already established subjective orientation to the reading process (the drives to imagine and create) partially motivated by the willing suspension of disbelief. For him, the key point to understanding an individual's response to any piece of literature is the idea of perceptual difference: "to say that perception processes are different in each person is to say that reading is a wholly subjective process and that the nature of what is perceived is determined by the rules of personality of the perceiver" (Subjective Criticism, 3).

Bleich believes that this idea that reading differences result from differences in personality is the primary reason that all readers connect to any given text based on their own past experiences and sensations: "psychology has shown that a person responds first and most to the sensations and demands of his own body, then of his own person, and then of the people about him" (Subjective Criticism, 13). Bleich asserts that based on the sensations elicited during the reading process, the reader either embraces the reading relationship through identification or rejects the author and/or the story as emotionally unfulfilling.

For Bleich, the most important aspect and purpose of the reading relationship is that a careful, thoughtful reading "can produce a new understanding of oneself—not just a moral here and a message there, but a genuinely new conception of one's values and tastes as well as one's prejudices and learning difficulties" (Subjective Criticism, 3-4). He also believes that the conscious reintegration of thoughts and feelings when analyzing literature will assist in enlarging the reader's awareness of his or her own personality and behavior; and once that awareness has been produced, the reader can seek an explanation when he or she is ready to
explore the newly discovered aspect of self. However important Bleich sees the reintegration of thought and feeling, or however natural he believes the process to be, he knows that to accomplish this kind of reading, readers must retrain themselves to go against traditional academic form and content by acknowledging and using their feeling as tools to enhance comprehension:

Thought has always been considered to be manageable, social, disinterested, while feelings are unwieldy, private, and altogether preoccupied with the self. The traditional way of dealing with feelings . . . is to ignore or delay them, and follow one's rational thoughts as if they were utterly independent of how one feels. . . Therefore it is not simply a matter of habit and tradition to avoid speaking of one's own feelings; our linguistic forms for discourse seem especially to facilitate speaking of what we perceive to be outside ourselves before speaking of what we know to be inside. (Subjective Criticism, 7-9)

Bleich asserts that traditional, formalist criticism simply capitalizes on this cognitive split between feelings and thoughts to hide the issue under of the guise of searching for "truths" and developing "correct readings." In reality, he asserts: "In order to avoid writing about what goes on 'in here,' we make believe that we are writing about something 'out there' and sneak in our personal judgments" (Subjective Criticism, 53). Therefore, to Bleich, symbolism or other formalist analysis devices are only relevant because of what they reveal about the reader. The associations one brings to the reading process simply reveal what aspect of the reader's personality was engaged by that experience and to what extent it involved an important relationship in the reader's life. There may be commonalties one can deduce between readers based on gender, class, race, sexuality, etc., but each individual's experience with that text, what each person who reads it gets out of it, will be unique, as they are each unique personalities with differing experiences. In later works such as The Double Perspective and "Gender Interests in Reading and Language," Bleich moves his research interests away from searching for commonalties resulting from an emotional connection to a given text and focuses instead on how differences in an individual's group identifications can
alter the interpretive reading process. In *The Double Perspective*, group identification based on social class, gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as the individual personalities and experiences of the reader, become integrated as an important part of what Bleich believes individuals brings with them to the interpretation processes.

By using group identification and individual experience as a basis for literary interpretation, Bleich believes that the reading process can become more inclusive and less alienating for historically oppressed groups. He also asserts that admitting one's subjective biases and integrating the affective component into literary analysis by using personal associations to respond to literature is a more honest, more egalitarian way of presenting what are ultimately just our own personal opinions about a particular book.

**Autobiographical Criticism**

Integrating or including parts of one's personal experiences to explain or analyze literature is a relatively recent and still controversial arrival to literary criticism. While David Bleich advocated including the personal in literary analysis in 1975 as a necessary and valid perspective from which to approach literature, he reserved its use as a technique to increase student involvement with the literature studied in the classroom. His ultimate goal in *Subjective Criticism* was developing the students' ability to move away from the autobiographical and into a more analytical style of criticism which acknowledged one's own personal biases.

However, the feminist poet/critic Adrienne Rich believed that the inclusion of the personal into academic writing and the academy itself was a way of further illustrating feminism's assertion that "the personal is the political." Rich felt that the exclusion of feelings and personal experience from academic discourse was a symptom of the male-dominated academy's need for objectivity and distance, and resulted in the continual silencing of the female experience. But even though Rich understood the importance of including personal
elements in her writing and the power it could have in her discourse, because of her own masculine-based academic training, she still hesitated for many years to utilize it in her own writing. When delivering a paper at a conference in 1971 Rich, with trepidation and much clarification, broke with academic convention and inserted the personal into her analysis: "I have hesitated to do what I am going to do now, which is to use myself as an illustration. For one thing, it's a lot easier and less dangerous to talk about other women writers" (On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, 38). Later in 1976 when writing Of Woman Born, Rich decided to rely on her experience as a woman and mother to analyze relationships between women, particularly mothers and daughters. However, the process of integrating personal details into her writing was still a difficult one for her:

It seemed impossible for me from the first to write a book of this kind without often being autobiographical, without often saying "I." Yet for many months I buried my head in historical research and analysis in order to delay or prepare the way for the plunge into areas of my own life which were painful and problematic, yet from the heart of which this book has come. I believe increasingly that only a willingness to share private and sometimes painful experiences can enable women to create a collective description of the world which will truly be ours. (Of Woman Born, xvii

In much of her work, Rich talks about the need to acknowledge the personal and the necessity of sharing those experiences with other women as a way of developing community and as a way of shattering the silence that has condemned women's experiences and histories to be buried and forgotten. In this way, Rich views the inclusion of autobiographical components in one's writing as not simply an exercise in self-indulgence, but a conscious and political move to reclaim one's voice and the right to speak for oneself.

For much of the seventies and eighties, autobiographical criticism or inserting the personal into one's critical writing was reserved for the "creative writers" like Rich, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and others or relegated to what was called "identity politics" in the writings of women of color and lesbians. With the publication of Jane Tompkins's essay "Me
and My Shadow" in 1987, all that began to change, and autobiographical criticism was thrust into the academic limelight.

Tompkins's essay exploded the conventions of literary criticism by inserting personal details about her life and her environment in academic writing and using them to criticize what she called "traditional literary analysis." Tompkins chose to write about her anger, her feelings, her wishes, her dreams, and, most shockingly, her bodily functions, all in the context of "theoretical analysis." Tompkins's attack on traditional, objective forms of literary theory and analysis was based on her belief that "theory itself, at least as it is usually practiced, may be one of the patriarchal gestures women and men ought to avoid" (24) because the human cost of practicing theory that way was just too high.

Tompkins discusses the oppositional pull she feels in herself while trying to write and shares her struggle with the various voices competing for position in her writing.

One is the voice of a critic who wants to correct a mistake in the essay's [Messer-Davidow's] view of epistemology. The other is the voice of a person who wants to write about her feelings (I have wanted to do this for a very long time but I have felt too embarrassed) . . . The problem is that you can't talk about your private life in the course of doing your professional work. You have to pretend that epistemology, or whatever you're writing about, has nothing to do with your life . . . Well I'm tired of the conventions that keep discussions of epistemology . . . segregated from mediations on what is happening outside my window or inside my heart. The public-private dichotomy, which is to say, the public-private hierarchy, is a founding condition of female oppression. I say the hell with it. (24-25)

However, despite this pull and inner tension she feels, despite the unease and embarrassment, Tompkins decides she must write in this "other" autobiographical voice. She must give it the chance to develop and express itself so that she can further develop and express herself. She must remove the "straitjacket" she feels epistemology and theoretical discourse has confined her in. She says, "The criticism I would like to write would always take off from personal experience. Would always be in some way a chronicle of my hours and days. Would speak in
a voice which can talk about everything, would reach out to a reader like me and touch me where I want to be touched" (28).

Diane Freedman a contemporary poet-critic who weaves the autobiographical, narrative, poetic, and critical into her analyses, also warns of the danger of only focusing on the general, on abstracted theoretical discourse. She states in an essay from 1992 that "the general . . . may also flatten out the differences, . . . deny the depths and details of the particular, unless the naming process is a prelude to a narrative one, an exchanging and validating of individual stories and voices" (7). Freedman goes so far as to assert that "in fact, women may learn more through personal narratives—their own and others—than through an argumentative discourse based on generalities and abstraction alone" (7). She believes it is important to personalize one's work as "to know the self we must speak of and from it. We must refuse to be accomplices in our own self-destruction. We must refuse or renounce silence and denial" (26). However, even her strong belief in the need to reintegrate the personal and the theoretical is also tempered by the inner fears of a politically aware, academic woman. She rhetorically asks:

Does asserting the self necessarily mean denying another? Can parachuting away from one kind of discourse (closed, legal, patriarchal, academic, impersonal, elitist) to another (open, revolutionary, feminist, quotidian, personal) solve such a problem? Is it possible to write and speak differently after all? And if so, would we still (or finally!) get published? Would we be heard? Would we lose our jobs, be denied tenure? (11-12)

Dorothy Allison states in her 1994 collection of autobiographical essays, Skin, that she also suffered from intense anxiety whenever she wrote about the personal: "Everything I wrote before then [1974], ten years of journals and short stories and poems, I burned because I was afraid somebody would read them" (53). Now she believes that inserting the personal into women's writing often helps to emphasize "the importance of women offering their own experience as wisdom, how each perception is vital. That's what I believe to be the
importance of telling the truth, each of us writing out of the unique vision our lives have given us" (219). Allison asserts that to attempt to separate the personal, to eliminate it as an influence in the work that one does is both futile and dishonest. For Allison, the context of our lives and experiences that shaped them are too important to be denied. It must be shared. "Context is so little to share, and so vital" (12).

Allison is also a creative writer who feels very strongly about her craft. She says good literature "comes from the place where the terror hides, the edge of our worst stuff. I believe absolutely, that if you do not break out in that sweat of fear when you write, then you have not gone far enough" (217). Furthermore, Allison claims that without pushing this edge, her stories would lose their ability to motivate and affect change in the reader: "I believe that until I started pushing my own fears, telling the stories that were the hardest for me, writing about exactly the things I was most afraid of and unsure about, I wasn't writing worth a damn" (217).

**Common Themes in Joyce Carol Oates**

Breaking out in a cold sweat is often the effect Joyce Carol Oates's writing produces in her readers. Oates is constantly pushing the margins of discourse with dark and starkly realistic portraits of America and, most importantly, portraits which often bring to the surface the violent undercurrents of American society. In *The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol Oates* (1979), Mary Kathryn Grant describes life in Oates's stories as "cruel, destroying, purposeless, and unless one realizes this, he [sic] will probably be swept into the vortex. The only way out of this death-in-life is through an awareness of the human condition by which one may seize the remnants of his life and reshape them into something meaningful and whole" (28). Oates's goal for her fiction, Grant believes is to "awaken ordinary people to their destruction . . . She has an unshakable faith that the human spirit can—someday—redeem the time" (7). Grant also asserts that the "overall thrust of Oates's works might well be summarized thus: to force
her readers to examine in detail their own lives, to discover the petty, trivial concerns that gnaw away at that life" (11).

In a similar direction, Marilyn Wesley asserts in *Refusal and Transgression in Joyce Carol Oates' Fiction* (1993) that a primary theme in Oates's work is exploring the formations and functioning of the American family while it undergoes a constant process of change. According to Wesley, Oates is concerned with the family's fractured, damaged, and diminished effectiveness rather than its purported socio-cultural demise. She believes that Oates's "domestic fiction registers the psychological suffering of radically truncated characters confronting familial and societal environments that restrict them by gender to inadequate half-existences" (11). Relationships between parents and children, husband and wife, siblings, etc. surge into importance in Oates's works, and her plots focus on both the individual's and the family's ability to address societal power issues such as economic dislocation, gender inequity, and violence as experienced in intimate relationships.

Grant sees the central tragedy of Oates's works as being that human beings continually fail to create community, even within the family; because of this lack of community, they selfishly destroy one another, setting up the destructive chains of events which mark Oates's plots. "The person lacking self-identity seeks community; not finding it he [sic] is thrown deeper into his vacuum. Without a secure sense of self, he cannot enter into a relationship with another—not even the community of marriage" (25).

This destruction of the family and the inability to form a sense of community through connections with other individuals also marks *Marya, A Life*. Central themes in this novel are family disillusionment, violence, and the search for a connection to others by a childhood sexual abuse survivor who moves from poverty to economic success, while desperately searching for an identity and a sense of family.
Marya and Me

However, what makes this particular story so powerful for me is that in this story novelist Joyce Carol Oates has created a protagonist who is more like me than I normally care to acknowledge. Marya is often so like myself that I sometimes become disoriented reading her story, unable to separate my inner, private voices from those created for the character by Oates. We are both from working-class backgrounds, the first female in our families to attend a four-year university, and we both feel trepidation about exactly where we belong, never feeling quite like we fit in anywhere—be it at home or in academia. Marya and I share a love and passion for literature, have a hunger and passion for politics, and tremendous drive to achieve justice for those who are oppressed. We are viewed as perfectionists in our lives, our work, and our relationships. Beyond the surface level similarities in our backgrounds we are alike in a more profoundly defining and a much less public way—we have both been sexually and physically abused, and it is as a victim and a survivor of abuse that I feel closest to her. She and I both carry with us the mental scars of the original traumatic moments in our minds.

I am drawn to Marya through her lifetime search to find and define herself as separate from the abuse she experienced. Oates creates and enlivens Marya as a believable character by portraying the internal battle that rages between the "public" and the "private" Marya. In waging this constant struggle, Marya articulates the shadowy, slippery after-effects of abuse that I feel only as vague stirrings and rumblings. Oates gives Marya the words I can not find or that I fear to say. In this way, Marya embodies both my fears and my ambitions.

At the same time, this affinity I feel for the character of Marya often causes me to try and reject her, to attempt to create distance between her life, her decisions and my own. Simultaneously, as a reader, I want to be both like Marya yet unlike her. I want to be able to connect to the novel while remaining untouched, unaltered by the reading experience. However, that is not possible. Even though I admire some aspects of Marya, other aspects of
her force me to look deep inside myself and acknowledge what could be negative patterns in my own life. I want to try and convince myself that I would not make the same decisions Marya does while recognizing that in some cases, I already have. This is the part of the connection that forces me to read only snippets of her story at a time. When I read the book the first time, I had to proceed cautiously, reading only one chapter at a time for fear that Oates would uncover and expose some buried, hidden part of my soul. "Don't you start crying," Marya's mother warned her. "Once you get started you won't be able to stop" (17). Both Marya and I have learned to take this warning very seriously, and we have made it an essential component of our life philosophy. And I wondered, if I were to heed Marya's mother's warning, how could I keep reading? This new, unbidden knowledge about my past was bound to affect my present life. But I persisted—even though continuing to read might "cut [my] life in two" (310). As Marya's mother says, there is no time to cry, let alone be unable to stop.

**Bi-polar Reading**

The constant struggle between identification and rejection I felt when reading the novel required a reading theory which would utilize these contradictions. Jean Kennard's model of bi-polar reading offered me a way into the novel without losing myself in the process. It allowed me to read Marya's story and view parts of my own life using the lens of an outsider and critic while at the same time experiencing intense solidarity and compassion for the character and her decisions. Therefore, capitalizing on the polarities of compassion and criticism allowed me to connect to Marya while still maintaining the distance necessary to process her story.

Bi-polar reading allows the reader to become, for a brief time, an extreme aspect of him or herself, usually an aspect that the reader has denied. When the reader "leans into" one side of the polarity/aspect of self, the other side gets 'attracted' towards it, pulled as if in a
magnetic field; the side that gets pulled is deepened and solidified in the process" (69). In this way, bi-polar reading results in heightened self-awareness. Kennard believes this process allows any reader to connect to any text, and opens up the possibility of enjoying a wide range of literary experiences without denial of self. In fact, her theory encourages the reader to use that personal connection to the text, be it negative or positive, as an attempt not only to better understand the text, but as a way for the reader to better understand him or herself.

_Marya, A Life_ presented a challenge to Kennard's theory of reading, because in this novel I had found a character to whom I felt very connected, and yet, in many cases, a character I desperately wanted and needed to dissociate myself from. For bi-polar reading to succeed, I need to "lean into" the character of Marya, and using willing suspension of disbelief, identify with her as fully as possible. According to Kennard's theory, I should read the story from the perspective of a current victim of physical and psychological violence, while retaining my identity as an abuse survivor. By allowing polarities like these to exist in myself while I read, I am able to embrace the sadomasochism within myself in order to pull to the surface, and reaffirm the survivor. In order to accomplish this, I found it necessary to look not only at the story, but also at how the connection/revulsion I feel towards Marya is rooted in my own history of abuse. Fully embracing Marya allows me to use the emotions elicited by the text to better understand both the novel and myself. "Leaning into" Marya's character, a character who shook me at an almost primal level, was frustrating, but ultimately, rewarding. However, the process of attempting to find solid ground in a story that continually tossed me back outside its boundaries with graphic images of abuse was not an easy one:

"Be quiet," Lee would say, grunting. "Or I'll wring your skinny little neck." He didn't mean to hurt her because, really, he liked her; she knew that. She could tell . . . She was afraid only that her neck might snap because of the pressure. He gripped her so tight—his forearm jammed beneath her chin—his clenched fists straining hard, hard into her back, just above her buttocks . . . When it was over Lee wouldn't wait to catch his breath but drew away from
her at once, flush-faced, panting, his wet lips slack. He never looked at her—
they never looked at each other, at such times. He rarely spoke expect to
mutter, "Don't you tell anybody, you."

Hold still. Don't move. Don't tell.

As if Marya Knauer required such warnings. (17-18)

She remembers, afterward, one of them prying her legs apart—she remembers
him prodding and jabbing at her—trying to enter her—trying to force his penis
in her—but she might have squirmed free, arching her back, or one of the
others hauled him away . . .(129)

She knew her breasts and belly and the inside of her thighs would carry the
bruises for days. It doesn't matter, Marya consoled him. (218)

The doubling of my reading self—the outsider critic vs. the insider compassionate
created by Kennard's bi-polar reading model—created a conflict between my ideas of
traditional literary response and my personal relationship to the character. Initially in
developing my thesis, this conflict presented much difficulty. Like many readers, I responded
to the novel most strongly at the locus of my personal identification—Marya's abuse and its
aftermath in her life. However, eventually this reading process proved to be liberating.
Through the process of bi-polar reading and searching for ways to categorize and understand
Marya, I found ways to categorize and understand myself. My critical analysis of Marya's
actions and thoughts helps to create a buffer zone, permitting the burden of those self-defining
truths to fall on someone who is "not me," but "like me." Kennard's reading process allows
for the luxury of indirect self-discovery, helping to minimize the pain of my encounter with a
brutal past. But at the same time, this type of reading forces me to look at how my own
violent past has influenced me, resulting in a heightened self-awareness. This self-awareness is
a direct result of using bi-polar reading to explore the results of traumatic experiences in
Marya's life and behavior.

The theories of Judith Herman and Jessica Benjamin establish the connection between
Marya's abuse and what I assert is her masochistic behavior. Analyzing Marya's use of
masochistic behavior in her relationships with others as a strategy for self-growth has caused me to analyze similar strategies in my own life and relationships.
ABUSE SURVIVOR BEHAVIOR
Masochism and Trauma Recovery

In her 1988 work *The Bonds of Love*, Jessica Benjamin analyzes the roles of dominance and submission in human relationships. Rather than look at sadomasochism simply as a "deviant" sexual practice followed by a small group of people, Benjamin views sadomasochism as socialized personality tendencies used to enforce male/female gender roles within patriarchy. Benjamin discusses sadistic and masochistic behavior patterns as examples of the idealized relationship roles for men and women as defined by society and channeled into socially acceptable roles of dominant and submissive behavior, where men are supposed to be dominant and women submissive. She analyzes the idea of female masochism and submission within the symbiotic, sadomasochistic relationship, and discovers that what the masochistic self gains or finds from such relationships is as important as what is lost.

She believes sadistic and masochistic tendencies manifest themselves in individuals because of a disrupted and dismembered basic bond of trust necessary to establish relationships with the outside world. She views sadomasochistic tendencies as the root of later adult submission or adult abusive behavior. An inability to form or maintain this trust results in individuals seeking to repeat familiar patterns (even abusive ones) to help create a sense of self through their interactions with others. This need for a connection to another drives the individual to find that particular desire for agency that has not been developed or has been destroyed in earlier human interactions. By searching for it outside the self, sadists and masochists are able to feel a sense of completion and purpose in their connection to the "other," vicariously experiencing what they seek to find.

Benjamin believes masochistic behavior is motivated by the desire of the psyche to be truly known, to experience authentic inner reality, "to be reached, penetrated, found, and released" (73). Masochism is then defined as "the search for self definition and recognition..."
through another who is powerful enough to bestow this recognition" (56), and often embodies what society would identify as "female" behavior. Masochism is used as a strategy for escaping the sense of aloneness resulting from a violation of basic trust, because it is "aloneness" within another. The masochist is attempting to achieve a coherent sense of self through the total renunciation of self to an omnipotent, idealized "other," who has the power for which the masochistic self longs, but doesn't believe she deserves. It is through this definition by the "other" that the masochistic self is able to gain a sense of power and agency, though vicariously. "By letting the other remain in control, the masochist hopes to find a 'safe,' open space in which to abandon the [previously] created, protective false self and allow the nascent, hidden self to emerge" (72). It is the sacrifice of the masochist that creates the sadist's power, which is used to produce the coherent self the masochist takes refuge in. The submission of the masochist also protects the "other" from damage by internalizing all fault and injury, maintaining the idealized, omnipotent state of the other. The masochist believes that by losing herself in the sadist, access is gained to what is believed to be a more powerful self. The relationship with the sadist offers the masochist a chance to be accepted despite her feelings of worthlessness and allows the masochistic self to become someone else in the exchange.

Benjamin believes this aspect of masochistic tendencies is reinforced by popular romance novels and manifests itself in women's lives through their need to enter into love relationships to vicariously acquire something they believe they do not have in themselves. Both these novels and society reaffirm the idea that "a woman can only unleash her true desires in the hands of a man whom she imagines to be more powerful and who does not depend on her for his strength. Such a man desires, but does not need her" (120). This is based on a belief that the man will provide the woman with access to a world that is otherwise closed to her. Regarding the social construct of ideal love, Benjamin quotes Simone
DeBeauvior: "When woman gives herself completely to her idol, she hopes that he will give her at once possession of herself and of the universe he represents" (116).

This idea of losing oneself in an omnipotent, idealized other who will protect and grant recognition to the masochist self is compatible with Judith Herman's findings in her research on the recovery process of trauma survivors. In *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), she states that the violation of basic trust resulting from abuse often causes trauma survivors to seek powerful authority figures who will offer a special care-taking relationship to the survivor. Survivors also tend to idealize that "other" in the hopes of keeping away their constant fear of being betrayed and to minimize their sense of self-denigration. Survivors will often search for an omnipotent rescuer designed to replace the omnipotent abuser.

Herman focuses on the long-term effects of traumatic incidents on the lives of the victims, the resulting damage to the victims' sense of self, and how that damage affects the self's relations to others. Herman's work traces the commonalties evident between the stress symptoms and the recovery steps of victims of war, torture, and rape. She extends that analysis to include victims of chronic domestic trauma such as incest, child abuse, battering, and marital rape.

Herman states that sustained psychic trauma like domestic violence and child abuse, completely severs the basic bonds of trust defining human interactions such as family, friendships, love, and community. It is this breech of trust which causes the survivor to question all basic human relationships. By fragmenting the construct of self formed and sustained through trusting relationships with others, trauma undermines basic belief systems, destroys fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, and shatters one's sense of self-esteem. Survivors feel alienated, abandoned, and alone, and thus create intimate relationships driven by the hunger for protection and care, but haunted by a fear of abandonment and exploitation. These inner drives can also lead to the re-establishment or
reenactment of abusive behavior patterns with others by interpreting those relationships and trust expectations through "familiar" behaviors of dominance and submission, even while searching for an escape from abuse.

Physical, emotional, and psychological abuse demonstrate contempt for the victim's sense of autonomy and dignity by removing control over her body and/or demanding surrender of her mind. Herman believes that these effects, coupled with the destruction of basic trust, inhibit the formation of a whole, unified self and/or destroy the concept of self held by the victim prior to the abuse. Therefore, internalized feelings of blame and inferiority lead the victim to doubt that she can be herself in relation to others. In response to this, many survivors of abuse develop "new identities" which suppress any memories about the loss of control and an enslaved, violated body. This development of a "false" self to disguise, deny, or bury the traumatic events is used by the victim to shield herself from the reality of what has happened and allow her to continue to function in an "unsafe" world. Herman states that this phenomenon is based on the internalized belief that the abuse suffered has somehow been the victims' fault, and that by being "good" they can earn the love, protection, and care needed to stop the abuse, or later, to recover. The need to appear as "good" in the eyes of the abuser or others, to cover-up inherent "badness," often causes survivors to develop empathic attunement to the needs of others and a constant desire to please other people. Unconscious habits of obedience and conformity to the needs of others affect the ability of the victim to maintain her own separate point of view while remaining connected to others, sometimes leading to unconscious submissive behavior.

In the case of extended contact with the perpetrator of the abuse, Herman states that the abuser often becomes the most important and powerful person in the victim's life, demanding an almost "god-like" reverence from the victim. This is a result of the perpetrator's the need to control every aspect of the victim's life while demanding the victim's
affirmation through obedience and professions of respect, gratitude, and love, thus imposing and enforcing roles of dominance and submission.

Herman's research indicates that, as a result of this pattern, abuse survivors are more likely to seek out a powerful, idealized, savior to rescue them from themselves. This corresponds to Benjamin's research and her belief that masochism results from the self's search for recognition and validation by an idealized, omnipotent "other." Both physical and psychological abuse and sadomasochism are topics Joyce Carol Oates tackles in her writing. Oates states in the preface to You Must Remember This, the novel she wrote following Marya, A Life, that the novel's plot was designed to explore the sadomasochistic relationship. In reference to the two main characters in You Must Remember This, she states that passion motivates instinctual desires which move the feminine self towards suicide and the masculine self towards self-destructive violence. Regarding the sadomasochistic polarity, Oates states: "The one distinctively female, the other male: poles of masochism and sadomasochism. Which is not to suggest that we are defined by such poles; only that they exert a gravitational pull, weak in some, powerful in others" (Woman) Writer, 380).

I will illustrate this polarity using Joyce Carol Oates's novel Marya, A Life. The experiences of the novel's protagonist, Marya, will allow me to explore the areas of commonalities between Benjamin's theories about masochistic behavior patterns and the extended recovery symptoms of abuse victims as outlined by Herman. This analysis will be based on the behavioral patterns that Marya, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, establishes within a series of relationships. Next I will establish Marya's masochistic behavior and explain how Marya attempts to use these sadomasochistic relationships to further develop her potential and personality. Finally I will illustrate how Marya moves beyond the sadomasochistic polarity and towards recovery with her reevaluation of her relationships with her mother and other women.
Marya, the Abuse Survivor

Part of Marya's survival strategy as an abuse victim coping with extended trauma recovery symptoms manifests itself through what Jessica Benjamin calls masochistic tendencies in intimate relationships. The roots of these tendencies can be traced back to her experience as an abused child and adolescent which shattered her sense of trust and belief in herself. These are also the very characteristics in Marya that I identify with so strongly as a result of my own past experiences as a survivor of a violent relationship. Marya and I have played roles which require dominance and submission in our interactions with others, and we have continued those polarities in our intimate relationships. We still experience many of the trauma survivor stress symptoms outlined by Herman, and we both have exhibited the masochistic tendencies described by Benjamin in our attempts to search for and redefine ourselves in relationships with strong, powerful men. We have both hidden and denied our abuse and our real selves out of an intense fear of abandonment and feelings of inner worthlessness. In many ways we are still living and reliving those terrible moments when those with whom we were intimate warped, used, and violated our trust in them.

Marya's traumatic experiences began at a very earlier age. As a young child she had to learn to cope with her mother's erratic mood swings and abusive behavior toward her and her brothers. When her union-organizing father is killed in a bar brawl, young Marya is taken by her mother to identify the body at the morgue. Symbolically, her father's death is her first abandonment by one who loved and protected her, and the events surrounding the evening of his death are her first traumatic moments. The child-Marya is unable to comprehend what has happened, so she fragments the horror into frozen segments—Marya's hunger, fear, worry, wonder, and confusion—then internalizes her mother's warning which will echo through her life "Don't you start crying. Once you start you won't be able to stop" (5).
After suffering abuse and neglect, Marya and her brothers are literally rather than figuratively abandoned by her second parent, her mother, and taken to live with her father's brother and his family. It is at her uncle's house that Marya the abused child begins to solidify. At her uncle's house she is told by her aunt and cousins that she isn't wanted or valued and suffers sexual molestation by her slightly older cousin, Lee, in silence. Through Lee's repeated violations of her, Marya learns the defense and survival strategies of an abused child, setting up the relationship patterns that will emerge later in her adult life. Her most important strategy: "Don't you tell anybody, you know what’s good for you" (23). Finally, she is almost gang-raped by her high school friends at her going-away-to-college party.

The complete, yet subtle integration of the abuse experience into Marya's life is demonstrated by the initial placement of the abuse in the narrative. The structure and content of the second chapter of the novel crystallizes for the reader Marya's sexual abuse. The narrator begins the chapter by starkly and graphically sharing an incident of sexual molestation, one that epitomizes all the others in action and place, but cannot be referenced by the reader or narrator with a specific time. The chapter opens: "He instructed her to hold still. Not to move. Not to move. And not to look at him either. Or say a word. Marya froze at once. 'Went into stone,' as she called it" (15). However, while chronologically following the first chapter, the second chapter's narration is a reflection backwards to the molestation, to Marya's past, not present. This narrator is ageless, not eight or nine or ten like the chapter's victim. It is the adult Marya/narrator describing the incident, not the voice of the child Marya/narrator of the first chapter. To assist in creating this sense of timelessness in the chapter, the reader is constantly brought back to and shown the wrecked, torn up Buick in the back of the salvage yard with the bloodstained seats and broken windshield. Time is negated by the shifting narrative scene where only Marya, Lee, and the Buick are constant. It could be raining, snowing, or sunny, hot or cold. It is immaterial to the abuse. Each time the narrator
veers off the path of describing the sexual molestation to then return again to the Buick, the scene has shifted or changed very slightly, revealing more details, but causing a narrative feeling of timelessness. This feeling of continuity gives the abuse no specific beginning or ending. It exists in a state of simultaneity along with the progression of linear time. "Marya was eight years old for a very long time. And nine years old. And ten. A very long time: the years stretched and buckled, the days were always the same day, only the weather differed . . ." 'Be quiet,' Lee would say, grunting. 'Or I'll wring your skinny little neck" (17).

The beginning of chapter two describes the intense concentration Marya uses to separate herself from the trauma that is happening to her. She "went into stone', as she called it. And stared at the grimy, partly broken windshield of the old car. And said nothing" (15). The process which she uses to "go into stone" is described a couple of pages later:

She stared at, she must have memorized, the windshield of the old wreck. It was cracked in cobweb like patterns that overlapped with one another, doubly, trebly, dense and intricate and fascinating as a puzzle in a picture book. A maze, such things were called. A labyrinth. Can you get to the center without raising your pencil point and without crossing any line? Sometimes Marya could do it at the first try, sometimes she couldn't. If she got angry she cheated: but then getting to the center didn't count. (17)

Herman describes this phenomenon as dissociation from the traumatic event, and it is one of the abuse victim's defenses against the abuser's violation. During dissociation, victims separate themselves from what is happening; often experiencing the sensations as happening to an "other." Using altered states of consciousness, they "may feel as though the [abuse] is not happening to [them], as though it is being observed from outside the body, as though the whole experience is a bad dream from which [they] will shortly awaken," (43) or the incident is blocked out and converted to an experience of something else by intense concentration on something other than what is happening to the victim's body. This use of dissociation helps in the voluntary suppression of the traumatic incidents, turning them into truncated memories.
devoid of emotion and meaning so the abuse can be forgotten and buried. At other times, memory suppression causes the actual act of abuse to become the secondary memory rather than the primary image as in Marya's focus on the windshield rather than the details of Lee's violation of her. To remember everything or think about the meaning of the actions would bring back the pain, terror, and rage associated with the abuse.

States of altered consciousness, voluntary memory suppression, and feelings of total surrender coupled with states of hyperarousal and constant high anxiety characterize what Herman calls the constrictive stress symptoms evident during the abuse and after the removal of the abuse from the victim's life. When intrusive symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares are combined with the constrictive symptoms described above, Herman's "Dialectic of Trauma," (47) is established which will shape the victim's life and relationships.

In the "Dialectic of Trauma," alternating states of constriction and intrusion yield "extremes of amnesia or reliving of the trauma, between floods of intense, overwhelming feeling, and arid states of no feeling at all, between irritable, impulsive action and complete inhibition of action" (47). Marya experiences this fluctuation periodically during her life, with the symptoms resurfacing more often when she is under greater stress. After having her undergraduate dorm room robbed and her entire paycheck stolen, Marya begins to wonder: “Is this how it begins, she wondered, half amused. Breaking down. Cracking up. Why breaking down . . . but cracking up . . . ? Her long periods of intense concentration began to be punctuated by bouts of directionless daydreaming, sudden explosions of feeling” (153). Throughout her life, Marya is also plagued by intense nightmares symbolic of her past abuse and current inner fears of being abused again. She also occasionally experiences traumatic memory flashbacks when she sees a young man who is about the same age, build, and social class as her cousin Lee at the time he sexually molested her:
Twenty years later, crossing a street in a distant city, Marya happens to see a
tenaged boy straddling a bicycle at the curb nearby, talking and laughing
loudly with two of his friends: thick-necked, long-limbed, sinewy, brutish and
childish at once: the very image of her cousin Lee.

Her cousin Lee as he'd been, of course — long ago on Canal Road.

That age. That physique. Braying with laughter, showing his big white
teeth, poking one of his friends in the shoulder. Marya stares; freezes at the
curb; feels her heart beating rapidly; wonders what the boys are talking about.

. . The slang, the hearty smut, the companionable gestures and mannerism, the
camaraderie of adolescent boys. . .

Marya who knows herself to be tough and resilient and supremely
capable of blocking unwelcome incursions from the past nevertheless feels a
powerful welling-up of dread, excitement, vertigo. She finds herself staring
helplessly at the boy as if she were waiting to recognize him. Waiting for him
to recognize her. (34)

While the intrusive feelings dissipate over time, Herman states that the constrictive
symptoms remain to yield the feeling of simply going through the motions of life or of
observing life at a great distance rather than participating in it, creating the feeling that one is
simply acting out various roles rather than being oneself. This is epitomized by the common
survivor complaint: "I cannot feel." Throughout her life, Marya deals with the feeling of
having someone else's experiences, that she is just watching life go on around her. In
graduate school she describes her behavior as a performance:

These weeks and months, Marya continued to perform beautifully, as she had
always done. She thought of her self as a figure skater, executing
extraordinary spins and leaps and patterns on the ice, in a very circumscribed
space.

She went through the motions of a daylight life. She was still the good
girl, the A-plus student, fired by competition and virtually inexhaustible. Or so
it seemed. Attending all her seminars and lectures, acquitting herself
admirably. Sometimes she observed herself from a little distance, quite
impressed. The baroque figures—the ingenious tricks!—of the seasoned ice
skater (223).

This idea of acting out of roles and the inability to be oneself out of fear of losing love
or being abandoned by those cared about, epitomizes the relationships of Herman's abuse
survivors and Benjamin's masochists. Herman believes this fear is motivated because of the
abuser’s violation of trust, his coercion of the victim into maintaining silence regarding the abuse, and his encouragement of the victim’s internalization of blame. As a result, victims must develop strategies for survival.

Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Marya develops strategies designed to minimize the risk of the abuse reoccurring and to gain the approval and recognition needed to rebuild her damaged concept of self. Like other abuse survivors, Marya develops an almost empathic attunement to the moods of others and often consciously or subconsciously modifies her behavior to gain their approval. As a teenager, she develops a biting wit and makes it her mission to create laughter in others; she becomes the perfect student to win recognition from teachers; she occasionally attempts to become the perfect daughter to win her aunt’s approval; and she flirts with the idea of martyrdom and a nunnery to achieve religious perfection. As an adult, she finally chooses professional academic achievement.

She very consciously develops and cultivates this alternate, perfectionist identity all of her life to showcase her difference from others in a positive way. As her graduate school colleague tells her: "To be perfect will get you nowhere, Ernest said, if you don’t also seem perfect. In this part of the world, reality counts for very little apart from its appropriate appearances" (203). Marya’s public identity contains none of the feelings of worthlessness and self-hatred contained in the inner, real Marya—the Marya that cannot deny the abuse. Recognizing that there is a difference between herself and "normal" people, Marya attempts to define that difference herself. Her difference must seem to others to result from socially defined "goodness"—academic success, being the perfect daughter, never showing pain, etc.—rather than resulting from what she believes is the inherent "badness" of her hidden abused self. Her low self-esteem, caused by internalizing the blame for the abuse, motivates her to minimize the severity and importance of the abuse on her life. And because of the creation of an alternate, public identity, all of Marya’s successes can be ignored and denied by
the inner Marya because the "others" don't know who she really is. They are rewarding a construct; they would dislike and abandon the "real" Marya. When she considers telling her lover about the sexual abuse thirty plus years after the fact, she is still ashamed and fearful. The scenarios she rehearses are calculated to show him how unimportant the abuse really is—to hide her pain from him, to deny him access to the real Marya. She must continue to uphold the fictional Marya created for self-protection, for that is what she believes he loves, not her. The scene also demonstrates her deeply internalized, masochistic belief that she is not deserving of love, and that if her lover truly knew her, he would abandon her:

She doesn't want to exaggerate. She isn't sentimental, she wants no excuses, she is likely in fact to be rather pitiless with her self.

One day soon she will tell her lover about Lee Knauer, but the opportunity must present itself gratuitously, like fate. For Eric Nichols isn't in the fullest and richest and most magnanimous sense her lover. (He claims to love her, to be devoted to her, but Marya knows better: it's just his notion of her, a kind of capsule-sized female in his brain, "Marya" in this pose, "Marya" in that, "Marya" imagined, of all things, as deserving of love.)

However, she will tell Eric Nichols about her boy cousin; she is conventional enough to believe that he has a right to know.

For if this man loves her, even if he is deluded in his love, he must have a sense of her history, of who he believes he loves.

And telling him about Lee will serve the purpose of explaining certain hesitancies and doubts in Marya's nature, that stoniness of soul he has surely noticed. (Not that Eric Nichols has said anything to Marya. He is kind, patient, gentle, supremely civilized. Not at all what Marya Knauer deserves.)

When I was eight years old . . .

There was this cousin of mine, a boy, a few years older than . . .

My parents died when I was eight and my two brothers and I were taken in by . . . And I had two cousins, a boy and a girl. And the boy, he didn't really mean any harm, he didn't really know what he was doing . . .

This sort of thing happens all the time, it isn't uncommon though I once thought it was. In recent years . . . the statistics . . . (39)

Benjamin states that the biggest fear of the masochistic self is that its unworthiness will be discovered by the idealized other and she will be no longer desired. Therefore, the masochist must seek to avoid abandonment at all costs in order to keep that sense of a
coherent self derived from the relationship. The masochist will modify her personality, behavior, appearance, and beliefs to meet what she believes to be the needs and desires of the "other." She will hide and deny aspects of her personality to "protect" the other from that which she deems unpleasant to them. An additional example can be seen in this narrative comment: "Since the early days . . . [Marya] had learned to suppress certain aspects of her personality in his presence: above all, any hint of weakness. She might be sinful in thought, word, and deed, but she was not going to be weak" (77). Benjamin also believes that if the relationship results in physical, emotional, or psychological abuse, it only serves to feed the masochist's sense of worthlessness and inspires her to try harder to please the sadist to avoid both the abuse and abandonment. Herman agrees with Benjamin's assertions in this area, stating that the creation of a "good" perfectionist self often is used as a survival strategy by victims to prevent the abuse from reoccurring by pleasing their abusers.

However, this idea of projecting a false self or of role playing is also coupled with the victim's internalization of blame for the abuse. This compounds the serious damage done to the concept of self by both the traumatic event and continuing relationships. This symptom of Marya's abuse is evident in a quote by Nietzsche which haunts the adult Marya: "Terrible experiences give one cause to speculate whether the one who experiences them may not be something terrible" (226). This kind of attitude reaffirms the victims' belief that the abuse was their fault, as they are "bad" people and deserve the negative treatment they get; and to receive love, they must hide or radically change themselves into what they believe the "other" wants. Benjamin asserts that these traits which Herman states abuse survivors exhibit are also important factors influencing the behavior patterns of the masochistic self.
MARYA AND MASOCHISM

As a result of her childhood abuse, one coping strategy Marya exhibits is what Jessica Benjamin views as the heart of masochistic tendencies. She attempts to use a series of powerful "others" (i.e. men) to create and define a coherent self for her, allowing for some self-development in what is believed to be relative safety. However, this the growth is male-controlled and directed personal growth, not actual self-exploration. Marya's tendency to gravitate towards idealized, powerful men is made evident to the reader through some of the narrator's comments on Marya's behavior, such as: "Marya usually managed to impress and to please men—men of a certain type; and not often women" (74). Marya's own comments about her behavior articulate for the reader the role she assumes in her relationships and illustrate her attempts to fulfill Simone DeBeauvoir's assertions about male/female relationships: "A familiar story, Marya instructs herself—a woman yearning to be completed in a man, by way of a man. As if she hadn't a soul of her own" (212). Marya begins to use the strategy of attempting to please the men she idealizes early on in her life, and continues it until her attempt to make contact with her mother in mid-adulthood. One of the first times she uses an idealized "other" to help define herself is in high school when she becomes an assistant to one of the local Catholic priests, Father Shearing, who is hospitalized and suffering from cancer.

This masochistic attempt is to lose herself in an omnipotent "other," an "other" whom she believes has a direct connection with the ultimate omnipotent being, "God." Benjamin views many of the characteristics of masochism as culminating in the devotion and transcendence associated with religion and the surrender of the saints. The torture and outrage the saints suffer is an essential part of their martyrdom which then, in turn, redeems them from their sins. It is the symbolic and ritual nature of devotion to the "other" which allows the relationship to take on the shape of a form of worship. Marya attempts to be
redeemed for her "sins" (the abuse) by converting to, then practicing Catholicism, and by worshipping God through worshipping Father Shearing. Even during their first meeting, when Marya is initially considering Catholicism, she begins to idealize Father Shearing and consciously modifies her behavior to please him. The narrator says, "She wasn’t going to flinch beneath the gaze of this extraordinary man—she’d known at once that he was extraordinary, that there was no one else like him in Innisfail—but it was difficult to sort out his questions, to guess what it was he might be most impressed to hear" (93).

In Marya’s attempt to reach out to God and the church, she also exhibits the masochistic desire to be known, found, released, and accepted for her true self that Benjamin’s research discusses. As is evident in the following passage, her whole desire to connect to religion is based on the belief that she will find some satisfaction and a sense of herself through devoted service to an omnipotent other (God in this case):

Marya, who knew herself to be generally disliked below (she was haughty, she was rude and impatient. Why couldn’t she help herself?), reasoned that she might have a chance with God . . . She liked it too that God cared not at all for outward appearances. He saw directly into the heart, the soul . . . In any case God saw the inner person, the real Marya Knauer, and would not judge her crudely, as her classmates did . . . To be born a second time, to have the sin of one’s parents washed away, to be free of personal history, at least for a space of time. (74-75)

However, the fact that this desire is channeled into a masculine physical being whom she devotes herself to serving shows the reader a less idealized, more valid reason for her actions. She loves the "idea" of Father Shearing and what he represents, not necessarily the man himself. She refuses to see the man for what he is, an ill, pompous, dying man with an inflated sense of the importance of his ideas on religious theory. Instead she sees a "saint" deserving of worship, a "saint" deserving of her miserable life: "She was not in love with Father Shearing (that would be a sin) but she had lavish fantasies in which the proposition was put to
her that she might exchange her life for his, she might die in his place: Yes, Marya whispered, desperate and elated. Oh yes" (72).

The extent of Marya's wish to lose herself in the worship of her ideal Father Shearing is evident in her thoughts during their last session together when she describes how she must often resist the powerful urge to bury herself in his lap and lose herself in him when he asks her what is bothering her. Simply showing a little interest and concern for this young Marya is enough for her worship: "the gentleness of his voice, the smiling solicitude of his manner, made her want to kneel before him and press her warm face against his hands and surrender everything in her of pride, rage, deep unhappiness . . . everything that was Marya, and consequently damned" (82-83). Marya is willing to sacrifice the essence of her being as she knows it just for the chance to be connected to her vision of Father Shearing. She will give up everything just to be known and loved.

Later in high school, during her senior year, her first boyfriend Emmett Schroeder is chosen from all the other available boys/men because of "his sense of himself as superior: superior to his environment, superior to most of his friends. Quickly Marya saw that he saw himself as superior to her; and fell in love with him that night" (116). Emmett is much older than Marya and is from a family with a good-sized construction firm. He is a coveted item within her peer group, and a relationship with him represents social mobility for Marya. While she is not completely enthralled with Emmett, her friends view him as a good catch because of his family's economic and social status and, most importantly, because he says he loves her. However, in exchange for an elevated community status, Emmett wants Marya to marry him and give up her dream of going to college. Emmett asks Marya to sacrifice her future for him under the guise that she doesn't have to go anywhere she doesn't want to, and he knows that she really doesn't want to go to college. He is older and wiser, so she should logically do what he wants, because what she really wants is what he wants. Marya, however, recognizes that
going to college is the only way she is going to escape the stagnation of Innisfail. She believes that starting over in a new town is the only way she can put her past behind her; the only way she can forget about everything that has happened, and move on.

Eventually the narrator reveals Emmett’s abusive tendencies and subtly illuminates this potential in their relationship. After Marya’s repeated refusals to marry him, Emmett becomes angry and insists that she finally have sex with him. He then becomes violent when she refuses: "He took her head in both hands and began to shake it up and down, and from side to side, as if he wanted to snap her neck. She’d been so frightened her knees had buckled; she couldn’t even scream. She thought, My God he’s going to kill me and it will be my fault" (105). When Emmett drives her to college the next week to look for a place to live, she again refuses to marry him. She tells herself that she wants a couple years of freedom first. Once there looking for a place to live and a job, she is torn between two simultaneous thoughts: give up and go home where she belongs and marry Emmett; and "that she was through with Emmett, and when she signed her name at the bottom of the form she was signing herself away from him. There she thought . . . that’s done" (109). While an undergraduate, Marya has no significant relationships with men. Instead she unsuccessfully attempts to form relationships with women using her previous behavior patterns. These attempts will be discussed later in the section on Marya’s "mother quest."

Marya’s next masochistic relationship with an idealized, omnipotent other begins in graduate school where she falls madly "in love" with her married, major professor, Maximilian Fein. In Fein, Marya finds what she believes she has been looking for: a genius who will allow her worship; a man whose strength and mental acuity she can draw upon, model herself after; a pattern to use to achieve perfection (albeit it is his perfection, not hers); someone to lose herself in, to define her. And Fein found in Marya just what he was looking for: a brilliant young pupil to adore and worship him, a young mind to mold, shape, and control.
The narrator foreshadows the direction Marya and Fein’s relationship will take by outlining Fein’s beliefs about the role of intimate relationships and genius (which he believes he is). "'The privilege of genius appears to be a curse to others,' Fein observed. 'But in fact it provides a sacred obligation, a religious 'path,' to the close-at-hand—the adoring spouse; and by way of the spouse, the larger world is served. Thus genius is a phenomenon of symbiosis; it can only be a relationship, not the condition in itself" (197). Marya’s thoughts in response to his comments further illustrate Simone DeBeauvior’s point on idealized male/female relationships, and predict the masochist role she will assume in her interactions with Fein:

Before meeting Fein, Marya would not have thought one might have a sacred obligation to another person; she had long given up—in fact she had rejected with distaste—the very notion of the convent, the cloistered life, decades spent in selfless adoration of Christ. It had not occurred to her that there might exist mortal versions of Christ . . . human and secular saviors. (197)

After falling in love with Fein, Marya begins to see Fein in a similar light to Father Shearing: that of a human savior or Christ figure. Following the pattern described in Benjamin and Herman’s research, she worships him and restructures her academic direction and interests to please him: "It is a way of commending herself to him, proving herself hour after hour. For Marya Knauer’s writing, her thinking, her very being, take value now solely in reference to Maximilian Fein . . ." (215). She modifies her behavior and schedule to meet his needs and to keep him interested: "She hears herself speaking—she seems to see herself behaving in certain prescribed ways—but it is not altogether real to her: . . . If she spends some time gazing at herself in a mirror it isn’t Marya-seeing-Marya but her-lover-seeing-Marya" (210-211). She loses herself in his identity and uses his recognition of her to define and value herself:

Tell me about yourself, Fein says.
And Marya’s imagination goes blank—for what is there to tell, apart from this? . . .
Apart from you, Marya whispers, close to tears, there is nothing. (213-214)

Fein's sadism and condescension towards Marya, his ability to reduce her fragile sense of self-esteem to rubble while maintaining his hold over her, are evident in his subtle manipulation of her. His creation of a fictional Marya, one he embues with all of the medieval qualities of the suffering Latin figure *mater dolorosa*, is what he sees when he looks at her, when he holds her. This fictional creation exists to such an extent that Marya finds herself "being confronted with a Marya not herself, a fictious Marya, worshipped if not precisely loved" (210), rather than the real Marya, loved and embraced for her true qualities. With a brush of his condescending hand, Fein also dismisses her concerns and feelings for him quite easily. "Marya loved him, believed anything he said—anything he said. But for all her intelligent sympathy she could not make her belief quite credible to him. No, concluded Fein, with a fatherly sort of patience, she was too young, too innocent, she struck him as supremely American; a creature of health and daylight" (203). Fein refuses to see who and what Marya really is, and Marya is masochisticly willing to embrace his fictional creation of her to maintain their relationship.

When Marya attempts to branch out on her own into her own areas of interest by publishing a journal article using Fein's theory to analyze contemporary politics, Fein immediately yanks in her leash by shaming her venture and reasserting his omnipotence. Despite the fact that Marya meant the gesture to be a tribute to Fein's brilliance, he is not pleased with her attempts to create her own academic niche. She is to follow and assist him, the genius, and serve as his muse. She is not to dabble in what he deems as trivial academic areas, no matter how important they may be to Marya. And she agrees. She declines the journal editor's request for more pieces, fulfilling the submissive role of the good masochistic female by hiding and burying a important part of her belief system to avoid displeasing Fein and risking his boredom and abandonment:
When she showed the published piece to Fein, however, he wasn't at all impressed. His expression showed disdain, immediate boredom. Though Marya had meant for him to keep the copy of *The Meridian*, he leafed through it in her presence and handed it back, saying that he hadn't had time for journalism and he was surprised that she had the time. 'Even journalism with the lugubrious moral tone of *The Meridian,*' he said.

Marya was hurt, puzzled; her blood pulsed with a childish resentment. She had thought his theory would lend itself to political application, she said. She'd given him credit throughout, hadn't he noticed? . . . Wasn't he interested?

No, Fein said politely. He was afraid he wasn't interested. 'Politics is invariably journalism,' he said, 'and journalism has simply never had any appeal for me. Even when it's intelligently and cleverly done. Even when it is under the byline—that *is* the term isn't it? of Marya Knauer.'

So she took back *The Meridian* and filed away her copies without troubling to read through the issue. She was sickened, ashamed. She wrote a note to the editor, Eric Nichols, declining his offer. She hadn't time, she said. She hadn't time.

'You mustn't expend your spirit in the pursuit of phantasms,' Fein said afterward, forgiving her. 'A fantasm of your own *self,* caught up in imbecilic habits of mind.'

'Yes,' said Marya dully. 'I mean no. No.' (215-216)

The amount of control Marya allows Fein to exert over her and their relationship is also evident in comments she makes towards the end of the relationship. When quarreling:

sometimes the quarrel seemed to be about the fact that Fein wanted her with him more ('at his side,' 'close by his side') more and more frequently, at *his* convenience; sometimes it was about the fact that Marya was lonely, Marya was ill-treated, Marya was feeling distinctly unloved and unwanted ('You derive pleasure from pushing me closer and closer to the edge, don't you,' Marya accused him. She made fists, dug her nails into her flesh, heard the childish whine in her voice and hated him more for it. 'You want me to be like yourself, a form of yourself don't you!' she whispered fiercely.). (p 226)

In response to this pressure and as a form of resistance, Marya is subconsciously drawn places no one would suspect her of frequenting—ones that remind her of her past. In a country western bar, while savoring a beer, Marya relishes briefly in the thought that "He doesn't
know where I am: I'm free" (221). Fein cannot find her because he would never think of looking for her there, in her buried roots, in the parts of herself she's hidden from him.

Marya is finally abandoned by Fein after he dies of a massive stroke suffered while isolating himself in his study. Since the end of the relationship is caused by Fein's death, rather than her rejection of what he represents and the submissive role he asks her to play, it leaves Marya vulnerable to repeat the situation years later.

After earning her Ph.D. under another professor in an entirely different area, Marya is forced to again deal with her submissive behavior and her next serious relationship still recapitulates the roles of dominance and submission. The difference is that her new lover is not necessarily conscious of Marya’s submissive role. He views her as a strong, powerful woman who is his lover and political ally—after all, she has created a formidable academic record and has earned tenure at a prestigious university. However, Marya still is constantly searching for his approval and hiding her real self from him for fear he will stop loving her.

After contributing several articles and book reviews to his political journal *The Meridian*, Marya meets Eric Nichols at a conference on Latin American culture. She attends a loud, boisterous panel discussion in which he is participating, discussing whether or not Latin American culture has a future or simply an interesting past. And as she watched him keep his temper from flaring and his voice low, she thought during the debate: "Oh yes. Yes. Him. Afterwards she introduced herself to him, and they shook hands rather shyly, staring, smiling" (258). From this point on, they begin to get to know each other and discover that they have much in common politically. He later helps encourage Marya to quit her job at the university and write full-time, exposing the problems of the world so they can be acknowledged and then fixed. After Eric and Marya become lovers, they travel the world together, attending and speaking at human rights conferences, while she publishes her books and writes articles for his journal. However, the novel explores her relationship with Eric
Nicholas only after his subsequent death. It is the Marya in mourning who shares with the reader the kind of relationship they had:

He had been dead, Marya thought, a remarkably long time by now. It could no longer be measured in terms of weeks, let alone days. Already it had become months. Four months...five months...was it going to be six...? Though the man had been dead for so long (constantly dead, one might say), Marya still dreamed up anecdotes and amusing or touching or outrageous or edifying tales to tell him. After all, what was the purpose of her sensibility, her singular way with words, if she could not present them in some form to Eric Nichols. It was difficult to imagine her life without reference to him. It was difficult to imagine that her life had a point, without reference to him. (280-281)

Marya describes a relationship in which she has again remade herself over into the ideal of an "other," and in the process, loses who she actually is. Throughout the human rights conference she is attending, she constantly references events in regards to how Eric would react, how Eric would view the situation, what Eric would find amusing. She is looking at the world through his eyes and using his viewpoint, not her own. She does this partly to distance herself from the topics of human rights violations, murder, rape, and torture as they dredge-up buried memories from the past, causing her to feel out of control:

Marya wanted to learn the simultaneous translator’s sleight-of-hand before it was too late. She wanted to convert human pain into human words, she wanted to convert the memory of intense emotion in the past into intense emotion in the present, and to be herself unmoved. But she had begun to doubt her ability. She had certainly begun to doubt her strength. Already, since the impassioned opening sessions of the conference, her handwriting had altered several times and was not always intelligible. (272-273)

As she listens to the speeches of the conference delegates the phrase "Death from without & death from within" (273) keeps surfacing in her head and reoccurring randomly in her notes. As she ponders what the phrase could possibly be referring to, she discovers its obvious reference to the death of Eric. She also begins to wonder about its obvious reference to her own inner death and destruction as a result of her past experiences and her relationships.
In her relationship with Eric, Marya was beginning to learn strategies she needed to stand on her own: to go away and be alone, isolated where she could work on her own projects. She saw these experiences as spiritual solace and part of a healing process in which she could forget who she was, even her name, and become invisible for a while. She was even beginning to be able to conceive of asserting her own needs in the relationship. While away on her last retreat, she "dared to think that if Eric did not divorce his wife within the year without a word from Marya (it was important it be 'without a word'), she would break off the affair. She could live alone without great hardship; she had her own work, her friends and acquaintances, her travel. She had her life. Surely these periodic retreats were proof of her own strength and independence . . ." (291).

However, Eric Nichols dies in a car accident before she can talk to him about what she had been thinking, and Marya is abandoned again. This time, however, she had already begun reevaluating the submissive role she had been unconsciously playing in the relationship. Thus Marya had grown. She became more prepared to move on and began to try and exchange the masochistic behavior patterns in her life for other strategies. But why would Marya, an intelligent woman, use masochism as a strategy at all rather than some other form generating self growth? The next section will discuss what Marya gains from the sadomasochistic relationships previously mentioned.
MARYA'S GAINS FROM MASOCHISTIC BEHAVIOR

According to Herman, in order to begin the recovery process, an abuse survivor must begin to reestablish relationships with others in the world. As it was within the context of relationships that the trauma occurred, healing must take place in the context of forming and sustaining new relationships. It is through her interactions with people that the survivor begins to recreate psychological faculties like trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy that were damaged by the abuse. However, to begin this process, the survivor must first establish a sense of personal safety and security. It is from this base that survivors seek to find and develop strategies designed to rebuild their ego functions. Because of the damage done to the self's sense of autonomy, competence, and identity by prolonged abuse, the need for a "safe space" for self exploration becomes very important. Benjamin's theories of sadomasochistic behavior can explain the survivor's attempt to create the sense of safety within the realm of the familiar while undertaking her quest for self-exploration. In other words, a survivor's self-exploration may take place under the protection and guidance of an admired, omnipotent "other" whom the survivor may use as a model to mold herself. The masochistic self's motivation for surrender is to dissolve her sense of being into one who is seen as completely in control. This enables her to gain the power and agency she believes she does not possess. Therefore masochistic behavior, when viewed in the context of the identity development and recovery process of an abuse survivor, takes on a new dimension. In this context, what becomes important is what qualities are gained by the survivor through her sacrifice and who she becomes in the process.

Herman states that once the survivor has established a "safe space" from which to venture out, the survivor's task is to become the person she wants to be by drawing upon those aspects of the "other" most valued. She then must integrate all those new elements and the abuse experience to create a new self. Abuse survivors demonstrating masochistic
tendencies may be attempting to negotiate and further their own recovery process. Once those qualities have been integrated, the survivor may briefly embrace the role of the sadist because she is only able to negotiate relationships through the polarities of dominance and submission.

Marya aptly demonstrates the ways in which masochistic behavior may have healing potential, particularly in the men she chooses to have relationships with. Each of the men in the novel is older than Marya, representing the lost father. Each of the men is at least one level above her current social class, representing and offering social mobility. Each of the men is viewed by others as having obtained a high level of success in their respective fields, offering her their expertise. Each of the men is idealized and viewed by Marya as being superior to her in some capacity she deems valuable, offering her guidance and direction. And after each relationship is finished, Marya has assimilated some of the very qualities she so admired in the men, and achieved her own version of their success. Marya uses her masochistic relationships in an attempt to construct a coherent, strong sense of self and to continually develop and refine that self. Initially she sacrifices her identity, but in the end, she walks away from each of the relationships "the winner."

One of the ways that Marya is able to walk away from the relationships as a "winner" is that she holds her real self, her abused self, back from the men, keeping distance between them while maintaining the illusion of intimacy. Marya is only content to play the masochistic role in the relationship with men who hold power and therefore have something to offer her. After they have served their purpose and taught her what they can, the power dynamic in the relationship begins to shift. Once the men begin to need Marya, she becomes outwardly cold and dispassionate, completely discarding them intellectually and emotionally. As the relationships deteriorate, Marya the masochist switches into a new role, Marya the sadist—the other side of the sadomasochistic partnership. Marya transforms the relationships by
switching the roles played by each partner. By using the roles she is familiar with to maintain her sense of control, Marya is able to maintain the relationships and exercise some of the qualities she has learned from them.

This pattern becomes evident very early on in the novel. Marya's relationship with Father Shearing begins her search for masculine approval and validation for self-definition. Her relationship with Father Shearing gives young Marya's life a sense of purpose. For the first time she is relied on, and her contributions are needed. Father Shearing's passion for religious theory intrigues and inspires Marya to strive for intellectual and rhetorical excellence. The challenge his material presents and the power that one could yield if it is mastered is too much for her to pass up: "to be able to write so well; to wield such a vocabulary; to argue so powerfully; to ferret out miscalculations in a rival's thesis to mere hairs breadth of a degree . . .

. She wonders if it is an entirely masculine skill, an art of combat by way of language, forever beyond her" (95). Father Shearing's religious passion is initially incorporated by young Marya as religious zeal. Later, Marya rejects him and then religion, but she is able to modify and channel what she learned from Father Shearing into a passion for literary analysis better suited to her own needs, loves, and ambitions.

The power dynamic in Marya and Father Shearing's relationship begins to shift once Father Shearing becomes dependent on Marya's visits, once her presence and actions become necessary for his sanity. Initially Marya is consciously oblivious to the dire medical condition of Father Shearing. Despite all the medical equipment he is hooked up to, despite the fragility and helplessness of the terminally ill patient, Marya sees Father Shearing as a powerful, vibrant intellectual force who is inspired by God, not a dying cancer patient. In keeping with this perspective, she worships him and hangs on his every word. One day after a long session of transcribing Father Shearing's "masterful" religious treatise, Marya turns to leave. He grabs her arm and says: "You won't abandon me, will you? Suddenly? Overnight? There's no one
else,' he continues, faltering, vague, confused . . ." (95). Once Marya realizes that she is needed by Father Shearing, the veil of omnipotence needed for her continual worship is removed. He becomes a weak and sickly man. The narrative descriptions of him in the text shift to show him no longer ethereal and omnipotent; it is his weakness that she concentrates on now: "his gaunt face, his thin-lipped smile . . . his bruised arms, the prominence of his facial bones, the small glistening sores about his mouth" (97-98), and his thinning, lank, colorless hair. She also now views his religious ideas as tedious and boring and struggles to maintain her concentration through his "droning, insistent words" (97). For Marya, he cannot be both fascinating and weak. Father Shearing further drives Marya away in their last session together when he says in response to her questions "I only wanted everything, Marya, was that too much to ask . . . ?" (100). Marya responds by never seeing Father Shearing again. He is eventually transferred to another hospital where he later dies. Marya sees no purpose in weakness, only strength holds power for her, so the real Father Shearing is discarded once the illusion has been dispelled. However, his contribution to Marya's intellectual growth and her new academic vigor have become a part of her and the search for self definition continues. Marya the sadist is ready to rebecome Marya the masochist in search of herself.

Marya uses her next relationship to further her sense of self-esteem and give her value and status within her community. She chooses Emmett Schroeder because he is desired by other women and his future seems secure through his father's business. Her friends envy her ability to "catch" him, and she is able to socialize with a group of people she believes others see as "better" than herself. Marya describes her relationship with Emmett by saying not that she particularly cares for him, but that "his desire for her (of which she was much aware) had the power to make her desire him" (108). With hindsight, an adult Marya is able to reflect back on her relationship with Emmett and place it in context:
She had not loved him—she wasn’t capable, she supposed, of loving anyone—but she certainly had basked in the sunny intensity of his love; she’d lapped it up eagerly, thirstily (so she nearly saw herself, a dog lapping up water), as if convinced that it had something to do with her. (162)

It is the fictional sense of social and sexual power that ties Marya to Emmett and inspires her to maintain the relationship as long as she sees it is necessary. However, once Marya had grown accustomed to the social status a relationship with Emmett provided her, she began to believe she could be something more than a working-class wife. This new Marya was no longer content with those opportunities her friends found fulfilling—wife and mother. Marya continued the relationship with Emmett because he offered the young Marya a choice of two paths: she could pursue her own goal of further class mobility and intellectual development through a college education or, if that failed, she would still have available to her the slightly elevated class status marriage to Emmett provided and a working-class lifestyle that was better than her family’s. Marriage to Emmett was considered primarily because it represented a fall-back position for Marya in case she was not able to accomplish her initial goals. If she failed to get into college, she would still have the sense of self that Emmett could provide.

Marya viewed this relationship as a purely practical matter, not one based on love, therefore it was easily disposed of once Marya came to view Emmett as a hindrance to her further advancement. Once Marya makes her final decision to go away to college and leave Emmett and Innisfail behind, she pushes Emmett away from her so strongly that he breaks off the relationship. While pushing him away, Marya is coldly calculating. She goes through the motions of attempting to maintain the relationship by pretending to be upset while actually increasing her intellectual distance: "you know how I am . . . but you know I love you," while a part of her thought calmly: There, that’s done" (110). She is simply acting for Emmett's benefit. Marya has moved on from a relationship she no longer needs. There is no turning back. Sadism will rule until Marya can be conquered again and persuaded to surrender to another.
One of the ways in which Marya is able to keep the men in her life and others in general at a distance is her use of role playing. As in the previous quote, Marya is often described in the text as having thoughts that directly contradict what she says to people. Marya uses fictional selves to get what she wants out of the various situations and to protect herself from being hurt by preventing anyone from truly "knowing" Marya. She consciously cultivates an aura of unapproachability and views herself as closed and armored. The narrator comments on Marya's ideal vision of herself through the lines from one of Marya's favorite poems: "She liked to think of Marya Knauer as unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow" (190). Marya's armor has two dimensions. One aspect is her formidable intellect which she uses to both impress and intimidate others. While an undergraduate "Marya had acquired a reputation for being brilliant—the word wasn’t hers but Imogene’s: 'Do you know that everyone thinks you're brilliant, everyone is afraid of you?'—and it struck Marya a felicitous, a sort of glass barrier that would keep other people at a distance" (147). That her intellect would assist her in avoiding real relationships with people gives it even more value as it protects the real Marya, the abused Marya, from being seen and pitied by others. The second aspect of her armor is her sense that her fictional selves are unreal, that they are simply a performance put on for the benefit of others. In describing her way of interacting with people, especially men, Marya comments

that it was arch, vaguely theatrical—cinematic? She performed and others watched. She was on stage so to speak, illuminated by their attention; they were forced to watch . . . it all became conscious, subtly nuanced, as if she were on film, protected by the very barrier of film, seen and admired by men but in no way obligated to see and admire them in return. (112)

The combination of the intellect and fictional selves is also what allows Marya to see her masochistic behavior as what it is, a survival strategy, a method to get what she wants out of others, and then because of the intellectual distance she keeps in the relationship, she is able to
turn on the men, once they have served their purposes, and discard them. Marya initially surrenders, but only in order to use people up so that later, she can throw them away.

The next omnipotent "other" in Marya's life surfaces after Marya, having the skills she learned from Father Shearing and the veneer of confidence she learned with Emmett, has successfully completed her undergraduate degree with honors. While in graduate school Marya uses her relationship with her married major professor Maximilian Fein to develop the tools that will later produce her formidable academic record. Marya draws on Fein for inspiration and motivation to put forward her best effort and produces outstanding work to garner his approval:

For awhile Marya's passion for Maximilian Fein inspires her work. He can not see her very often, not even every day: he has warned her that they must leave each other a considerable amount of privacy. So she does her meticulous research—she studies her languages—she writes her essays—with Fein as her ideal audience, her admiring listener. She is, in fact, always speaking to him in her imagination; sometimes, locked away in her room, very late at night, she murmurs aloud—to him, always to him, in reference to him. (211)

When publishing, she uses his methods and theories to draw attention to her work. She emulates his image, his drive, and his values to further define and refine her own ambitions. For Marya, the relationship with Fein also endows her with a sense of personal power including, possibly merging both the power of words and the power of sexuality. Her relationship with Fein creates, for the first time, a Marya who is desirable and physically attractive as well as intellectually formidable. This Marya begins to bridge the mind/body split caused by abuse. She recognizes on some level the extent to which she needs Fein to help her define herself when she looks at him toward the end of the relationship and says: "In this man there is the answer to the very riddle of my life, but I can't find it" (p 228).

As with Father Shearing, in the beginning Marya consciously worships Fein. She emulates him to gain his approval and modifies her behavior when it displeases him. She
attempts to become a version of him and emulate his successes in her search for self-definition. However, after Marya and Fein are physically intimate and he allows her to enter his private space, the study, Fein begins to need and depend on Marya, thus beginning the process of transferring the power away from him to Marya. The transfer process escalates once Fein begins to have psychological and physical episodes which require Marya’s care to nurse him back to health. Also, as these episodes increase in frequency and severity, so do Fein’s bouts with impotence:

Sometimes he couldn’t make love to her. Not in that way. He tried, he tried, half sobbing and clutching at her pummeling her flesh, he tried and failed: she knew he despised her for his failure, she knew her breasts and belly and the insides of her thighs would carry the bruises for days. It doesn’t matter, Marya consoled him, it doesn’t matter . . . . But of course it did, to her aging lover it mattered greatly. (218)

Fein’s increasing physical and psychological dependence on Marya causes her to push him away like Emmett, and recoil at his illness and weakness, as she did with Father Shearing.

Subconsciously Marya begins to sabotage her relationship with Fein. She uses his theories to analyze contemporary American society for a left-wing, bi-weekly journal, and he criticizes her for dabbling in what he deems as trivialities like "journalism." Later during an important meeting with one of Fein’s colleagues orchestrated by Fein to "show off" Marya, his latest creation, Marya attacks both of their positions: "She said they were each talking of meaning without meaning what they said; there was no 'moral content' to their remarks; why should they be taken seriously?" (228). By the end of the intense argument, Fein has lectured Marya until she feels humiliated. After attempting to laugh off what happened, Fein's colleague excused himself quickly, leaving Marya and Fein alone at the table, no longer speaking, only staring resentfully at each other. The frustration resulting from the sacrifice of her identity in attempting to be what Fein wants her to be has come into direct conflict with how Marya wishes to utilize what she has learned from their relationship. Marya is becoming
prepared to move on, and since Fein has in many ways turned the power over to her in the relationship, Marya uses it against him in an attempt to gain the distance necessary for her continued survival. She has learned all she can from him, and he is no longer needed. Fein, however, dies of a stroke soon after Marya takes control of the relationship; hence she does not need to abandon him as she has Emmett or Father Schroeder. He has abandoned her.

Marya's last relationship with a man in the novel is slightly different from her previous ones. When Marya becomes involved with Eric Nichols, she is in her thirties, has a fairly well-defined personality, and has achieved academic success in her own right. After Fein's death, Marya used what he taught her to carve out her own academic niche in her own way. The relationship with Nichols offers her the vehicle to acquire an international reputation as a critic and the ability and connections to travel the world. Now Marya is able to have her interest in politics not only encouraged, but nurtured rather than discouraged and scoffed at. Through Nichols, she has acquired a new life mission—a mission that she approaches with as much zeal as her experiment with religion. Moreover, she uses all the tools she acquired as a rhetorician to attempt to effect political change and right global injustices. When reflecting on her current position in political life Marya "remembered Maximilian Fein's dismissal of politics and journalism; she felt at times a stab of guilt—or was it guilty satisfaction?—that she had betrayed him" (259).

Her relationship with Nichols also creates the "safe space" which allows a mature Marya to begin to explore aspects of her abused self. Marya is given an opportunity to begin to work out her personal experience with violence by publicly documenting and condemning the international epidemics of politically motivated torture and human rights violations against others. Becoming angered and outraged enough to take action for others who cannot defend themselves allows Marya the survivor to again revisit the defenseless, abused child she abandoned in the beginning of the novel. For Herman, this idea of being motivated to political
or social action is a key step in the recovery process. The survivor becomes concerned with
raising public awareness, prevention, and achieving a sense of justice. It is the relationship
with Nichols that creates this safe space because it is though his eyes and his perspective that
Marya confronts the atrocities of the world. Initially it is his struggle she joins. It is only
toward the end of the relationship and, ultimately, after his death that she begins to make the
struggle against violence her own. Only after his death is she able to begin to use the skills she
learned from him to start developing her own resistance to violence by drawing on her
strength which is buried in her violent past.

Eric’s sudden death does not allow Marya the opportunity to lash out at or dismiss
Eric as she had been able to do with the men in her previous relationships. Marya is left with
the pent up frustrations resulting from her submissive role, and she is also unable to switch to
the sadistic behavior she had used to in order to reach resolution and restore her sense of
personal power before moving on. Because of this, Marya is relatively unable to mourn Eric’s
death, and she searches for a symbolic replacement for him. She briefly considers an affair
with one of Eric’s friends so that they can mourn Eric together and keep his memory alive by
sharing "Eric" anecdotes as amusement. Marya’s plan disintegrates when Eric’s friend asks
her to attend an international literary conference for distinguished writers which is similar to
those she had frequently attended with Eric. Marya lashes out at the friend, claiming to have
heard all the speeches before, met all the delegates, and seen Budapest even though she had
never been there. By the end of the conversation, Marya is angry and near hysterics. Her
unexpressed anger and frustration, caused by her submissive role in her relationship with Eric,
are vented on the man she had hoped would serve as Eric’s substitute.

All of the relationships with men throughout Marya’s life have followed a particular
pattern. Within the context of her relationships, Marya has moved from submission,
dependence, and masochism in the beginning to dominance, independence, and sadism at the
end of the relationships. While the movement from dependence to independence is a positive step, it is still trapped within the construction of the sadomasochistic relationship where one either has all the power or no power. It is Eric’s untimely death that removes the shield of protection provided by the sadist and opens up the cracks in Marya’s armor. Since she is unable to continue her pattern of switching from masochist to sadist when ready to move on from the relationship, she must begin to face some of her abuse issues alone, outside the protective shell provided by the sadomasochistic relationship. As a consequence, Marya is forced to begin to identify with what she perceives as the weakness in herself, her femininity, but only after the masculine omnipotent "other" vanishes from her life. Once this identification begins, she begins to look into her past, reevaluate her relationships with women, and begin the search for her "lost" mother.
MARYA'S MOTHER QUEST

To begin an analysis of Marya and her relationship with her mother, her position within the female community and her position as a daughter must be analyzed. In discussing Marya's position as a daughter within the text, Marilyn Wesley states in *Refusal and Transgression in Joyce Carol Oates' Fiction* that Marya follows what she sees as the typical history of the Oates daughter:

- first, the necessity of differentiating a self separate from the mother;
- second, the consciousness of rape as a cultural condition that implies the victimization of the female; and
- third, the attempt to counter the threat of violence through the discovery of forms of perception such as art, literature, or education that may balance order and vitality. (127-128)

However, while embodying Oates's paradigm of "daughter," Wesley says Marya takes the type a step further because "although Marya has had to forswear feminine nurturance for masculine power, at the conclusion of the novel she initiates the attempt toward wholeness by trying to reintroduce the feminine potential in the form of her lost mother" (133). Therefore, Marya has been unable to progress beyond the sadomasochistic dynamic while she continued to embrace and identify herself as gendered neutral, or more precisely as gendered male. As long as Marya continued to identify herself as like men and unlike women, the cycle would remain unbroken. Marya can only move forward in her healing process and away from sadomasochistic behavior once she begins to embrace the feminine element she has so adamantly denied in herself. At the novel's close, this process has begun and Marya's mother takes up a position of prominence after being absent from the text, and completely silent since the beginning of the novel.

In her book *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, Marianne Hirsch outlines what she sees as the standard of maternal silence and maternal silencing within the conventions of literature, especially literature about or told by daughters. In her look at literature from the Victorian age to contemporary times, Hirsch finds that the mother is often absent either physically or
emotionally from the texts. For her, a standard literary convention is one in which "the heroine, like the hero, is an orphan, attempting to cut herself off from a constraining past, to invent a new story, her own story, and eager to avoid the typically devastating fate of her mother" (46). In order to accomplish this separation, the female heroine must disidentify from other women and their fates, especially from her mother, and develop an intense identification with what she perceives as the more powerful father. Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* also argues that "the woman who feels 'unmothered' may seek mothers all her life—may even seek them in men" (*Of Woman Born*, 245). This strong need for women to reinvent themselves in an image they find distinctly different from their mothers', while struggling for survival in patriarchy, is illustrated by Joyce Carol Oates through Marya's struggle for self-definition.

In the beginning of the novel, Oates introduces us to Marya through her relationship with her mother. For Marya, the mother/daughter relationship is one which is charged with fear and loathing. Marya's mother is described to the reader as being unclean, smelly, and unkempt. Her hair is usually stringy and matted, her breath sour, and she is often drunk to the point of incapacitation. She is quick to judge and punish, alternating between physically and emotionally abusive behavior toward her children and intense, passionate love for them. Marya's responses to her mother are driven by fear and futile attempts to keep familial peace, i.e. to ensure her personal safety. Marya often has her mother's maternal duties thrust upon her during her mother's depressive or drunken episodes, and she is forced to take care of and feed her siblings.

However, in spite of this negative narrative portrayal, it is obvious that Marya's mother, Vera Sanjek Knauer, feels a strong connection and affinity towards Marya, her only daughter. The reader is told they share a physical resemblance which only increases as Marya grows older. And later, her relatives also comment that Marya shares some personality characteristics with her mother. Often asserting that there is no difference between them, that
Marya's fate and her own are inextricably tied together by the mother/daughter bond, Vera demands that Marya acknowledge this connection: "Don't you love me? Why don't you love me?" her mother would ask, staring her directly in the eye, shaking her. "You do love me—you're just the same as me—I know you!" (8). During Marya's childhood, Vera would vacillate between demanding extreme physical closeness with Marya to symbolize their connection, and denying her affection and tenderness by cruelly severing the mother/daughter bond with isolation or abuse. Vera further articulates her belief in their entangled identities, and insists that Marya be allowed to view her father's dead and disfigured body in the morgue because: "'She goes with me.' She said. 'Her name is Marya but she's the same as me—she knows everything I know'" (12).

The repulsion Marya feels even as a child towards her abusive mother is only exacerbated by her mother's behavior after her father's death when Vera becomes increasingly abusive towards the children. An emotionally unstable woman to begin with and unable to cope with raising three children, Vera deteriorates further, becoming a drunken prostitute. After a few months, she runs away, abandoning her children, who are found by the county officials three or four days later. It is this abandonment that Marya remembers all of her life. Her mother's abandonment is what fuels Marya's intense hatred for her, as well as Marya's compulsion to deny any affinity with or connection to her mother. The socio-political position of women in society also serves to further enhance Marya's negative feelings towards her mother and solidify her desire to become "different," more "masculine," so as to escape her mother's fate.

Like the heroine in Hirsch's plot convention, Marya effectively becomes an orphan and begins the desperate search for nurturing or maternal substitutes while continually emphasizing her difference from her mother. However, if we use Hirsch's vision of the maternal, Marya's abandonment serves another literary purpose. For Hirsch, mothers are
incapable of holding a subject position in relation to others because the prescribed role of "mother" is so constricted by and entrapped within patriarchal society. Therefore, the daughter must consciously and subconsciously distance and disidentify herself from her mother. The mother must be removed from the story so the daughter can attempt to create her own story, one separate from that of her mother. Marya's intense matrophobia, her intense fear of becoming her mother, drives and motivates her attempt to find definition in strong, powerful men who will protect her from her mother's declarations of "sameness," and set her apart from other women by declaring her "special." As Adrienne Rich explains, it is
easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her. But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one's guard one will identify with her completely. (Of Woman Born, 237)

This is demonstrated by Marya's attempts to deny her mother's very existence (to the point of lying and saying she's dead) in order to avoid becoming her or being forced to identify with her. Thus, Marya's life and, according to Hirsch, the daughter's desire are

e fueled by either a longing to experience symbiotic union with the mother (by identification with her) or by a struggle against an identification which still reveals a profound and continued closeness. The context of plot is not a process of successive distancing but, rather, is a struggle with a bond that is powerful and painful, that threatens engulfment and self-loss even while it offers the very basis of self-consciousness. (133)

Therefore, it is important for us to revisit the novel and look at Marya's attempted relationships with women in order to understand how she comes to reject the sadomasochistic polarity which dominates most of her life in order to begin the search for a fully integrated self positioned within, rather than outside, a community of women.

Marya's first attempt at creating a maternal substitute is with her Aunt Wilma, the woman who assumed maternal duties after Vera's abandonment of Marya and her brothers.
However, this relationship is as fraught with tension as the one Marya had with her mother. Wilma also fluctuates between kindness and cruelty and enforces the erratic, often arbitrary rules of her house with an iron first, sometimes bordering on emotional abuse: "Wilma would say, 'that depends,' in a mysterious voice, not meeting Marya's eye. She was the boss of the household, after all— . . . which meant she could give out favors or withhold them according to whim" (19). While growing up, Marya struggles with the need to feel connected to Wilma as a mother and realizing that that bond will not exist between them because Wilma is not Marya's mother. They are only related because of her marriage to Marya's dead father's brother. They're not really "kin," as Wilma tells a friend, crushing the young Marya. Marya has only been taken in out of charity because there was nowhere else for Marya and her brothers to go. She is not Wilma's daughter. At the same time however, Marya also often feels Wilma's begrudging approval for her intelligence, spunk, and attitude, so she continually strives to receive more, only giving up in adolescence when she switches to a search for male approval. Because of this roller-coaster relationship, Marya often feels tremendous anger towards Wilma:

I hate you thought Marya, her face caught in a frozen little half smile. I wish you were dead.

But no: Marya wished Alice [her cousin] was dead. So that she could be Wilma's daughter and wear Alice's clothes, sleep in Alice's bed, sharing it with no one. (20)

Marya's initial desire is to replace Alice in her Aunt's affections and assume Alice's place in the household. Since she is denied a nuclear family of her own, she wishes to seize it from someone else. This begins the competitiveness Marya feels towards other women in general, but women in her peer group especially. She must disidentify with other women in order to draw attention to herself, to separate herself from what she sees as their boring and mundane
lives, thus winning male approval for being unlike other "girls," and later, other "women."

This begins the dehabilitating process Adrienne Rich describes as becoming "special:"

> The great loss the "special" woman suffers is her separation from other women, and thus from herself. As soon as she is lulled by that blandishment about being "different," more intelligent, more beautiful, more human, more committed to rational thinking, more humorous, more able to "write like a man," a true daughter of the father-principle, she loses touch with her own innate strength. Underlying the "successful" antifeminist woman's thoughts is surely the illusion that "if I can be a special woman, I can be free"—even though this freedom requires a masculine approach to social dynamics, to competition with others, to the very existence of other human beings and their needs (which are seen as threatening). (On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, 82)

In undergraduate school, all of the girls in Marya's dorm are competing for the position and definition of "special." All of the girls are seeking masculine approval under the guise of achieving academic success. Marya lives in a residence hall floor with what the university community derogatorily calls "scholarship girls." In the residence hall the atmosphere is so competitive that none of the young women will assist each other academically or personally. Rather than form a community, the girls live isolated from one another as the rules of masculine competition prohibit any demonstration of weakness—like dependency or reliance on another. Marya holds the other women from the residence hall in contempt, viewing herself as superior to them because of her masculine defined "uniqueness." This competitive atmosphere leads one women to steal compulsively from the other women in the residence hall, and the pressure to succeed in a hostile environment ultimately leads to that same woman's nervous breakdown.

However, later the roles are reversed. Rather than having things stolen, Marya becomes the thief in her friendship with a young actress from a wealthy background. Imogene is beautiful, blonde, rich, engaged, popular, talented, and acceptably intelligent without seeming to try—a "femme fatale." She represents everything Marya wishes she could be, but not what she's decided she can be. Marya begins the relationship by constantly competing
with Imogene's other friends for her attention. Marya also uses her friendship with Imogene to compete with the women in her residence hall and uses the relationship as a status symbol on campus to highlight her uniqueness. At the same time, however, Marya resents Imogene's privilege and social ease, often hating her because of what she represents—Marya's hidden desires. Following a disastrous blind date, Imogene successfully humiliates Marya by spreading lies and vicious rumors about Marya's conduct. In retaliation, Marya confronts Imogene with the truth of her superficiality, and acting out her aggression, steals Imogene's favorite earrings. Throughout the novel, Marya consistently resorts to petty theft as a way to regain temporary power in conflict situations. However, this time, rather than hide her deed out of shame, she wears the earrings publicly like a badge of honor, and is able to drive Imogene over the edge until they have a physical confrontation in the middle of campus. These experiences further solidify Marya's negative attitude towards women and push her more towards the father. Using a masculine identification heavily based in competition to define herself, Marya is unable to receive any of the nurturing or companionship she is subconsciously seeking. By the time Marya reaches graduate school, she had resigned herself to being alone and friendless as a condition of achieving academic success.

Denied a supporting and nurturing environment by either friends or family, when given the opportunity, Marya attempts to regain both her father and mother through her affair with Maximilian Fein. Fein provides the encouragement, support, and motivation that Marya needs to push her to succeed, but he is incapable of actually nurturing or mothering Marya. Rather, he requires that she nurture him. Their relationship can only exist trapped in the gender and power polarities of the patriarchal father/daughter relationship, and according to Adrienne Rich, it cannot offer a true nurturing environment, only an illusion:

Like the father's favorite daughter in the patriarchal family, the promising woman student comes to identify with her male scholar-teacher more strongly than with her sisters. He may well be in a position to give her more, in terms
of influence, training, and emotional gratification... he confirms her suspicion that she is "exceptional." If she succeeds, it is partly that she has succeeded in pleasing him, winning his masculine interest and attention. The eroticism of the father-daughter relationship resonates here, and romance and flirtation are invisibly present even where there is no actual seduction. (On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, 139)

So, rather than Fein becoming a mothering figure for Marya, Marya becomes a daughter, then mother figure for Fein, reflecting both the initial power dynamics established by their sadomasochistic relationship and Marya's position of power at the relationship's end.

Marya's fictional or fantasized relationship with Fein's wife, Else, also goes through changes corresponding to the power shifts in Marya's relationship with her husband. Initially, Marya believes herself to be in intense competition with Else for Fein's love. She is repulsed by what Else represents, the traditional academic wife hovering in the background of her husband's life, and does not respect her or feel she is worthy of Fein and his greatness. At the same time however, Marya desperately wants the sense of family she feels has been denied during her life, so she fantasizes about usurping Else's position in the Fein household and becoming Fein's wife while Else is out of town: "What might it be, Marya dared to wonder, to live here by rights, to be Maximilian Fein's wife" (189)

Marya waits, Marya waits... for Fein to suggest that she move temporarily into the house with him; after all he isn't really equipped to live alone and unattended, wifeless. But Fein never brings up the subject... Still she consoles herself with fantasies of Maximilian Fein as her husband; her husband; for hasn't he made oblique references to... hasn't he indicated that one day they might... The summer ends and Else Fein returns, the house on Azazel drive is hers by rights. (211-214)

She believes she has seen Else's story and must disidentify herself from it also out of fear of repeating it. Marya does not want to be just a wife like Else; she wants more. She wants to be Fein's equal, his academic colleague, life partner, and his lover.

Once Marya begins taking on a nurturing role towards Fein and assumes the power in the relationship during Fein's illnesses, Marya's fantasies about Else begin to change. Now
Marya fantasizes about sitting in the kitchen and having tea with Else while they discuss the death of her daughter, Else's life, and their relationships with Fein. Marya's fantasy shifts from one in which Else is pushed out of her house, her position of wife lost to Marya, to one in which the two women are friends, sharing and engaging in dialog about what is important in their lives. Marya begins to wonder about Else personally, curious about her feelings, her happiness, her interests. Else becomes a person rather than an obstacle to be removed from Marya's way.

When Else arrives to pick Marya up after Fein's seizure, it is the first time the women have ever talked. Marya is so petrified by the contact with Else and Fein's possible death that she is speechless. She can not actually communicate any of her fantasies to Else, either positive or negative. Else expresses support and caring towards Marya, telling her that if anyone could get Fein out of his coma, it would be her. By reaching out for Marya's hands in the car, Else offers female companionship rather than female rivalry, a maternal influence rather than a masculine one:

Else Fein's sudden intimacy, even the pressure of her strong fingers, struck Marya as unsurprising, familiar, though the woman had never touched Marya before. Though the two of them had never been alone together before . . . She didn't even know their destination. She had not been told. She shut her eyes and made her secret wish; that their journey will never end. (231)

Marya finally receives the maternal nurturance she has been craving from her dying lover's wife, from a woman who should withhold it from her. Just this brief glimpse at this kind of female community causes Marya to wish that the journey would never end—that she could remain in the car with Else and not have to reenter the masculine world. However, that doesn't happen, and Marya inevitably falls back into her sadomasochistic behavior patterns, hoping to find the safety she so desires.
Throughout her life, Marya's thoughts periodically turn to her mother. At the height of her masculine identification, Marya thinks of her mother only rarely and always disparagingly. As a teenager, Marya wonders about the state of her mother's soul:

Marya wonders if her mother, if she's still living, is a practicing Catholic. If she goes to confession, prays to be forgiven. Vera Sanjek. Vera who cuddled her in a drunken embrace, pretended to love her, told her so many lies. Vera who gave Joey [youngest brother] away. Falling-down-drunk and staggering-drunk. Stinking of vomit. "That bitch"— . . . (89)

During her relationship with Fein, he suggests that Marya begin searching for her mother. He says "She must try and locate her before too much more time had elapsed" (209). Marya is completely shocked at Fein's suggestion. She had told him about her mother expecting that he would agree that her mother was better left out of her life—that he would reassure her, that he would mother her. Marya's painful response to Fein as she tries to explain to him why she won't and can't look for her mother, demonstrates how important the "potential of a mother" actually is to Marya:

I don't want to hurt people who have been good to me, Marya whispered, when . . . when she abandoned me . . . my brothers and me . . . when she's worthless . . . she doesn't deserve . . . She's really nothing to me now. . . . He said, She's nothing to you now, really— . . . and Marya, blinking angry tears from her eyes, said Yes, yes, yes. Oh God yes. (209)

Later in her adulthood, Marya is again haunted by images of her mother and the maternal. Imogene reenters Marya's life during Marya's relationship with Eric and attempts to reestablish a friendship with Marya. However, Imogene now is a divorced mother with two young children, a new lover, and a steady job on a soap opera. Imogene is no longer simply the femme fatale Marya secretly wished to be as an undergraduate; now Imogene is the embodiment of maternal satisfaction and pride, forcing Marya to again confront the lack of a family structure or support network in her life. Imogene has a family, is in love, and has a career.
When pondering her relationship with Eric Nichols during her writing retreat, Marya found her thoughts continually turning back to her mother's life, wondering where she was and what she was doing. While reevaluating her relationship with Eric by admitting her newly recognized need for a family, public recognition, and legal legitimacy as Eric's wife rather than simply his lover, Marya's subconscious refocuses her back to her mother and her original family: "Even before Eric's death, even before Marya had experimented carelessly with the idea of giving him up—of renouncing, rejecting, triumphing over him—she found herself thinking frequently about her mother" (292). However, this Marya, rather than thinking or imagining out of anger, finds herself haunted by an image of a mentally incapacitated mother kept in an insane asylum, a mother in prison, or a mother who is dead. The images Marya creates for her mother are understandable if not predictable because, as Hirsch states, society does not legitimize maternal anger, and as a result, mothers become incapable of truly giving or receiving love. "The active rebellious woman cannot be a mother; the mother can be neither angry or rebellious" (38). Only a woman fitting Marya's fears would have abandoned her, and Marya's image of her mother is that of a woman who has been paralyzed by her female/maternal anger and then, as a result of it, institutionalized as socially deviant.

These images serve a censoring function and allow Marya to continue attempting to ignore her own building anger towards Eric and the masculine world of fathers. The fear of owning her own anger, and ultimately becoming like her mother, gives Marya motivation to further postpone any attempt to find her mother. Marya herself says in regards to these haunting images: "She only thought of her mother (even the expression 'mother' was forced) in weak moods when she clearly wasn't herself. These days, Marya thought, she often wasn't herself. The very question of self intrigued her" (293).

Marya becomes increasingly obsessed with the concept of self, who she is and what that means in the context of her life. As she probes these feelings, she wonders about her
mother more often: "Marya had not thought of her mother in years, or so she believed. Now
for no reason, for no logical reason, she thought of her constantly." (299). Marya finally
comes to the conclusion that she should attempt to find out whatever she can about her
mother. She discovers in talking to other adopted (or as she views it, abandoned) children
that, as adults, they often become obsessed with finding their mothers after reaching middle
age or after starting their own families. She begins to wonder if finding her mother will be the
catalyst that moves her life forward after Eric's death. While her friends are encouraging,
Marya still harbors great anxiety about what contact with her mother will bring: "You must
have faith that it's worth pursuing—the 'lost' mother, any mother at all—because it will change
your life more than you can calculate. 'Yes,' said Marya. 'That's the point'" (298).

Marya's life had disintegrated dramatically since Eric's death caused the removal of the
sadomasochistic shield. After Eric's death, Marya began having sensations that something was
growing inside her womb. Even though she knew she was not pregnant and intellectually
understood the phenomena of hysterical pregnancies, she still

fancied that something was taking shape in her womb, in that innermost, most
secret part of her body, in which nothing had ever lodged, let alone grown. At
first it was the size of a melon seed. Then the size of a currant. Then the size
of a grape, a plum . . . Marya knew that the tight elasticity of her womb was
inviolate but if she made the conscious effort . . . she could sometimes summon
forth the thing's shape, envision (as she embodied?) its shadowy contours.
(274-276)

Eric's loss and the denial of the opportunity to confront him with her desire for their
relationship to grow into a "family," coupled with her contact with Imogene and her children,
are possible explanations for Marya's fantasy. However, this maternal fantasy could also be
explained as Marya's subconscious attempt to attack the images which the haunting phrase
"death from without, death from within" elicited in her. By creating a fictional life within
herself, she would therefore be able to defeat her own "death within" which has been caused
by her sadomasochistic relationships. The image of pregnancy is also relevant to Marya's changing views of her mother because, as she contemplates the maternal in herself, confronting her own internal and embodied demons, she is forced to examine her views of motherhood, and ultimately her views about her mother. All of these factors contribute to Marya beginning her quest for her mother.

Once Marya has decided to begin looking for traces of her mother, she begins to reevaluate her relationships with the other women who have figured in her life. She begins to look at Wilma differently during a trip home, and she consciously attempts to cultivate a new relationship with her based on respect. Her views of her Aunt and Uncle, her brothers, and her cousins—the family Marya does have—begin to alter. At the same time, Marya is able to acknowledge that Wilma, while she stood in her mother's place, still wasn't and couldn't be her mother. Marya also begins to revisit her past and reflect with regret on the lack of female community which has marked her life. She wonders about how undergraduate school would have been different had she and the other girls developed a sense of community rather than living in the isolation driven by competition, and she regrets not really knowing her brothers and cousins or their families. During her stay, Marya decides that "she did belong here, as much as she belonged anywhere" (304), and seems to be making peace with both herself and her past.

This act of reclaiming the past is necessary for the personal growth Marya desires and, according to Herman, the abuse victim must reintegrate all that she has abandoned or ignored in order to form a whole, coherent self and leave the trauma of childhood sexual abuse behind her. Gilbert and Gubar agree, asserting that "to forget the past is to ignore a matriarchal heritage that would enable the heroine [e.g., Marya] to find her own 'distinctly female power'" (44). For Hirsch, daughters who continually deny their mother's stories will not make progress and are, in some senses, doomed to repeat them. It is only as the daughters begin to
see their mothers as like themselves that the question or activity becomes rewriting the past, reframing the stories, and refusing to repeat them by acknowledging the importance of maternal identification.

The construction of the novel *Marya, A Life* lends itself to a reading in which Marya's definition of herself must ultimately be repositioned from the male-defined Marya who occupies the majority of the text to a self-defined Marya who is beginning to integrate feminine elements which will radically change her life. Oates begins the novel with Marya's relationships with women—her mother, her Aunt Wilma, and her cousin Alice. Oates then spends the majority of the novel focusing on Marya's masochistic relationships with men, giving those relationships what seems to be primacy in the text, as they are only interrupted briefly by descriptions of the very competitive female relationships Marya has with her undergraduate dorm mates and her friend Imogene. The end of the novel, however, spirals the reader back to the women in Marya's life as she revisits her previous relationships with these women and reevaluates their importance. The novel then culminates with a letter and photograph from her mother, the first communication in over thirty years and one which will "cut her life in two" (310). Marya will be radically altered from the experience of finding her mother and the reader is lead to believe that she will now be able to begin exploring her connection to her mother and its potential to heal the severance and separateness of masculine and feminine in her psyche. Adrienne Rich describes feminine enlightenment and the completion of the mother quest as: "The search for the father leads to reunion with the mother . . . She has worked her way back beyond patriarchy . . . she has had her illumination: she has seen her mother" (*Of Woman Born*, 245).

The structure of the novel's plot also mirrors the masculine/feminine split Oates develops in Marya's character and is symbolized in the phrase "Death from without, death from within" (273, 274, 276) that haunts Marya after Eric's death. Upon first reading, one is
apt to initially dismiss Marya's relationships with women, but after completing the novel, one is compelled to return to those relationships as the very core of what the novelist was attempting to demonstrate—that devaluing and denying the maternal, the feminine in oneself, inevitably leads to what Oates would consider one's personal spiritual death. Thus, the novel demonstrates that one must admit his or her connection to and need for others in order to fully experience life.

In an article from (Woman) Writer entitled "Beginnings," Oates said that she envisioned the narrative voice in the novel, not as a child maturing through her life experiences, but as the story of one woman's life told from the vantage point and perspective of adulthood, a perspective enlightened by the distance and time needed to assist her in reviewing her experiences and her relationships: "Marya Knauer, eight years old as the story opens but already in my imagination an adult woman—the thirty-six-year-old woman she would be when the novel ends" ((Woman) Writer, 20). Thus, Oates tells Marya's story using a narrative perspective which references the past rather than one which creates the illusion of immediacy in the reader's experience. This narrative strategy is perhaps an attempt by Oates to make processing the violence of the novel easier for readers.

Laura Tanner in her 1994 book Intimate Violence offers a reason Oates may have chosen to use a narrative technique designed to create distance between the reader and the violence in the novel. Tanner states that:

As violence becomes the subject of the reading process, the element of distanced observation that distinguishes the act of reading from its experiential counterpart assumes not only a formal but a substantive role. Because the dynamics of reading necessarily involve the reader's distance from the fictional content of the novel, the reader maintains a sense of coherence that counteracts the chaotic, fragmented experience of the victim of violence. Even when the reader's viewpoint is aligned with that of the victim, the reader perceives the act of violence from a perspective outside the text, a perspective mediated through the fictional frame that brackets the novel's violence. When that frame situates violence within aesthetic forms that lend it an artificial coherence, the
novel itself offers the reader a sense of control over the violence about which he or she reads. (37)

The reading model Tanner offers for negotiating violence within a text offers only two possible roles of identification for the reader: one with the victim of the violence or one with the perpetrator of the violence. For Tanner, readers either acquiesce to the violence like the victim or become involved in imaginatively creating the textual violence, therefore becoming the literary agent of violent action. However, when reading Marya, A Life, the reader is neither victim nor perpetrator, masochist nor sadist. Oates's uses a narrative strategy that shares similarities with Tanner's assertions about the viewing audience's strategy during Amnesty International television commercials. For Tanner, the commercial viewing strategy is designed to inspire the viewer to take action for the victims they encounter.

In an article which analyzes commercials by Amnesty International, Tanner states that these "commercials redefine the conventional limits of imagination to cite the disembodied status of the viewer as a source of empowerment rather than as a function of detachment and distance" (54). This process of using the disembodied state of the reader as an empowerment tool is what Oates invokes as the narrative strategy for Marya, A Life.

While the reader is positioned to identify with Marya, the victim in the novel, Oates's narrative technique allowed me as a reader to take the process of identification one step further by translating the novel's narrative voice from third person to first person, from Marya/she to I. This process supplies the agency Marya's character has been lacking and inspired me to take action for Marya, to speak out about the violence she suffered on her behalf.

Through Oates's use of a descriptive narrative style, the reader slips more easily into a role similar to that of Tanner's commercial audience. And because of this process, readers become the ones who direct the scenes Oates creates inside their minds by using their imagination. Therefore, by using this process, the reader supplies Marya's lacking agency like
the commercial viewer supplies the victim's agency in the Amnesty Internationals ads. Thus, the reader becomes empowered through the process of becoming Marya's agency, fighting for her against the world of the text and speaking for her the "I" for which she is searching.

While using first person narration may have also caused the reader to take an empathizing position in relation to Marya, it may have heightened the violence of the novel, and thus the connection to Marya's experiences might serve as an alienating rather than inspiring force for the reader. The reader might choose to disidentify with Marya to avoid the pain of her story rather than embracing Marya's search for herself. Oates's use of third person provides the reader with an "out" or "escape" through critical distance from the inherent violence and exploitation of Marya's experiences.

Another possible reason for using the third person narration in the novel is the retrospective element inherent in Marya's self-reflexive narration. Most of the story is told in a descriptive rather than active form to reflect the descriptive nature of memory and to assist the reader in recreating Marya's experiences. To further emphasize this point, Oates uses very little actual dialog to tell the story, supporting the view that the story is based on the narrator's memory. In my experience, when recounting events that have already happened to others, an individual only includes dialog for a particular effect or to highlight and emphasize a point. This seems to also be true for Marya. The sections where other individuals are allowed to speak in their own voices illuminates their true personalities for the reader, thus exposing some of Marya's illusions. For example, Fein's explanation of the role of the masculine genius is attributed as a direct quote, presenting the reader with his patriarchal attitudes. However, Marya's thoughts immediately following the quote show how drastically different her initial interpretation of him is. Since Marya's story includes many snippets of dialog which are similar to the previous example, the reader is led to believe that upon later reflection, these incidents served a similar enlightening function for Marya; and with hindsight, she was able to
recognize their importance, hence their inclusion in the novel. It would seem that Marya is perhaps using this hindsight to both explain and expose her illusions to the reader illustrating her path to self-growth by being honest about the mistakes she has made.

This retrospective focus of the novel is further reinforced by Oates's use of a third person narrative style which occasionally exposes the reader to Marya's thoughts while referring to her and the other characters in the third person. Using third person to tell Marya's story also allows the reader to have a sense that he or she is objectively viewing, with accuracy, the true events and circumstances of Marya's life. What signals the reader that Marya is the narrative voice is that the reader is shown only her thoughts and no one else's, leaving the reader in a position to identify and sympathize with Marya and her struggles. Even the other characters in the novel are described in such a way as to reveal more about Marya and her behavior rather than to explain their own actions. Therefore, the reader is forced to interpret all the characters through Marya's eyes, descriptions, and memories. Thus, envisioning Marya as the narrative voice in the novel further enhances the necessity of repositioning her story. The content of the plot, the dynamic of the sadomasochistic relationship, the masculine/feminine split in the structure of the novel, and Oates's strategy of supplying narrative agency can all be viewed as Oates's attempt to illustrate a possible path for the resolution of female developmental conflict. Marya's search for self throughout the novel is reflected in the female development model advocated by psychologist Ellyn Kaschak.

In her book *Engendered Lives*, Ellyn Kaschak discusses difficulties involved in female development as the result of unresolved Antigone Complexes rather than as simply female versions of male oedipal fixations. She repositions psychoanalytic theory away from oedipal and pre-oedipal relationships by revisiting the myth of Oedipus through the perspective of his daughter Antigone. In rendering the roles of women visible within the Oedipus myth and
studying the archetypal good daughter, Kaschak hopes to render visible the cultural assumptions which govern the idea of the good daughter within modern patriarchy.

Kaschak defines the Antigone phase as one in which the daughter "learns that men are central and that her function is to please them. She learns her own limits . . . the daughter's Antigone complex is laced with rage at her mother for the betrayal of their relationship and of herself. As she is female and her mother's daughter, she learns to diminish and disdain herself. She turns away from and forgets her mother, dutiful to her father and brothers" (76). Kaschak states that the rebirth offered by identification with the father in the patriarchal society is based on the destruction and loss of the mother/daughter bond and ultimately culminates in women's loss of self.

Kaschak's stages of the Antigone complex strikingly mirror the plot structure of Oates's novel. Kaschak states that for women the first stage in the Antigone complex is one which has a strong desire for a real relationship with the mother, places an emphasis on being careful, nurturing, pleasing, and attractive, and often includes incidents of sexual molestation. Marya's feelings towards her own mother and later her Aunt Wilma, her behavior as a young girl, and her sexual molestation by Lee illustrate these aspects of stage one. Stage two includes the denial of birth and origins, the equation of pleasure and danger, the denial and hatred of her body, placing her identity secondary to the men in her life, using the male perspective to view the world, striving for safety and protection, and having fragmented physical and psychological experiences. Marya's teenage and adulthood years, her sadomasochistic use of male definition in relationships, and her denial of her family, the feminine, and the maternal are all symptoms of this second stage. For Kaschak and the third stage and the first steps towards a resolution of the Antigone complex begin when a woman separates from the father to return to herself, her mother, and female community. She chooses not repeat Antigone's pattern and therefore must face her own vulnerability, develop
her own identity as woman, reintegrate body and self, and begin to view the world through her own eyes. Kaschak believes it is only through the successful resolution of the Antigone complex that a woman will be able to grow and attempt to flourish in spite of the patriarchal institutions that surround her. This the very process of self-growth Marya is attempting through changing her female relationships and her search for her mother.

I see as the purpose of the novel the necessity of this reconnection to the mother, the female community, and the feminine in oneself. For most of the novel, Marya then serves as an example of Rich's "antifeminist woman." Marya demonstrates to the reader what can be lost by using a masculine competitive identity, while at the same time, offering the reader the possibility of recovering that loss by rediscovering female relationships at the end of the novel. For Oates, the independent fragmented self suffers from a lack of community that isolates and alienates. It is only through recognizing and embracing both masculine and feminine, integrating the self, and embracing our pasts that can we begin to live full, complete lives within a community, rather than hover on the outside of one, attempting to destroy it out of frustration and anger. Through Marya, Oates illustrates what Hirsch and Rich assert, that in order to be complete and whole, one must revisit and reclaim the maternal in our lives.

In "Beginnings," Oates comments on *Marya, a Life* and discusses her realization that she had inadvertently captured and fictionalized a moment from her own mother's life in writing the novel. She says of the coincidence that:

> Not my father, of course, but her father had been murdered; not I, but my mother had been "given away" after her father's death, to be brought up by relatives. Marya is eight years old at the time of the event that changes her family's life; my mother was an infant of six months. Somehow, without knowing what I did, without knowing, in fact, that I was doing anything extraordinary at all, I had written my mother's story by way of a work of prose fiction I had "invented." ((Woman) Writer, 21).
In sharing this anecdote, Oates further positions the novel as an examination of female relationships on a multiple levels. In the novel, Marya reevaluates her relationships with women, reclaims her mother's stories by becoming willing to listen, and begins the process of reintegrating the feminine and masculine in her psyche by moving away from her sadomasochistic behavior. Thus the woman reader is compelled to look at her own life in the context of the masculine/feminine, sadomasochistic polarities of the novel's relationships and wonder what she has left behind. She may even possibly become inspired by Marya's story and begin her own "mother quest." Finally, the novel plot itself contains a recovered story of Oates's own mother. Oates claims and shares her own mother's story, perhaps beginning her own attempt to change in herself the polarities she so often writes about. For me, the conclusion of this novel said if it's not too late for Marya, it's not too late for me.
PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Joyce Carol Oates says in the original preface to *Marya, A Life* that "of all my novels, *Marya* is the only one I could not approach head-on. I had to write it in self-contained sections, each dealing with a specific phase of Marya's life, and after finishing each of these sections I was determined not to write another—the tension was too great" ([*Woman*](#) *Writer*, 377). Oates's description of the difficulty she faced writing her novel mirrors the constant struggle I had with myself while reading it. I also had to proceed by moving through the novel a chapter at a time. But, sometimes I wasn't even able to do that. Two of the chapters in particular caused such strong, involuntary reactions that I had to put the novel down. The memories Oates's images brought back were too discomforting. The questions they raised were too unsettling, yet too pressing to be ignored. However, rather than abandon the novel for resurrecting what I believed to be abuse issues long resolved or for forcing me to view behaviors I didn't want to recognize in myself, I was inexplicably pulled back to the story. Once the initial anxiety passed, I had to know what came next, and would begin reading again. How would Marya react? Would she react as I did or was it that I had reacted like Marya? Whenever I wanted to reject and disidentify with Marya, I consciously recognized those as the times where Marya's experiences were speaking most strongly to me. In those cases, we were the most alike, as I shall explain.

In the novel's preface, Oates gives as one of the reasons the novel was so difficult for her to write was its autobiographical content—the ways in which her experiences intersect with those of Marya. She tells the reader: "*Marya* was an extremely difficult novel to write, perhaps because it is both 'personal' and 'fictional.' Many of Marya's thoughts and impressions parallel my own at her approximate age but the circumstances that provoke them have been altered, as have most of the characters ... what is most autobiographical about the novel is its inner kernel of emotion—Marya's half-consciousness and often despairing quest for her own
elusive self" ((Woman) Writer, 376-377). This is also true for me. While Marya and I have the same race and gender, share a similar class background and choice of career, and have both survived extended periods of abuse in our lives, our experiences are not exactly the same. It is her "inner kernel of emotion" and her search for herself that I identify with.

One of the things I struggled with in my thesis was this intense emotional connection I felt with Marya and her experiences. Whenever I tried to explain why the novel meant so much to me, people didn't seem to understand. I would describe Marya's story—walk them through the novel's plot—and they would respond: "But that hasn't happened to you." Occasionally someone would change the statement into a question, saying "But that hasn't happened to you, has it?" and look at me with new eyes, as if that particular commonalty would explain everything about me to them. Technically, however, they are right. Marya's experiences are not interchangeable with mine. I have never been abandoned or orphaned. My parents are alive, well, and still married. I was not sexually abused by my cousin. My childhood abuser was a sixteen-year-old man from down the street. None of my "friends" have ever attempted to gang rape me. My repeated rapist and batterer was an ex-boyfriend. I've never fallen "in love" with a priest or one of my professors. I've never traveled the world as a distinguished scholar and have never been invited to speak as an internationally recognizable political figure. I have only been a nameless, faceless delegate at similar conferences. But, my claim was never that we were identical, only similar in our emotional responses.

I never meant to assert that Marya's life was interchangeable with my own. There are no one-to-one correlations between my experiences and the ones Oates creates for Marya. There can't be. Besides, as Dorothy Allison states: "Each of us has our own bitterness, our own fear and that stubborn tenderness we are famous for. Each of us has our own stories and none of them are the same no matter how similar some of the details" (219). As an example
of one of the irresolvable conflicts between fiction and real life present in the novel, all most
all the men with whom Marya becomes sadomasochistically involved are tidily disposed of after
they have served their purposes in the novel and Marya's life. All the men she "loves"
conveniently die once Marya has absorbed enough of what they have to offer, and is ready to
move on. This has not happened to me or anyone else I know—not even to women who have
prayed for such an occurrence. It is purely a plot convention, a fictional convenience utilized
by Oates. The rest of us have to worry about being "friends," hurt feelings, or even worse,
being harassed or stalked.

While Marya's life is far from being pleasant and is, in fact, often tragic, it is fiction and
therefore is able to be illustrate Oates's points, reach a resolution, and make sense in only
three hundred and ten pages. Making sense out one's own life and reaching a sense of
resolution is not quite so easy. However, with the appropriate tools, like a good book, one
can make progress. In "Literature as Pleasure," Joyce Carol Oates describes what she believes
is one of the ways reading can change one's life. Oates asserts that "the most life-rendering
discoveries involve what has in fact never been thought, never given form, until another's
words embody them" ((Woman) Writer, 56). Her novel, Marya, A Life, has accomplished just
that for me. Oates has given form to thoughts I had previously refused to acknowledge and
exposed qualities that I may have unconsciously exhibited. Reading Marya's story has opened
my eyes to unknown parts of myself, while using Jean Kennard's bi-polar reading theory has
allowed that self-discovery to have focus. "Leaning into" Marya caused me to "lean into"
previously unexplored aspects of myself, probably ones I would have normally left buried, but
once those aspects of self were "embodied by another's words" and in another's life, I had a
safe distance from which to view them. Analyzing Marya's masochism in her relationships,
and recognizing it as a tool for furthering her recovery process, has enabled me to
acknowledge similar behaviors in myself.
I too have feared losing myself in a relationship while at the same time using relationships to find myself. My four and a half year relationship with my abuser, one built on violence, emotional, and physical abuse, and sustained by fear rather than love, will shape my life forever. Domestic violence, battering by a loved one out of "love" can not help but effect later relationships. Like Marya's relationship with Emmett, my abuser represented social mobility. His family was very wealthy. My female friends and I initially competed for his attention, and for the first time I had won. He chose me, not one of them, and "we" became a status symbol for me. Like Marya, I also viewed college as my only way out of the working class lifestyle I had grown up in since marrying my abuser was an option I wanted to avoid. Once there, college became a place to escape from my past. Somewhere where I could start over again, where no one knew about my abuse, where I could become whatever I wanted to be and remake myself in a new image. Like Marya, I was considered smart, but unlike her (and more like many abuse victims) I was always told I never worked up to my potential, and I still harbor fears that I don't belong or that I should never have gotten this far. I too stayed in my abusive relationship until it no longer served its purpose, and I learned I could make it without him or his family. In the process, I had changed too much to remain. My new independence had caused the relationship to disintegrate to such an extent that I was sure that if I remained, it would eventually result in my death or his premeditated murder.

However, as Herman asserted in her research, to leave I needed what I believed to be an omnipotent rescuer to replace the omnipotent abuser I wanted to leave behind. Having been involved in what Benjamin would describe as a sadomasochistic relationship where violence was used as a control mechanism rather than for sexual pleasure, it does not seem surprising that I would search for a substitute and attempt to maintain the polarity, but without the violence. Getting rid of the violence would take care of everything, or so I thought. Therefore, I found someone I thought was everything I wanted to be and, without
his knowledge or consent, endowed him with the honor of playing my new omnipotent other. I then used this next relationship to create a safe space to explore the self I wanted to create, a self which had no connection to the abuse. I had left all of that life behind and I had no intention of looking back.

To facilitate the growth of this new me, like Marya, I created a series of fictional selves, depending on the circumstances or circle of friends. I experimented with various roles trying to find out who I was or who I wanted to be, all while hiding the details of my previous experiences with abuse from people and denying its impact on my life. I was (and still am that's why this is so hard to write or still hard to talk about) afraid that if my friends knew, it would change how they felt about me. The new personas I created (modeled after my omnipotent other) were all strong, independent, active, politically involved and aware, and didn't take shit from anyone. Rather than focus on what had happened to me (that was the past and I wasn't going to get trapped there like other survivors I knew), I focused on what was happening to others locally, nationally, and internationally. For a while, I was able to channel my anger and pain into various fights for social justice. The frightened, insecure, dependent, abused, people pleaser remained hidden away and removed from public view. And for many years, she has remained, as a friend described it, angry and locked up in a gray room full of pictures and broken mirrors, only surfacing occasionally to retreat quickly out of embarrassment and shame. This "real" self is the skeleton in my closet. She is what I hide from the world. She is the one who found a kindred soul in Marya—another victim/survivor hiding behind her presentation.

My abuser always told me that this if I "told" anyone what was happening to me no one would believe me and no one would do anything about it. He was right. No one who knew did anything to help me. Most of "our," or more accurately his, friends encouraged me to stay in the relationship, not to leave. I was "good for him," the best thing that had ever
happened to him in fact. Unlike Marya, I told one person at my high school early on, a teacher. She believed me, but did nothing. My punishment for "telling" was to be choked until fingerprints were left on my throat. I violated the rules as stated by Marya's cousin and my abuser: "Don't you tell anybody, you know what's good for you" (23). After that, I learned to evade questions and to lie about the severity of the abuse. To this day, whenever I think about "telling" my throat constricts and sometimes while talking I start to cough or begin to lose my voice. I am sure it is because of this that I carry all my tension in my shoulders and neck as if I am still braced for the next blow—a blow that now never comes. I often wonder if feelings like this will ever disappear or if they will only remain hovering just under the surface. I wonder if, like Marya, I will cringe and jump at thirty whenever I see a young man who reminds me of my abuser, considering I still avoid places I think he might be and old friends who remind me of those days. I wonder if the nagging fear that he will come after me again, the nightmares, and occasional sensations of panic, will ever go away.

The evasion, the hiding, and the lying helped to isolate me from everyone, including my family. The shame was too great. They could never know what was happening to me. I effectively had no friends during high school. At that time, my only form of human interaction was with his friends, and only under his supervision. College gave me the opportunity to make my own friends, but the abusive relationship still required me to keep them at a distance. Because I couldn't "tell," I had no family or a community on which to rely on. Eventually I began to trust some of my new friends with limited knowledge about the abuse, but still I minimized it to avoid their questions and sympathy. After all, it was my fault. Or so I believed. At first, my new friends were almost all gay men. They were safe. They wouldn't be interested in dating me, so my abuser allowed them. Having my own friendships helped develop a sense of independence, and I began to believe, despite what he told me, that I was likable, or at least that my new personas were.
The continual hate crimes perpetrated against my friends in the gay community moved me to political action. I was able to get angry for them, to fight for their rights, while still not yet acknowledging I had any of my own. As I became more involved in their struggle, women in the gay community shared with me their own stories of abuse and I learned that I was not alone, and that I could get away if I was careful. They introduced me to feminism which told me that I was not someone's property and didn't deserve to be abused. I couldn't even tell these women because I believed they would lose respect for me— not resisting oppression was a sign of weakness. However, the intellectual tools and arguments they used opened my eyes, and by readily giving me access to feminist recovery books, I began to plot my escape. Slowly throughout that first year of college, my circle of friends began to expand as I got more involved on campus. I began to trust people more and allowed myself to begin to develop real friendships where a few people were allowed to see parts of my hidden self.

Eventually, I met the man who I would later endow with the omnipotence I had been searching for. He was one of the best known and most powerful of the campus leaders. Through his organizing he had helped to change the face of campus, and my friends talked about him with the utmost of respect, sometimes bordering on awe. While organizing together, I attracted his attention. He saw potential in me, and I developed a crush on him which would later border on worship. He was much older than I, a graduate student, and not only was he important, he was extremely intelligent, strong, sensitive, and caring. Once we began dating, I realized that I had to get out of my abusive relationship or lose him to someone else. In him, I had found someone who would give me all the space I needed to figure out who I was, and someone who could serve as a model for my ideal self. A couple months later, I left my abuser and planned on creating a whole new life.

Like Marya, I kept what I believed to be the positive qualities I had learned from my previous relationship. I now knew I was strong, resilient, articulate, intelligent, and that I was
capable of surviving almost anything; after all, I already had. The years went by and my new relationship blossomed from its initial power polarity into an equal partnership and marriage. I outgrew many of my old, abuse learned behaviors, and began to become my own person. Yet, no matter how hard I tried to ignore or bury it, I was still occasionally haunted by my abusive past, and I still kept that part of my life hidden, even from my husband. We never really discussed the details of my experience or some of the ways it still affected my behavior unless a problem arose, and then only in generalities. I had developed my personas into fine art form, almost completely separating the projected and hidden selves. Using one of the personas, I had even become able to discuss aspects of my abuse at public forums to try and educate others as to the complicated dynamics involved domestic abuse, but I never discussed my hidden self and the really important or relevant details that still haunted me.

Reading Marya's story has forced me to examine the possibility that I too used masochistic behavior to create a new self in my early relationship with my husband. Marya's relationships with Fein and Eric pulled into focus aspect of feelings I once had towards my husband. There was a time when I could not conceive of a life without him at the center or myself as separate from him and our relationship. Many of the things I have done, while they also gave me personal satisfaction, were always measured in comparison to his accomplishments or done with the hope of making him proud of me. Their value was often measured by the praise or criticism it would invoke from him. Even obtaining good grades was not something I did so much for myself, but in order to avoid his disappointment. Like Eric, he was never aware of the role I forced him into or how much our relationship has shaped who I am.

Since reading Marya's story, we have discussed the similarities I see between Marya's relationships with Fein and Eric and ours, and, for a while, we very strongly disagreed. He initially felt that asserting these commonalities denied my own accomplishments and diminished
significant contributions that I have made on various issues. He didn't feel I had followed in his footsteps or organized various social justice campaigns based on his approval rather than my own interests and desires. My contributions have mostly been the areas of violence against women and gay, lesbian, bisexual rights, while he has focused elsewhere. In some ways he was perhaps right. It may be easier to say these things about myself and my contributions because they were accomplished using a "fictional self" rather than an integrated personality. But, I don't see my or Marya's use of masochism as a recovery strategy as negative, nor do I believe that he or Eric intentionally participated in the power dynamics of these relationships. Marya and I did what we needed to, using the only tools we knew of at the time, in order to grow as individuals and discover that "elusive self." Marya is able to stop using sadomasochistic relationships as a shield, begin her mother quest, and explore her hidden, denied self, and I have used Marya's story and my research similarly to assist in my own process of self-discovery. By recognizing that I too have those tendencies, I can continue attempting to resolve them in my relationships and develop other coping strategies—ones that do not require dissolving or sacrificing myself in the process.

I still have a long way to go in the process of recovery, and I must continually struggle to allow my hidden self, the one I keep locked away in that gray room of broken mirrors, out into the open. I will never feel complete or whole until I can integrate my abused, private self with my public one. Perhaps this is the first step. Herman states that for one to progress through the stages of recovery one must first establish a safe space from which to venture out. All my current relationships have allowed me to do just that.

Herman suggests the next step in the recovery process is one of remembrance and mourning. As I have worked on my research, more and more memories have surfaced. This remembering process has not always been pleasant. However, the nightmares, while increasing in frequencies, have become less severe. They have changed from being hunted,
stalked, or killed by my abuser to ones in which we inadvertently or accidentally cross paths, and not being able to stand my discomfort any longer, I confront him about our past or his behavior. Since my abuse continued over a period of almost five years, I, like Marya, have trouble reconstructing the memories. Several incidents stand out because of their severity, but the others blur together.

In cases of extended exposure to trauma, Herman suggests that the survivor creates a memory that is a compilation of all the fragments and lets it serve as a symbolic representation. Herman states that in this context it is important to write out one's story as "it appears that the 'action of telling a story' in the safety of a protected relationship can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of the traumatic memory" (183). For Herman, the goal of reconstructing the trauma is that of integrating the traumatic memories back into the self. During this process, the trauma story becomes what she calls a testimonial—a story that links the private, confessional, and spiritual dimensions with the public, political, and judicial aspects of the survivor's life, facilitating the healing process.

Although I am not sure if I am ready yet to write down all of the details of my abuse, I think my thesis has been a start.

My thesis has also been more than just a step in my recovery process. Through working on it, both my husband and I have learned more about our relationship and our behaviors. By being able to recognize and admit these patterns we are now able to work towards fixing them. After reading my thesis in its entirety, he now understands, and agrees with much of what I've said. It has forced him to reevaluate some of his own behaviors as well. Now, we are no longer arguing. We are in the process of sharing. Writing my thesis has had a positive effect on his self-growth as well my own, and with time, or relationship will grow stronger as we learn to relate with each other without the pseudo-selves.
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