1995

Body image and the dynamics of eating in three adolescent girls in three Joyce Carol Oates novels: Angel of light, American appetites, and Wonderland

Maren Engebretson Larsen
*Iowa State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd)

Part of the *English Language and Literature Commons*

**Recommended Citation**

[https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/7924](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/7924)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Body image and the dynamics of eating
in three adolescent girls in three Joyce Carol Oates novels:
*Angel of Light, American Appetites*, and *Wonderland*

by

Maren Engebretson Larsen

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

MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
Major: English

Approved:

________________________________________
In Charge of Major Work

________________________________________
For the Major Department

________________________________________
For the Graduate College

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

1995
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Historical and Cultural Roots of Eating Disorders in Women</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Relationship to Food</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of Parental Relationships on Women's Eating</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Psychoanalytic Roots of Eating Disorders in Women</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirsten Halleck in <em>Angel of Light</em></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca McCullough in <em>American Appetites</em></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilda Pedersen in <em>Wonderland</em></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CONCLUSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## NOTES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOTES</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## WORKS CITED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## WORKS CONSULTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CONSULTED</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Joyce Carol Oates's title poem "Women whose Lives Are Food, Men Whose Lives Are Money" in her 1978 poetry collection sets forth the relationship between women and food. The following passage illustrates the role food plays in the lives of women:

Women whose lives are food
breaking eggs with care
scraping garbage from the plates
unpacking groceries hand over hand.
(Oates, Women Whose Lives 3)

Women prepare food, they dispose of it, and they buy it. Their daily routines center around it; they schedule their days around the times to prepare the meals and to clean up after the meals. In essence, food keeps women tied to their homes and to their kitchens, as Oates's poem states:

Where are the promised revelations?
Why have they been shown so many times?
Long-limbed children a thousand miles to the west
hitchhiking in spring, burnt bronze in summer
thumbs nagging
eyes pleading
Give us a ride, huh? Give us a ride?

and when they return nothing is changed
the linoleum looks older
the Hawaiian Chicken is new. (4)

The mother is not tanned "bronze" in the summer; she does not hitchhike and have adventures. Her newest adventure in her kitchen is the "Hawaiian Chicken."
The poem continues with the idea that women's work with food is an endless routine:
While her daughters (and sons) hitch rides in the sun of the West Coast, the mother remains in the kitchen. Kim Chernin states in *The Hungry Self*, "Food, after all, has defined female identity...through the domestic routine of daily means—that endless, tedious round of supermarket, refrigerator, table, and kitchen sink from which we are so legitimately eager to free ourselves" (197). Women, particularly mothers, are tied to the homes with food which limits their freedom. As daughters grow up in the home, they observe their mothers' roles with food, and learn that they will one day adopt these roles. Food-associated roles can tie mother and daughter together, but they can also lead the daughter to resent the roles and the mother for teaching them to her.

What are the issues surrounding women's, especially daughters', food-connected roles and eating in particular? In three of Joyce Carol Oates's novels, the issue of eating is prominent in the lives of three adolescent girls: Bianca McCullough in *American Appetites*, Kirsten Halleck in *Angel of Light*, and Hilda Pedersen in *Wonderland*. The ways these girls relate to food illuminates struggles for power and control in their relationships with both parents, and in the relationships of the parents themselves. By exploring their relationship to food, one can understand the ways eating disorders emerge in the lives of Kirsten, Bianca, and Hilda due to social, cultural, and familial influences. In order to understand the lives of these young women, it is necessary to look at the theoretical framework of eating disorders and body image.
CHAPTER ONE

The Historical and Cultural Roots of Eating Disorders in Women

Throughout Western history, there have been different social and cultural influences on women's eating. At certain points in this history, women were allowed to eat more and have fuller figures, unlike women of today. According to Pauline S. Powers, eating for women was acceptable in early Greek and Roman history (204, 205). However, throughout most of history, the rules for women's eating were that women should have small appetites and eat less than men. Women should also have thin and delicate bodies. According to Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "certain social and cultural systems, at different points in time, encourage or promote control of appetite in women for different reasons and purposes" (46).

Modern day anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders where women will not eat have roots in the fasting women of the Medieval period where fasting had a supernatural basis. Women fasted for the sake of purity, as demonstrated by such women as Catherine of Siena, who was a saint, and upheld spiritual and moral ideals through fasting (Gordon 121). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, physicians questioned the idea of fasting as a sign of supernatural intervention when fasting came to be regarded as a symptom of disease instead of as a miracle from God (Brumberg 50). In fact, sources date the discovery of anorexia nervosa to the late seventeenth century. Brumberg dates it as far back as 1694 when it was discovered by Richard Morton (44), but Spignesi and Sholevar state that the first encounter with this disease of fasting occurred as early as 1689 (Spignesi 7; Sholevar 31).
In the nineteenth century, the phenomenon of fasting young women, or "fasting girls" continued (Brumberg 61). The cultural systems in place in the Victorian period had an impact on the eating practices of women, particularly young women. For instance, a girl's intake of meat was regulated because it was thought that women's stomachs were delicate and could not digest meat as well as men's stomachs, and that women who ate meat were not perceived as feminine or decorous (177). There was also the attitude, in the Victorian period, that women should not be seen eating and should show self-restraint by controlling their appetites (178). Being thin, in the nineteenth century, was also "a sign of social status" for the Victorian woman because having a slender figure showed that a woman was "unfit for productive (or reproductive) work"; therefore her slenderness showed her "social distance from the working classes" (185). Interestingly enough, girls in the nineteenth century manipulated food to exert some control because most aspects of their lives were controlled by their parents. Brumberg states that "because food was a common resource in the middle [and upper class] household, it was available for manipulation" (188). When parents restricted the girls' lives, girls refused to eat to express their resentment of this control (138, 140). The seeds for modern day anorexia were sown during the nineteenth century because the culture and society of that time restricted women's eating, and women, to preserve a sense of control against familial and societal expectations, used food for manipulation.

Thinness continued to be an ideal for twentieth-century women. In the post-WWII period of affluence, anorexia increased (11). There was a cultural emphasis on slimness because of fashion (fashion designers predicated slender bodies), and health insurance companies tried to persuade Americans to lose weight because Americans were considered fat and "sedentary" (Seid 6). In the 1950s and 1960s, the
standard for women's bodies was set by "thin, almost emaciated models ... in fashion magazines" (Powers 208). M. G. Lord states that the Barbie doll, which was introduced in 1959, also played a role in the image of female bodies (4).

The fight for thinness continues to play a major part in our culture. The ideal weight for American women "has progressively decreased to that of the thinnest 5-10% of American women. Consequently, 90-95% of American women feel that they don't 'measure up'" (Seid 8). On T.V. and in magazines, one can find a potpourri of ads for products to make us thinner: exercise equipment like the Nordic Trak and Solo Flex, health clubs, lower fat foods, and diet products such as Slim Fast and Dexatrim. Roberta P. Seid sees our dieting and fitness obsession as the new "religion" in American culture (14). She states, "Although there is a long history of fasting for spiritual cleansing or purity, no religion has set it up as a virtue" as our new dieting and fitness "religion" has (14). Seid sums up her negative view of this new religion by saying, "Surely this is the worst form of hubris—to despise our bodies because they are not perfect" (15).

To live up to cultural expectations, then, women must continue to suppress their appetites and continue to feel frustration because they are forced to eat in secret and hide the fact that they like to eat. As Esther D. Rothblum states, "To be female in the United States is to be acutely aware of one's appearance" (54) and to restrict one's appetites. Since emphasis on a thin female body has been prominent throughout history, one can see why this emphasis still exists today. If one looks, for example, at the earlier Disney animated classic Snow White of 1937 and compares it to the later Beauty and the Beast of 1991, one can see how the preference for women's bodies has changed. Today, the tiny-waisted, full busted, sexy Barbie-like Beauty is preferred over the smaller-busted, rosy-cheeked, innocent looking Snow
White of the 1930s. Because the preferred body image is changing to smaller women's bodies, one can see how daughters of today and daughters like Kirsten, Bianca, and Hilda struggle with food. The attitudes towards eating and body image have been hard for women to live up to for centuries. These attitudes about women and eating have been passed down for centuries through cultural, social, and familial influences, particularly in mother-daughter relationships. According to M. G. Lord, "historically, through words and actions, mothers have interpreted and taught the looks and behaviors associated with 'femininity' to their daughters' which means different eating habits" (231). Lord continues,

Mothers frequently encourage their teenage daughters to eat differently, as a way of losing baby fat or clearing up their complexions. Thus food restraint "becomes the domain of the two females who may either cooperate or squabble over it." (231)

In this historical context, then, the stage is set for women's struggles with food today.

Women's Relationship to Food

Food imagery is all around us in our culture today. As Pauline S. Powers states, food imagery exists in common household expressions, such as "'apple of my eye'" to refer to a favorite person (a child), "'hot tomato'" to refer to a sexually attractive female, and the term "'fruitcake'" to refer to a person who is a bit crazy (216). When paging through a popular magazine, one can find a melange of beautifully pictured foods, arranged meticulously on expensive china. Almost every event involves the serving of food: cake at birthday parties or weddings, hot dogs at football games, and luncheons after funerals. Many business meetings occur over breakfast or lunch. Every American holiday is associated with food: pumpkin pie at
Thanksgiving, roast turkey at Christmas, jelly beans at Easter, candy on Valentine's Day, hors d'oeuvres with champagne on New Year's Eve, and popcorn balls on Halloween. Food is a large part of our lives, and a good part of our budgets goes to buying groceries and dining out. A good deal of time (for women) goes into selecting and preparing food for their families.

The kitchen is the place where women cook the food that they serve in their dining rooms, so women have power in their kitchens. In her article "The Woman Who Came To Dinner: Dining and Divining a Feminist 'Aesthetic,'" Eileen T. Bender states that "cooking, serving, and eating are vital signs of feminine experience . . . promising power" (319). Generally, the woman has power over her role as cook. She usually decides what to cook, when to cook the food, and how to cook the food. A woman knows her kitchen: she knows where every gadget, appliance, and serving dish are. She has it arranged to her needs, so anyone else entering her kitchen will be at a disadvantage. Margo Maine gives an example of a mother who used cooking as power. This mother "expressed anger with her [husband] by not cooking" (Maine 87). Women also show their power through cooking by using the food they cook for manipulation. For example, Glynnis McCullough in Joyce Carol Oates's *American Appetites* cooks her husband a lavish meal, complete with all his favorites. Glynnis cooks this meal to show Ian that she knows about his contact with an acquaintance of theirs, Sigrid Hunt, and suspects him of having an affair with her. The meal is served beautifully on a table set "with a table cloth, and candles burning. This was hardly Glynnis's practice when they dined alone" (Oates, *American Appetites* 83). Everything in the meal is perfect on the outside, but the salmon has bones and is too dry. Glynnis also forgets to serve lemon with the fish, so the meal is not perfect (84). Glynnis demonstrates power in
her cooking because even though she has cooked all of Ian's favorites, she has not cooked them well; however, Ian has to eat her food because that is what she has prepared and he is hungry, and if he does not eat Glynnis's meal, he will make her very angry. The following passage shows the tension and Glynnis's power in making the meal.

They were having salmon steaks, one of Ian's favorite meals, which both touched him and worried him. Yet he was hungry, and ate hungrily, with an appetite that surprised him. Glynnis ate slowly—indeed, with increasing slowness—until finally she laid her fork down and sipped wine, replenishing her glass before it was entirely empty. She stared at him contemplatively. . . . 

. . . She smiled and continued to stare at him. She did not appear angry so much as bemused. "How is the salmon? You haven't said a word. I'm afraid I grilled it a little too long. And there are bones, unfortunately. Watch out for the bones."

"The salmon is fine," Ian said, smiling. "My favorite—"

"Yes, I know. Watch out for the bones."

Indeed there were bones, a curving backbone of bones, sawnotched and cartilaginous. Ian picked them carefully out of the cooked flesh and off the tip of his tongue. The asparagus and small red potatoes Glynnis had prepared were overcooked; the salmon itself, dry as if baked, had rapidly cooled.

"It's delicious, actually."

"Is it." Glynnis's smile, stretching her lips, rapidly vanished when released. (83-4)

It seems Glynnis's purpose in cooking all of Ian's favorites is so that he will see all the work she has done and feel guilty for having betrayed such a wonderful wife by giving the young Sigrid one thousand dollars.

Women also use cooking to express their creativity and their love for others. Maine states, "Women . . . show their femininity and their desire for relationships through cooking" (68). Cooking allows women to develop their creativity by trying new variations on recipes and new combinations of foods on a menu. Mothers and wives prepare special dishes for their loved ones to show their appreciation and
love. For example, on birthdays, women make special meals for their families. The old saying, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach" has a basis in experience. Since women have power over their cooking in their kitchens, they can turn a hungry husband's bad day at work into a nice evening at home by cooking his favorite meal.

The kitchen is also the place where young girls learn from their mothers how to prepare food and serve it to men and gain a sense of power from this preparation. Bender states, "It is in the kitchen that the woman is tutored in 'patience and passivity'" ("The Woman Who Came to Dinner" 318). Kim Chernin in *The Hungry Self* further illustrates the idea of a daughter learning from her mother in the kitchen:

Identity was shaped at the kitchen stove and confirmed at the family table through those weighty culinary communications that transpired between mother and daughter: "The stove, the bins, the cupboards, I had learned forever, make an inviolable throne room. From them I ruled; temporarily I controlled. I felt powerful, and I loved that feeling." (112)

Daughters learn from their mothers that the role of cook has power. For a woman, then, power is tied to food. Food can also have a negative role, as illustrated in the passage from "Women Whose Lives are Food, Men Whose Lives are Money," where the woman maintains an endless repetition of buying the food, cooking it, then cleaning up after her family eats the food. Therefore, if girls perceive their mothers' discontent with her role of cooking, girls "may interpret this lack of pleasure as a forewarning of the central but sometimes negative role food will play in their lives" (Maine 67).

A daughter also watches as her mother's power in the kitchen dwindles in the dining room. The man sits at the head of the table in the dining room in the position
of power, but the woman does retain some power, especially in table etiquette. Bender states that the female hostess has a "particular power of custom embodied in table manners, and the special ability . . . to control the company and even to 'turn the tables' on her submissive and mannerly guests" ("The Woman Who Came to Dinner" 317). Bender goes on to state that eating in the dining room is "an act charged with potency, sensual, and often erotic [sic]. The cook, the hostess and the diner confront an occasion dreaded or desired, a time to exercise autonomous restraint or yield to subliminal urgency" (317). Often, the dining room is a stage for family conflict. In American Appetites, the climax of the novel occurs in the dining room where Ian and Glynnis fight, a fight that ends in Glynnis's death. In Wonderland, Dr. Pedersen drills his children during every meal at the dining room table on what they learned during the day, which makes eating tense and problematic.

In short, even though women have power with food in the kitchen, food becomes problematic for women in the dining room where they have to eat it. The conflict over food revolves around the longstanding social and cultural "rules" for women's eating. According to Ellyn Kaschak in Engendered Lives: A New Psychology of Women's Experience, "For women, eating becomes tied to appearance, self-control, and self-indulgence, nurturance, guilt and shame, not just to hunger or its satisfaction" (206). For example, Chernin cites an example of a woman who had powerful messages and memories evoked by an image of an orange. This piece of fruit reminded the woman of rules she had to adhere to as a child for how much she could eat and when she could eat (Chernin 142). The woman recalls "the way her mother reached out to slap her hand, grabbed her by the shoulders, shook her violently, exasperated by this persistent greed: 'Didn't I tell you to wait for dinner?
Didn't I tell you you have to share? Didn't I tell you not to stuff yourself like that?" (142). This woman's mother had accused her of being greedy if she ate food between meals. The girl states:

"I remember how stubborn I was. Would you believe it? I was that terrified of my mother. But every chance I got, I sneaked into the kitchen and stole the oranges. I didn't always get caught. Sometimes I got away with it." . . . "But I kept at it; she never beat me off from those oranges." (142)

The fact that the girl "sneaked" the oranges shows that she was trying to get around the rules of how much she could eat (no extra food between meals), when she could eat (only at mealtime), and that food should be treated as valuable and should be eaten sparingly. One would normally expect that oranges would be an acceptable snack because they contain vitamins and no fat. This mother obviously kept tight control of what her daughter ate because the daughter was "terrified" of being caught. Therefore, this girl had to eat the oranges elsewhere, outside of the kitchen and away from her mother, setting up the idea that eating is "bad" and involves fear, and that it should be done in secret.

Certain rules for eating apply to women and not to men. For instance, on dates women are generally discouraged from ordering a steak, perhaps because they do not look "feminine" when cutting a piece of flesh. Women tend to order salads, or something "light," to demonstrate that they are always watching their figures, which all women are supposed to do, are they not? And, women are not supposed to have second helpings. I was always discouraged, as an adolescent girl, to have seconds, even though I was very slim. (However, my brother was encouraged to help himself to more mashed potatoes and gravy.) Naomi Wolf states in her essay "Hunger,"

Women's portions testify to and reinforce their sense of social
inferiority. If women cannot eat the same food as men, they cannot experience equal status in the community... [and] as women, we do not feel entitled to enough food because we have been taught to go with less than we need since birth. (98)

The rules for women's eating apply to women's bodies in our culture: women cannot have too much (food or flesh). The tendency in our culture is to have women be either sexy or anorexic. Wolf states, "Our culture gives a young woman only two dreams in which to imagine her body, like a coin with two faces: one pornographic, the other anorexic; the first for nighttime, the second for day--the one supposedly for men and the other for other women (100). The "pornographic" body, the one used to please men sexually, must be sexy and therefore, by American society's standards, must be thin and curvaceous. In this "pornographic" body, the woman can have power. She can manipulate her body, by eating or not eating, to have the power to attract men. Margo Maine states that since men have the power in society, "women usually have to find it elsewhere--within the family or via their bodies" (110, emphasis mine). If a woman is not intelligent or assertive, she can make up for it by having a thin, sexy body. "Being thin represents a sure way to power for many women who are unsure of their abilities" (Maine 64).

The second dream for a woman's body is the anorexic, who rejects the feminine qualities of her body. The anorexic woman has been referred to as "genderless." Angelyn Spignesi states, "The anorexic is one who has stepped out of conventional gender" (15). An anorexic is neither male nor female; she possesses neither the feminine hips and breasts nor the masculine virility and musculature. Spignesi goes on to say that the anorexic "refuses to be bound by categories exclusively equating women with domestic hearth, receptivity and nurturance" (16). "What dies [in the anorexic] are the curves of a female body, the emotions of tenderness and warmth, as well as the fertility brought by the menstrual cycle" (10).
Therefore, the anorexic rejects qualities of the feminine body associated with giving birth, feeding, and nurturing a child. She starves herself to the point of stopping development of secondary sexual characteristics, such as the widening of the pelvis, enlarging breasts, the development of more fat, and the onset of menstruation (Clarke-Stewart, et al 371-2). An anorexic, in Spignesi's view, would avoid becoming "fat" or developing the fat that is a normal part of a woman's body. O. Wayne Wooley states that fat is a feminine quality (37). Wolf expands on this idea and states that "[fat] is the medium and regulator of female sexual characteristics. . . . Fat is sexual in women. . . . To ask women to become unnaturally thin is to ask them to relinquish their sexuality" (98, 99).

Issues of eating and body image in women are related to sexuality in that by eating or not eating, women have some control over the sexual aspects of their bodies. Some women may avoid a feminine body out of fear of sexuality, which relates to Spignesi's view of the anorexic's rejection of sexuality. Many anorexics wish to avoid or delay sex; they avoid developing into sexually mature women (Maine 97). An anorexic, then, is different from the woman who uses her body for power to attract men. The woman who wants to attract men may avoid eating, or she may eat but exercise more to achieve a body that will be noticeable and pleasing to men. There is a spectrum of women's body types from the feminine to the genderless. The body types at each end of the spectrum have their own power: the feminine "pornographic" body has the power to attract men, while the genderless "anorexic" body has the power to turn men away.

Because of the conflict women feel with food due to society's expectations of body image, the cultural rules for women's eating, and the negative perception of roles with food in the kitchen, it is common for women to avoid food or always
watch what they eat. Kaschak, who sees eating problems for women as a normal part of women's lives, states, "I cannot overemphasize that all the various manifestations of difficulties with eating are only an extreme or parody of the normal... I submit that the normal eating pattern for women is a dieting pattern" (195, 197). Below are two examples of typical women's eating patterns provided by Kaschak:

Susan keeps a list of every calorie she eats, and exercises every day. If she goes over her allotted calories, she is unhappy and berates herself. She immediately worries about how much weight she has gained from the one transgression, but never weighs herself. Susan, in her mid-thirties and a professor at a major university, is in many ways an extremely competent and effective woman.

Andrea has yet another strategy. She allows herself a different food each day, something she is really craving. To maintain control, she eats only that one food for that day. Sometimes she loses control and eats too much. Then she feels guilty. She also feels too fat unless she is about ten pounds below her ideal healthy weight. She feels that the extra weight, which settles in her hip and thigh areas, is like a burden that she carries around and is not really part of her. She hates it and wishes it would go away but often does not have the will power to deny herself food. (197-98)

The "strategies" these women have show their disordered relationship to food. The two scenarios illustrate guilt women feel after eating and the control they feel they need to have over food. Many women who claim that their eating is "normal" most likely experience the same feelings toward food as Susan and Andrea.

In *The Hungry Self*, Chernin sets forth seven characteristics of a disordered relationship to food: "(1) an intense and driven need for food; (2) a fear about the size of the appetite; (3) a dread of eating; (4) a sense of shame about the act of eating; (5) a conspicuous feeling of guilt; (6) a dread of the body growing fat; (7) a need to diet or purge and starve" (131). These characteristics apply to women who deprive
themselves of food and those who overeat. Many "normal" women fear growing fat and feel guilty after eating, for example, a hot fudge sundae. But in women with eating disorders, such as anorexics, bulimics, and compulsive eaters, these characteristics are extreme. A bulimic woman, for example, feels such extreme guilt after eating that she must purge herself of the food.

Young women with eating disorders are obsessed with food. According to Spignesi, the anorexic "dreams of food, speaks of food, eyes it, hoards it, works it" (27). As G. Pirooz Sholevar says in "Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia," anorexics cook food for their families, collect recipes, and think about food but "[refuse] to eat" (34). Some anorexics have been known to cook lavish, gourmet meals for their families but never take a bite of it themselves. Bulimics and compulsive eaters are also obsessed with food, and they actually eat the food, often in large quantities. The following passage from Richard A. Gordon's Anorexia and Bulimia: Anatomy of a Social Epidemic illustrates a bulimic's obsession and struggle with food:

It would start to build in the late morning. By noon I'd know I had to binge. I would go out... to the supermarket down the block, and buy a gallon, or maybe even two gallons of maple walnut ice cream and a couple of packages of fudge-brownie mix... On the way home, the urge to binge would get stronger and stronger. I could hardly drive my car because I couldn't think about anything but food. There was a doughnut shop that I passed on the way home. Almost always I'd stop the car, buy a dozen doughnuts and start munching on them even before I was walking out the door. On the way home I invariably finished all twelve doughnuts... I'd hurry up to the apartment with the urge for more bingeing growing stronger by the minute... I'd hastily mix up the brownie mix and get the brownies in the oven, usually managing to eat a fair amount of the mix myself as I was going along. Then, while they were still cooking, I ate the ice-cream. Only by constantly eating the ice-cream could I bear the delay until the brownies came out of the oven. (24-25)

While bulimics purge themselves of the food, compulsive eaters retain it, letting it sit like a rock in their stomachs.
For anorexics, bulimics and compulsive eaters, food serves the same purpose: to avoid dealing with deeper issues. Geneen Roth states in *When Food is Love*, "The obsession with food gives us a safe place into which we can place all our feelings of disappointment, rage, sorrow. As long as we are obsessed with food, we always have a concrete reason that explains our pain" (63). Women may eat to avoid dealing with problems in their families, such as their parents' unhappy marriages, or issues linked to incest. In Oates’s novels, eating is often an indicator of the pain some of her characters face. In the three novels *Angel of Light*, *American Appetites*, and *Wonderland*, the three adolescent girls use food as a way of expressing the pain they feel because of the tension in their families. Kirsten Halleck in *Angel of Light* has a strained relationship with her mother because she does not live up to her mother’s idea of the perfect daughter. She therefore punishes herself and her body by not eating. Kirsten also refuses to eat after her father's death. After her mother's death, Bianca McCullough in *American Appetites* cannot keep her food down because of the turmoil and guilt she feels. Hilda Pedersen in *Wonderland* eats large quantities of food to avoid having to think about the fact that she is not a good enough daughter for her father: she is not pretty enough or intelligent enough.

Women with eating disorders fear the size of their appetites. Some anorexics limit their food to a small amount, such as five carrot sticks per day. "Lettuce with mustard, half a bottle of lemonade and a lollipop, a tablespoon of ice cream, coleslaw and ketchup are recorded as typical feasts [for the anorexic]" (Spignesi 17). Roth gives an example of a woman who was so concerned with the amount she ate that she exercised excessively:

One thousand calories a day seemed like way too many to eat, so when I discovered that a calorie is really a kilocalorie, I multiplied everything I ate in a day by 100 and was disgusted by how much I was eating. I began eating smaller and smaller portions and finally
got down to less than 100 calories a day. I ran five miles, I worked out with weights, I took two aerobic classes daily. I'm 5'9" and I weighed 100 pounds. (63)

According to Deborah L. Tolman and Elizabeth Debold, today's young women experience a conflict between the desire to eat and the image of being thin (308). This conflict tells them not to eat too much, and if one eats too much she should feel guilty because she will not have the ideal body.

For women with eating disorders, eating involves shame and guilt, so they eat alone. Spignesi states, "[The anorexic] lives on tidbits smothered with spices or salts prepared for certain meals which she prefers to eat alone instead of with the family. . . . She eats in secret. She hides her food, eats alone, often standing up or moving" (17). Compulsive eaters and bulimics also eat by themselves, drawing from their stashes in closets, cars, and/or purses. Compulsive eaters and bulimics go out at all hours, especially at night, to buy food and eat it in the dark, behind closed doors, where no one will see them. Their guilt about eating is so great that they cannot bear to have anyone, even their closest family and friends, watch them. Sometimes women fear they will be criticized for eating, so they keep their eating a secret.

The guilt that eating disordered women feel after putting food into their bodies stems from the fear of growing fat. Roth states, "When I pictured myself thin, I never saw myself alone" (10). So, being thin means being beautiful, being loved, and being successful. The models in magazines look beautiful. They usually have handsome men with them, and they are smiling. They look wealthy. To a woman unsure about her body and herself, they "have it all." An anorexic taking a bite of a piece of bread, or a compulsive eater finishing the last spoonful of vanilla fudge ice
cream has lost this image of beauty. Roth gives another testimony of a woman with an eating disorder who feels guilty about her eating:

I awaken with an image of myself slashing each organ in my body to pieces. . . . I want to destroy myself. I want to eat until I die. The pain seems so deserving. It is the only way I am comfortable. Not sleeping, eating uncontrollably, driving myself to the edge, this feels right. I want to get in my car and go to Albertson's. 3 a.m. Bright lights. Eat ice cream. Be totally mad and fling myself into the ocean. Get rid of myself. I hate this creature that I am. (62-3)

Most women want their bodies to conform to the ideal weight, but for anorexics, bulimics, and compulsive eaters, the fear of their bodies not fitting the ideal is more intense and these women see food as their archenemy. Often compulsive eaters dread getting up in the morning because they will have to face another day battling with food and trying to resist eating constantly. They see every mouthful of food going to their hips and thighs.

The intense fear of gaining weight and the guilt after eating often lead to the purging of food by vomiting or use of laxatives. According to Spignesi, "If the anorexic indulges in binge eating, she becomes panicked at the thought of the particles of food remaining within her. Since she perceives this food as alive and harmful to her being, she prepares to purge herself by vomiting" (17). Later in her book, Spignesi states, "Vomiting and starvation are the disgust at [the anorexic's] desire" (63-4). The desire for which the woman is disgusted is her appetite and her desire for food, which may be symbolic of desires for other things such as friendship, love, and success. Vomiting is most often associated with bulimics. Since they are afraid of becoming fat, they feel guilty about having eaten so much food (Gordon 3). The vomiting, according to Spignesi, can even involve a ritual:

[Vomiting] necessitates a special lavatory and a particular induction method. . . . She must wait a certain number of minutes after the last portion of food is consumed: the food must be got rid of at all costs.
Her panic at not obtaining enough of a specific food for a binge or a private place for vomiting demands that all other activities be put aside until the ritual is completed. (17-18)

What Chernin does not mention in her list of characteristics of young women with eating disorders is the idea of control. Anorexics, particularly, are very control-conscious. They count their calories, and they keep track of exactly how many pieces of food they eat. When anorexics are in the early phase of the disease, they feel "secretly enslaved, dependent, and manipulated [by food]," but "as dieting turns into fasting, it begins to yield an exhilarating sense of power and independence" (Gordon 124). This "power" an anorexic feels to resist eating is her control. Vomiting also relates to control: women who vomit after eating are regulating what goes into and out of their bodies. Many women with eating disorders often have no control in their lives, so they turn to food as a means of control. According to Margo Maine, "Starving or bingeing and purging may be efforts to establish personal boundaries, to punish oneself . . . to express anger or to control one's life" (100-101, emphasis mine). Compulsive eaters often feel out of control in every aspect of their lives, as well as in their relationship with food. Roth states, "We live in fear of food, in fear of chocolate and sour cream and cinnamon rolls, while believing that if only we can get that part of us under control, everything else will fall into place" (37).

Sometimes in order to escape the chaos in their lives, compulsive eaters focus on food because it fills them up briefly, giving them a few minutes of peace before they have to face the real world of their problems again. For Hilda Pedersen in Wonderland, food allows her to feel in control of herself in the presence of her domineering father because she can focus only on the food instead of on his threatening presence.
Women often develop eating disorders during developmental crises. According to Sholevar, the peaks for the onset of anorexia are ages 14 and 18, and the ages when women are most susceptible to bulimia are between 15 and 30 years (32,33). Two points at which these diseases peak, age 14 for anorexia, and age 15 for bulimia, occur during adolescence, which is the developmental stage between childhood and adulthood. The peak for anorexia that occurs at age 18 is important because at 18, a woman is on the border of entering adulthood. Most eating disorders tend to begin in adolescence because during this time a girl is preparing herself for adulthood. Chernin, Spignesi and Maine all agree that eating disorders occur between phases of life—a passage from one developmental phase to another (Chemin 22; Spignesi 19; Maine 86). When women are about to pass from one developmental stage into the next, they face new challenges and expectations that they may not be ready to meet. Chernin says that eating disorders, which coincide "with an underlying developmental crisis," are "an extremely effective way to stop the movement into the world. . . . [They bring] development completely to an end" (21, 23). The three daughters in Angel of Light, American Appetites, and Wonderland are all adolescents. Kirsten Halleck is 17, Bianca McCullough is 19, and Hilda Pedersen is 13 (Angel of Light 9; American Appetites 7; Wonderland 93, 88). Therefore, these girls are all at the prime times in their lives for developing eating disorders because they are all preparing for adulthood, which is the time when girls will adopt their mothers' roles. Kirsten and Bianca are especially at risk because they are on the border of adulthood.

The fact that many women develop eating disorders during their college years (as Bianca McCullough does) is important. Today, women face more expectations when they enter college. Chernin states, "The epidemic of eating
disorders must be understood as a profound developmental crisis in a generation of women still deeply confused . . . about what it means to be a woman in the modern world" (17). Women today no longer have to stay in the home and raise a family, but they can have a career and a family. A question perhaps looming in a young woman's mind is, "Can I do it all?" This question may lead to self-doubt and fear, and this fear is what makes a young woman focus on food rather than on other issues, such as her future. In college, women are in the process of forming new identities separate from their parents, and they may be afraid to enter adulthood, which bring with it choices women have to make. These choices are hard for women who are unsure of their identities. Chernin goes on to say, "We are in conflict, and so far, as a generation, we have expressed this uncertainty about who we are and what we may become through the disturbing symptomatology of eating disorders" (25). Gordon states ,

In a period of such radical cultural transition, some young women are vulnerable to becoming caught in the uncertainties and ambiguities of a drastically altered set of expectations. Most female college students, even those who are not having difficulties with food or weight control, will quietly assert that they themselves feel vulnerable to the same problems experienced in acute form by those who develop eating disorders. (63)

The Impact of Parental Relationships on Women's Eating

Girls' relationships with their parents often affect their attitudes towards food, and the conflicts within these relationships may manifest themselves in an eating disorder. Mothers have a great impact on how their daughters perceive eating. In the passage about the girl with the oranges, the mother set the rules of when oranges could be eaten. My mother set the rule of no second helpings for her daughters. As girls grow up, they watch their mothers' reactions to food. Maine
states that often while the mother prepares a big meal for her family, she only eats a sparse meal of perhaps 300 calories or less, while the daughter watches, anticipating her future struggles with food in her future kitchen (69). In the daughter's future lie 300-calorie meals in comparison to the family's seven-course dinner. Mothers also "discourage their daughters' active play and experimentation with food" which gives a message that "girls should control their appetites and look neat, clean and tidy" (58). While girls control their behavior with food, boys are allowed to play and experiment with theirs (58). For girls, this control with food sets up an uncomfortable relationship with it. The message is that girls are not supposed to enjoy food and/or eating. Maine later states that "girls who grow up in an ambiance where women are in charge of meals and men have a smaller contribution, learn to assert themselves through food. Resentful of the role handed down to them to cook and care for others, they may express this by ignoring their own hunger and needs" (122).

In mother-daughter relationships where the daughter has an eating disorder, the problem of separation can reside with the daughter or the mother. Sometimes the daughter is afraid of breaking away from the mother, and sometimes the mother does not want the daughter to leave. "Most women use food, unconsciously, to remain trapped in the home and tied to the unresolved issues of mother/daughter negotiations" (Cherin 114). Chernin poses a theory as to why daughters use food to remain tied to their mothers. According to Chernin, today's young women have more opportunities in terms of careers than their mothers did; however, the daughters feel guilty about surpassing their mothers and having better lives than they did (60). In essence, the daughters' opportunities wound the mother, reminding her of a lack of opportunities. Chernin states:
In a generation where daughters are offered the opportunity to take their growth and development past that which was available to their mothers, we would expect daughters to feel the full force of that early childhood guilt about damaging the mother and deriving their growth and development at the expense of hers. If, as their mothers before them, they simply followed in their mothers' footsteps, they would give up the longing for their own development and sacrifice it for their children. (125)

Perlick and Silverstein say that "women who strive to achieve in areas traditionally dominated by men and who come to feel limited by being female may develop a syndrome involving disordered eating . . . particularly if their mothers were unable to achieve in these areas" (89). Spignesi sums up this problem well in her statement, "Food becomes loaded with the accumulated fires of mother's unfulfilled desires" (48). Chernin illustrates the idea of daughters' guilt by saying,

Underlying the symptomatology of an eating disorder--whether anorexia, bulimia, or the type of sustained unpurged compulsive eating that may lead to obesity-- is . . . a wish to bite and tear at the mother, to scoop and suck out her fluids, with the concomitant belief that one has really done this and has consequently damaged the mother, drained her, depleted her, and sucked her dry. (119-120)

So every bite an eating disordered woman takes is laden with guilt. The roots of this guilt lie in the fact that the mother sacrificed her life, her goals, and her identity to raise her daughter who could take advantage of things the mother could not. The daughter feels that because the mother had to raise her, the mother has given up part of herself and her self-development (124). The guilt the daughter feels pushes her to remain at home, tied to the mother to appease her guilt (60). An eating disorder will keep the daughter close to the mother, because the mother and daughter can care for each other. The mother can nurture the daughter and the daughter can sacrifice herself for her mother by not going further in her
development. In essence by sacrificing herself, according to Chernin, the daughter has paid her mother back for sacrificing herself for her daughter (66).

Sometimes mothers of young women with eating disorders have difficulty with separation. Spignesi, who takes a negative view of the mothers of anorexics, describes the mother of an anorexic as "a bitch" and as "domineering, demanding, frustrated, and ambitious" (39). The mother of the anorexic, who is "a woman of potential achievement" which was "sacrificed for the good of the family," does not like her daughter to be away from home (43). The mother may blame the daughter for her sacrifices and want the daughter to sacrifice herself just as her mother did. Spignesi states, "The anorexic is the mother's confidante and it is often the mother's physical disease or psychological breakdown which precipitates the 'renewed clinging closeness' and subsequent anorexia during which the daughter feels compelled to stay with the mother" (41). Often a mother-daughter relationship intensifies when the daughter is anorexic because "the mother's powerful identification with her daughter [is] a compensation for a disappointment in her relationship with her husband" (Gordon 57). The daughter is ill and "helpless" so the mother can direct all of her attention towards her daughter to avoid her problems with her husband. A mother in this type of family would want her daughter to remain with her to fulfill the mother's need for companionship.

While daughters tend to identify closely with the mother and may have a difficult time separating from her, sometimes they do not want to be like the mother and take on her roles within the family. According to Maine, girls may see mothers' care and nurturing as going unrewarded so "the burdens of femininity do not look attractive and the payoffs are few" (117). If a daughter sees a mature female body as representative of the roles of wife and mother, which may not be recognized or
respected, the daughter will avoid eating to avoid putting on the female curves, hips and breasts that characterize a mature female body. Deborah Perlick and Brett Silverstein say that women who see their mothers' lives as limited and the mothers' roles as limited often develop eating disorders to avoid growing into that role (80). In this context, then, a girl may become anorexic and bulimic.

The mother-daughter relationship can also influence a daughter's relationship towards food in that if the mother did not give the daughter enough love, the daughter uses food to replace her unfulfilled needs. Sometimes when a woman feels very empty or lonely inside, food can temporarily fill that void. Chernin states, "[W]hen certain needs, reminiscent of childhood, make themselves felt in adult life, they take a disguised form" such as "[r]age at the mother or at life in general" or in the form of problems with eating (119). Geneen Roth gives an example of a girl who ate because she was angry at her grandmother (who presumably raised her) for not loving her:

The second thing Trina did was sneak food from the kitchen and store it under her bed. Boxes and cans and bags of food. "My grandmother kept sweets in the dresser in her bedroom," she said, "underneath the bras with the wires in them. And whenever she watched TV, I would sneak into her room, put some of the candies under my shirt and hide them between the mattress and box spring of my bed. Sometimes," she said, "I would take cans of food from the kitchen and put them under there, too. In the middle of the night, when my grandmother was sleeping, I would turn on my night light, get out my can opener and eat. Eating, especially food that I had taken from my grandmother's drawer, made me feel like I was someone special." If Trina could not get her grandmother's love, she would steal her food. (21-22)

Instead of confronting her grandmother with her anger, this young woman turned her anger in on herself through a disordered relationship to food. Trina shows her anger through food by stealing it, hiding it, and then eating large amounts of it. This young lady will no doubt enter a cycle in which the more she eats the angrier at
herself she will become, which will make her want to eat more so she does not have to deal with her anger at her grandmother. If these needs are felt as an adult, the woman perhaps has not separated from the grandmother because she still feels rage.

Although there are many critics of the mother-daughter relationship as it relates to eating disorders, this relationship can be positive in the lives of eating disordered women, especially during their treatment. Judith Ruskay Rabinor discusses the mother-daughter relationship as a key component of the healing process for women with eating disorders. She says the mother-daughter relationship is damaged by "a mixture of dependence, resentment, envy, jealousy, and spitefulness" (Rabinor 274). The mother is often blamed for the daughters' problems with eating even when the father was abusive, because the mother was ignorant of the abuse or did not step in and help the daughter and shield her from the abuse (275). Other critics of the mother-daughter relationship in which a daughter has an eating disorder have blamed the mother because she herself was concerned about being thin (275).

Instead of blaming mothers, Rabinor suggests understanding mothers in the context of their culture and working to respect the institution of motherhood. Rabinor states:

As transmitters of the culture, mothers and fathers cannot avoid communicating the sexist patriarchal realities of female powerlessness to their children. . . . Blaming mothers for this obsession with slimness detracts attention from the negative impact of patriarchal culture on women. . . . Mothers who diet need to be understood in their cultural milieu, rather than admonished for exhibiting personal inadequacies. (275)

She later quotes Jean Baker Miller who said, "It is easier to blame mothers than to comprehend the entire system that has restricted women" (275). When the daughter is "at odds with her mother" she is "at odds with her body" because she and her
mother both share the same female body (276). In this state of conflict with the body, a daughter is "vulnerable to developing an eating disorder" (276). Rabinor suggests, then, that in treatment, the mother-daughter relationship not be abandoned, but it may need to undergo a serious change. The new mother-daughter relationship will be different than it was during the daughter's childhood (276). In therapy, a new respect for the mother-daughter relationship and for motherhood itself should be fostered (282). In this way, perhaps the daughter will not want to avoid becoming a woman like her mother, and will not want to starve herself to stave off approaching motherhood. "By identifying, expressing, and letting go of her anger at her mother, the eating-disordered woman breaks the chain of misery that might otherwise have bound her not only to her mother, but to her future daughters" (283). Also, if the mother-daughter relationship is strengthened, mothers may overcome their bitterness and share in their daughters' successes instead of being angry for lost opportunities. Rabinor states, "It is in the mother-child relationship that the self is born" (272). If the mother-daughter relationship becomes more positive, both the mother's and the daughter's "selves" can be reborn, and the daughter can receive the "positive qualities mothers pass on to [them]: love, care, and attachment" (282).

Ellyn Kaschak agrees that mothers are not alone in shaping their daughters' eating; she also implicates fathers. There are several ways in which fathers influence their daughters' eating. First, fathers directly limit their daughters' eating to help them be "attractive."

If the good mother doesn't do her job well enough, then the good father must enter in and let his daughter know how important it is that her appearance be pleasing and that her eating be directed toward this end. To succeed as a woman, she must learn to manipulate her
appearance, and food is an important tool toward that end. (Kaschak 205)

I knew a young woman who had been battling with compulsive eating and whose mother had constantly told her as a child, "You can eat only three cookies a day or you'll get fat," thereby restricting the girl's intake to ensure that she had a slim figure. When this young woman was 23 and about to get married, she had gained a few pounds. She was not obese, but not "stick thin" as she used to be. On her wedding day, her father told her she was heavy. By implication, the mother was not doing her job in forcing the girl to keep up the image of the "twig-bride," so the father stepped in to give his opinion, and basically told his daughter that she did not fit the image of the thin, virtuous bride.

Most fathers of women with eating disorders are men who expect a great deal of their daughters, so daughters diet to please them. Perlick and Silverstein cite examples of eating-disordered daughters of famous, "high-achieving" men (87). For example, Margot Einstein, the stepdaughter of Albert Einstein, "had an illness throughout her life" and was "'excessively slim'" and "'frail'" while Charles Darwin's daughter, Henrietta, was also described as being ill and "'frail'" (Perlick and Silverstein 87). "At adolescence, Queen Elizabeth I suffered a 'breakdown of the nervous system,' lost her appetite, refused to eat, and lost much weight" (87). Perhaps these daughters did not feel that they were good enough for their high-achieving fathers, so they tried to please them in their appearances. In essence, daughters feel that they need to please their fathers "in whatever ways [they deem] appropriate" (Kaschak 196) which may mean having thinner bodies and/or having dainty appetites--appropriate "women's appetites."

Dieting to please the father occurs in situations where the father is distant or unavailable and a daughter may even starve herself just to get his attention. Margo
Maine discusses how a disordered relationship to food may develop from a daughter's lack of love, support, or attention from her father. She defines "father hunger" as the "unfulfilled longing for father, which for girls and women, often translates into conflicts about food and weight" (Maine 3). Maine argues that girls need attention from fathers as they are going into adolescence, so they feel that they are attractive and acceptable to men in general (3). If girls are not accepted in this way by their fathers, they experience emotional distress, which the girls show by "withdrawing from social contact, by being promiscuous, or by the self-loathing and rejection of self that is expressed through an eating disorder" (23). If the father remains distant from the daughter, the daughter may experience problems with food and may "manipulate [her] eating and weight to deal with [her] uncertainty about [her] ability to succeed or survive in the masculine system outside the home" (57).

Daughters' eating disorders also develop as a result of daughters punishing themselves because they feel they are not good enough for their fathers. Maine states that if a daughter is "convinced that she is unworthy of [her father's] attention, she may punish herself by not eating, overeating, purging, or over exercising" (74). Her hunger for her father's love and attention may cause the girl to transfer that pain onto a disordered relationship with food. The daughter may be thinking, "If only I were thinner, maybe he would love me." If they cannot control how their father feels about them, daughters can control food (82). The scenario with the woman who was told by her father on her wedding day that she was overweight reveals a distant, troubled relationship between this father and daughter. The father did not realize that this was the most important day in his daughter's life, and the daughter more than likely knew that she did not fit the image of the ideal bride. This
daughter no doubt felt that she was never good enough for her father, and, as a result, became a compulsive eater in college and in graduate school. Sometimes, according to Maine, a girl will diet to look masculine because she feels that the father would have preferred a son, and she, as a daughter, is not a good enough replacement (76). Therefore, her dieting may prevent the development of feminine sexual characteristics, such as breasts, hips, and the onset of menstruation, making her body more "masculine" or even "genderless."

The Psychoanalytic Roots of Eating Disorders in Women

The roots of women's eating disorders that result from conflicts in the family, particularly with the parents, can be understood through psychoanalytic theory. Ellyn Kaschak discusses how women fit into the oedipal model, but repudiates this model with the Antigone model, which allows women to define themselves and move beyond and separate from their fathers. Kaschak also discusses the role of eating and disordered eating in these psychoanalytic models, which is why her view is particularly relevant. In her discussion of the oedipal model, Kaschak says that the daughter is an extension of her father and that her role is that of caregiver to the father (61-2). In "the oedipal phase," which lasts from mid-childhood through adulthood, the male "experiences [himself] as superior to females" (73). The oedipal man expects the caretaking role of females because he has learned this from his father (62). So, as he grows up, the oedipal man transfers this need for and expectation of caretaking from the mother-figure to his wife (and later to his daughters) (62). Also, according to Kaschak, in the oedipal model, "daughters exist to meet . . . (the fathers') needs. It is the right of the fathers to train their daughters to please them in all ways" (62). Interestingly, in the oedipal model, "a mother's
relationship with her daughter often centers on caring for men or children" (64). In a typical kitchen where the mother trains the daughter in food preparation, one sees the mother and daughter cooking the meal for the father, hardly eating any of the food themselves, which illustrates how they sacrifice their needs and/or appetites for the needs and/or appetites of the father.

Yet even though a girl identifies with the father and is an extension of him, she cannot be like him because she has no phallus. Eventually, she must return to identify with the mother. The daughter then may become angry at the mother because she is like the mother, with no power. As Benjamin states,

The ideal type of femininity (which, as we observed earlier, is constituted as whatever is opposite to masculinity) absorbs all that is cast off by the boy as he flees from mother. The main difference is simply that for girls, masculine traits are not a threat to identity, as feminine traits are for boys, but an unattainable ideal. But for both sexes the important oedipal limit is the same: identify only with the same-sex parent. (170-71, emphasis mine)

In essence, the Oedipus complex can never be resolved for females because they never get beyond being subsumed by and subordinated to men.

Recognizing that the Oedipus complex can never be resolved for females, Kaschak looks at female psychology in terms of the Antigone model. She discusses the roots of the Antigone model: "While a son can become his own man, a daughter experiences complex internal pullings toward her mother, herself, her father, and her children" (Kaschak 77). So, the "plight of Antigone" is to be an extension of her father, to be his caretaker, as women are for the men in their lives (75). In the early phase of the Antigone model, the girl is attached to her mother but she is being prepared to take over the mother's role of caring for the men in her life, so the daughter is still not recognized as a separate self (76). The woman in the Antigone phase, which lasts from mid-childhood through adulthood, is an extension of her
father, so she "experiences needs of men and children as her own" and denies her own needs; she is concerned "with appearance as central to her own value" (meaning she is an object to be looked at and desired) but her "own identity is secondary" (84). So, "in the unresolved Antigone phase, women are connected to men or to one another only as helpers of their men" (77). They do not form relationships with other women as independent women or with the roles of women. The woman in the unresolved Antigone phase denies her mother to become an extension of her father, trying to please him and care for him while embodying the nurturing and caring qualities of her mother.

The Antigone complex can be resolved for women. In the resolution of the Antigone phase, which occurs during adulthood, a woman "separates from father and the fathers to return to herself and women. [She] rediscovers pre-Antigone connection with other women" (84). She also develops her "own identity as a woman" (84). In essence, the woman makes a complete cycle to the pre-Antigone phase and returns to identify with the mother who is now clearly and more strongly a part of her. This recognition of the female side of the woman is the reversal of the oedipal phase. Instead of staying with the father, the woman returns to the mother-side of the self and learns to deal with men on an equal basis instead of allowing herself to be subordinate to them (84).

Problems with eating for women emerge during both the oedipal phase and the antigonal phase. In these two phases, development can come to an end (which is a characteristic of eating disorders), if they are not resolved. In the oedipal phase where the girl turns to and idealizes her father after rejecting the mother, she may stop eating to please him by being physically and sexually attractive to him. As stated earlier, if the mother does not do her job in teaching the girl how to be
attractive, the father will step in and do this, telling his daughter she must conform to an ideal image of women (205). Because the father represents power, the daughter may be afraid of being rejected by him, so she diets.

Also, in the oedipal phase, the mother is repudiated, so the daughter, who inherits the mother's qualities, anticipates being rejected. The daughter will diet to avoid developing a mature female body, like her mother's, which embodies the feminine qualities of caring and nurturing. At the same time the girl learns that "it is her vulnerable female body that leads her to a secondary role in life, she also learns a disdain for it" (76). She may then punish this disdainful body by starving it. She also denies a relationship with her mother who has the same body (76). Chernin agrees with this idea and states,

It is worth considering what it means to a woman putting food into her mouth that she must immediately fear this food will turn her into a woman whose life is without ambition, who married and had babies and feels so ashamed... With every bite she has to fear that she may become what her mother has been. (42)

The daughter who sees her mother being rejected by the men in her life will prefer a body without curves, and without reproductive capacity, as is shown in the cessation of menstruation. The daughter hopes to have a genderless, anorexic body that does not possess the feminine qualities that men could reject.

Eating disorders also emerge in the Antigone model. As Kaschak states in her discussion of the Antigone phase, "eating disorders contain a failed attempt to nurture oneself instead of others" (83). Because in the unresolved Antigone stage women are extensions of men, they do not think about their own needs (to eat), and they put the needs of the men in their lives above their own. Also, since a girl in the Antigone phase is an extension of her father, she may often have to please him by dieting to fit the ideal image of women. However, in the resolution of the Antigone
phase, the woman discovers "connection with other women" and learns to view herself as independent of others and as not having to put others' needs ahead of her own (84). Perhaps eating disorders are not prominent in this stage of adulthood (if women have resolved the Antigone phase) because women no longer worry about pleasing men, especially their fathers.

The roots of eating disorders that emerge as a result of a daughter's conflicts with her parents are evident in the Oedipus and the Antigone models where women are taught to be subordinate to men. Only in the resolution of the Antigone phase can a woman recognize herself and recognize her appetites and desires as worthy of being fulfilled. Women with eating disorders, then, need to recognize the importance and value of femininity and motherhood, as Rabinor suggests, in order to feel that womanly bodies are beautiful.

Women have power in the kitchen with the role of cooking, but eating in the dining room becomes problematic because food, for women, represents a long history of struggle with issues of body image, control, and guilt. Eating can also illustrate how the dynamics of a family work, such as how a mother has trained her daughter on how much to eat and what to eat, and how a father feels about his wife's and daughter's appetites. A girl who refuses food or hoards it is manifesting externally the unspoken inner conflicts with the other members of her family. Therefore, the dining room table can be a stage of drama in which girls act out cultural expectations and family tensions through their attitudes and relationships to food.
CHAPTER TWO

Angel of Light (1981), American Appetites (1989), and Wonderland (1992) all deal with the issue of eating in the lives of upper-class adolescent daughters. The issue of class is pertinent because when there is more money, there is more food, so food becomes a source of manipulation for the daughters who use it to express the tension in their families. Kirsten Halleck in Angel of Light, Bianca McCullough in American Appetites, and Hilda Pedersen in Wonderland all experience tension in their families. According to Anne Z. Mickelson, one of the themes in Oates's novels is the "complexities of family relationships" (16). Marilyn C. Wesley sees the Oatesian family as one "you can't live with" and one "you can't live without" (Refusal and Transgression 144). Gordon O. Taylor refers to Oates's statement that there is the small universe of the family "from which 'there's no escape. . . . And if something has gone wrong inside this small universe, then nothing can ever be made right" (25).

What is wrong in the families in the three novels Angel of Light, American Appetites, and Wonderland are the marriages of the parents, and because of the parents' bad marriages, the family system has a large crack in its foundation. Wesley discusses the parents in Oates's fiction and states that they do not cooperate and have a "sense of separation. . . . Individual mothers and fathers are experienced by their families as flawed" (Refusal and Transgression 30). Mickelson states that in Oates's works, male and female characters do not communicate well with one another (33). The partners in the marriages in the three novels also experience lack of communication. Mrs. Pedersen in Wonderland cannot express to her husband that she feels trapped, but runs away from her husband and children. Her freedom lasts only hours because Dr. Pedersen brings her back, and she does not stand up to him.
Isabel de Benavente Halleck in *Angel of Light* tells her husband after several years of marriage that she does not love him, and never really did love him, which illustrates this couple's lack of communication. Glynnis McCullough in *American Appetites* cannot tell her husband directly that their marriage is stale, but instead has affairs to improve her sex life. Ian McCullough is no better at communicating because he does not tell his wife that he gave a young acquaintance of theirs, Sigrid Hunt, one thousand dollars. Because Ian does not tell Glynnis that he was merely trying to help Sigrid who was in a bad situation (she is pregnant with an abusive man's child), Glynnis assumes he is having an affair with Sigrid.

In all three novels, the women focus on the men in the marriages. Joseph Petite states that "marriage in Oates' fiction does not involve a union between two equal partners. Instead, it is based on a superior/inferior symbiotic relationship. It is husband centered. A wife lives in order to assist her husband with his life" (225). In *Wonderland*, Mrs. Pedersen does most of the cooking, with the help of a cook, of course, but she plans the meals and centers them around her husband, often cooking his favorite meals. Interestingly, Mrs. Pedersen is mostly referred to as "Mrs. Pedersen" throughout the novel, not as "Mary Pedersen" or just as "Mary." This is because she is thought of as merely an extension of her husband. (This woman has not resolved the Antigone phase.) Isabel de Benavente Halleck, a very independent woman, also assists her husband. Isabel is a society woman in Washington, known for giving gala parties. But, she must give gala parties because her husband has a prominent position in Washington; he is the Director for the Commission for the Ministry of Justice. So, Isabel is one of those "Washington Wives" who must socialize with and entertain important people, such as colleagues of her husband's, to help him keep up his appearance. A man like Maurie Halleck, who is not
especially flashy or visible, needs a wife like Isabel to put him in the spotlight through her fabulous parties. Isabel de Benavente Halleck is described as "One of Washington's most popular hostesses" (Oates, Angel of Light 33). As the narrator states in Angel of Light, "There is always a party at 18 Röcken, [the home of the Hallecks]" (397). Glynnis McCullough in American Appetites is also a woman who assists her husband. Ian McCullough is a prominent fellow at the Institute for Independent Research in the Social Sciences in Hazelton-on-Hudson and is in charge of several research assistants and other fellows. Glynnis has her own career as a writer of cookbooks, but she does this out of her home, and does not think of herself as a "professional." "Though Glynnis's first two books were praised by reviewers and have sold well, she prefers to think of herself as an amateur: an amateur writer, an amateur cook, an amateur 'food person.' (There is room for only one true professional in the McCullough family, Glynnis has told friends.)" (Oates, American Appetites 34). Glynnis's main job, then, is to keep the house running smoothly and cook for Ian (which she enjoys), while he has the significant career outside the home. Glynnis, like Isabel, also gives parties, which puts the McCullough family in the society pages. Ian, like Maurie, is not flashy or outgoing, but Glynnis, like Isabel, gets her husband recognized through social gatherings.

Often, women in Oates's novels become unhappy in their marriages. Petite states that women become disappointed because they have to have babies and raise them, keep house, and be a sexual object to their husbands (224). As stated in Jessica Benjamin's The Bonds of Love, women are seen as objects and not subjects (81). When women realize that they are perceived as objects, they become unhappy. "Deprived of the subjective experience of identity in marriage, many of [Oates's] wives turn to adultery, mistaking sexual excitation and the first bloom of romantic love for the
personal identity they so desperately seek" (Petite 224). The adultery Oates's wives (and husbands) practice not only affects the marriage but also the children. According to Margo Maine, the family is a system that is not linear, but all parts affect each other "through interactions, interconnections, and feedback" (8). Wesley states, "The stability of the family may be affected by the challenge to the primary and legitimate bond of the mother and the father" (Refusal and Transgression 261).

As a daughter grows up in a family where the wife exists to assist the husband, the daughter sees the unhappiness of the mother in her marriage and learns that being a woman will involve being insignificant and serving the husband or being inferior to him. When the parents have extramarital affairs, the daughters become resentful of both parents. If the mother is the adulteress, the daughter may resent her own body because it is like her mother's "sinful" body, and if the father has affairs, the daughter may learn distrust for other men. All three daughters--Kirsten, Bianca, and Hilda--are affected by their parents' marriages and how these bad marriages produce deep cracks in the family systems, especially in the relationships between the daughters and the parents. Maine states, "An eating disorder or conflicts about body maturation and appearance may be the only safe way for [a daughter] to express that something is wrong with the family's functioning" (114). By looking at the dynamics in the families of the Hallecks, the McCulloughs, and the Pedersens, one can see how as the daughters observe the dynamics of the marriages of their parents and the faults within their families, they use food in some way to get back at their parents and/or punish themselves because they ultimately feel that they are not good enough.
Kirsten Halleck in *Angel of Light*

*Angel of Light* takes place during the 1970s when the politics of America is poisoned by the Watergate scandal. In this novel, Oates has her own version of a similar scandal in which Maurie Halleck, the Director of the Commission for the Ministry of Justice, confesses to "acceptance of several installments of bribe money from an intermediary for GBT Copper, his deliberate stalling of prosecution against that company, and actual sabotage of certain tapes, letters, memos, and documents" (*Angel of Light* 344). Since he is in a prominent position in the U. S. government, his reputation and his career will be over after the scandal. Therefore, after Maurie confesses, he kills himself. Maurie's death affects his family, particularly his children who think that he has been killed by their mother and her lover, Nick Martens, another prominent figure in Washington. In this context, one can understand the difficulties a young woman like Kirsten Halleck would have; the scandal and especially her father's death shatter her family.

The social and cultural attitudes of the 1970s directly affected women. The 1970s was the time of the women's movement and the Equal Rights Amendment. Women were moving outside the home for their careers and becoming more independent from their husbands. Also, the 1970s has been referred to as the "Me Decade" (Norton et al 987). "In the self-centered new decade, suggestions for realizing one's full potential were consumed as readily as jogging shoes and health foods" (988). Brumberg takes this idea further and states, "Notably since the middle to late 1970s, a new emphasis on physical fitness and athleticism has intensified cultural pressures on the individual for control and mastery of the body. For women this means that fitness has been added to slimness as a criterion of perfection" (254). Kirsten Halleck's anorexia can perhaps be understood in the
context of the desire for fitness and the self-centeredness of the 1970s. But, more importantly, Kirsten's illness can be better understood as a reaction to the turmoil in her life: her negative relationship with her mother, her father's death, and inappropriate sexual experiences.

Kirsten and Owen Halleck in *Angel of Light* are described by Eileen Teper Bender in *Joyce Carol Oates: Artist in Residence* as "children of privilege" who go to the best schools, (away from home, of course), and who will have the best opportunities (120). Owen, who attends Exeter, frequently talks about going to "HLS" or Harvard Law School (*Angel of Light* 24, 45). Kirsten is a student at the prestigious Eyre Academy for Girls (16). In the Halleck level of society, children are sent away from home for school to be out of their parents' ways. "[The children] were almost always away at school, or at camp. Their lives rivaled their parents' wholesome busyness" (25). The parents are so busy with their careers that they do not have much time left for their children. Maurie Halleck, as the Director of the Commission for the Ministry of Justice, works long hours and seems to have no time for his children. Isabel de Benavente Halleck is too busy giving her parties and being a society woman to have time for her children.

Kirsten is the one in her family who is most affected by the family's dynamics and suspects that Isabel and Nick plotted to kill her father. Kirsten is constantly

Thinking. Brooding. Inventing. Dreaming. Populating her head with fantasy figures that are, in fact, "real" figures. Isabel and Maurie and Nick Martens. Isabel and Maurie and Nick Martens. Or is it Isabel and Nick--and Maurie Halleck. Or (since they were boyhood friends) Maurice Halleck and Nicholas Martens--and Isabel. (38)

The effects of her mother's affairs and her father's death have taken their toll on Kirsten. The following is a description of 17-year old Kirsten:
An introvert, a loner, passive-aggressive, bright, quick, inventive, unsocial, remarkable facility for language, troublemaker, ringleader, sarcastic, naturally good-humored, witty, funny, comedian, clown, in fact voted class clown at Hays, her second and final year at that prestigious school, depressive personality, manic interludes, prone to fantasizing, high I.Q., wide range of interests, unusual maturity, sympathy for overseas orphans... perfectionist, impatient, immature, sloppy work habits, inability to listen to instructions, hostile to authority, unfunny in fact potentially dangerous sense of humor. (30-31)

The above passage illustrates Kirsten's lack of structure and her attempts to get attention through her "class clowning" and her jokes. Kirsten's desire to get attention shows that she is not getting it at home because Isabel is wrapped up in her socializing and her affairs, and Maurie is extremely busy with his job.

Because of the turmoil in her family and especially the anger at her mother, Kirsten has a disordered relationship to food.

Since early childhood Kirsten's eating habits had been eccentric, and obsessive. She occupied herself with dividing the food on her plate into sections, working quickly and deftly and, it seemed, with her eyes half-shut: some things were to be eaten, some not. In a crab meat salad there were suspicious ingredients--sliced black olives, minced pimiento—that could not be eaten. (108)

At the age of 17, Kirsten still eats hardly anything. Kirsten also displays the purging of food associated with anorexia:

Excusing herself from history class, the pains in her stomach so intense she had to walk doubled over: No I'm all right no please I said please I'll be all right I don't need any help thank you. (So I did eat breakfast & seemed to enjoy it, she noted with satisfaction in her journal, but my stomach rejected it & I had to go to the bathroom & vomit, underscoring the word vomit several times.). (38)

The pains in Kirsten's stomach are no doubt hunger pains. Bender states, "Kirsten is an anorexic and neurotic Electra, a school girl who is not well served by the curriculum or governesses of Eyre" (Joyce Carol Oates 127). Kirsten's anorexia may
be an attempt to get her parents' attention away from their problems so that they focus on her. According to Maine, eating disorders are "a request for change in the family" (119).

Kirsten would probably request a change in her parents' marriage. She is particularly angry about Isabel's lack of dedication to it. Because of its sarcastic tone, the following passage shows Kirsten's anger:

Kirsten was not jealous of Isabel: she was not jealous of Isabel's friends, or the men who appeared and disappeared and reappeared in her life. Isabel was one of the three or four highest-ranking Washington hostesses of the era, after all—what could her daughter expect? What could her son expect? The attention and fidelity of an ordinary American mother—? (Angel of Light 131)

The marriage of Maurie and Isabel is one of bitterness and regret. Isabel has numerous affairs, and Maurie feels that he has never been good enough for his wife. During one tender moment when Maurie comforts Isabel who becomes emotional when thinking about her abusive father, Maurie thinks that he does not deserve a woman like Isabel. "[H]e knew even then that he didn't deserve her. He didn't deserve her beauty, her arms around his neck, her frankness, her distress, her tears" (196). Throughout Maurie and Isabel's marriage, there has always been a love triangle between Maurie, Isabel, and Nick, Maurie's best friend who became Isabel's lover before Maurie and Isabel were married. Years later, Maurie and Isabel separate, and it is Maurie who feels the guilt, even after he has been the faithful one in the marriage. Isabel blames Maurie for the death of the infant who died: "she could not forgive him for the death of their second child—for the loss of that unnamed unbaptized infant girl" (347). There is other evidence of the bad marriage between Isabel and Maurie Halleck. For instance, "Isabel Halleck [told] her wildest, funniest, most irresistibly wicked stories when her husband was not present" (273),
which shows that Isabel has a separate side, a separate type of life away from her husband because he was often offended by her stories. Also, Isabel is cruel to Maurie, as the following speech addressed to Maurie shows:

But how could you imagine that I loved you in that way, Isabel asks Maurie one otherwise ordinary winter morning, and finds herself coldly astonished by her own courage. How could you be so deceived, you aren’t a fool, you should have known . . .

. . . —That I loved you sexually, that you have meant anything in my real life, my physical life, my life as a woman. . . .

. . . I don’t want to hurt you, God knows I respect you and admire you, you’re a wonderful man, you’ve been a wonderful father not like so many men, but—" (345).

Isabel, very coolly, while sipping a glass of wine, tells her husband that he means very little to her, and to a sensitive man like Maurie, this speech is devastating and ultimately results in his suicide.

The relationship between Kirsten and Isabel is characterized by tension. Joanne V. Creighton describes Isabel as a "predatory" mother who intimidates her anorexic daughter (Novels of the Middle Years 33). Also, at the beginning of the novel, Isabel says, "Kirsten won’t allow me to visit her" (Angel of Light 5). Isabel also speaks negatively about Kirsten’s appearance: "Her clothes don’t exactly fit now, she’s lost so much weight— and I assume—dear Christ, I know—that they’re in shameful condition anyway—Kirsten simply isn’t a clean person—even before the trouble with your father. . . . And she could have been such a beautiful girl" (8-9). Kirsten also feels rejected by her mother because she feels she is not the baby girl Isabel wanted. There was "an unnamed female infant who lived only a few days (sometime in 1961—Kirsten isn’t certain of the date and cannot of course make inquiries since the subject is too intimate, too 'serious,' and in any case she has always had the terrified idea that the death of the unnamed baby girl is the sole reason for her own birth)" (15). So Kirsten feels she is the replacement for that baby,
but has always felt she has not been a good enough replacement. She is not clean
enough or beautiful enough for Isabel.

Because she feels she is not good enough for her mother, Kirsten does
everything to be the opposite of the beautiful Isabel.

Isabel [accuses] Kirsten of being unclean, of having dirty slovenly
habits, not bathing frequently enough, not wearing a sanitary pad, for
Christ's sake, what was wrong with her? --soaking her panties, staining
her slacks, her skirt, the sheets on her bed, even the mattress. Are you
doing this to upset me? Isabel asked. Are you doing this to mock me?

Kirsten rejects her mother's beauty by making herself ugly and unclean in
comparison. This illustrates how much she resents what her mother stands for:
beauty and perfection. Kirsten is also known for her pranks and one of them,
perhaps unintentionally, mocks Isabel:

**Pranks, jokes, obsessions.** Kirsten Halleck at the age of four, her small
pretty face encrusted with makeup from Isabel's dressing table: what a
sight! A darling little clown! Golden-beige putty, pink rouge, lurid
scarlet lipstick smeared so thickly on her lips it looked like a
Halloween get-up. And how her eyes glowed with mischief! She had
smeared silvery-green eyeshadow on her eyelids, unevenly, and
messed about with Isabel's mascara brush too—so precocious. The room
of adults opened to receive her, she ran boldly and blindly into their
midst, one strap of her white nightgown slipping from her shoulder.
A tall dusky-skinned man in a turban stooped to peer into her heated
little face and pronounce her a beauty: Just like her mother. (28)

Kirsten avoids food to avoid growing into a woman. She avoids a womanly
body like her mother's because her mother's body represents infidelity against the
father she loved so much. Kirsten is "starving herself. Fainting in gym class and on
the stairs. Silent in class, her arms folded tight across her breasts" (37). The fact that
Kirsten hides her breasts shows that she rejects growing into a womanly body. Also,
Kirsten rejects the feminine reproductive capacity of her body by not eating: "Over
the months her body has grown flat, her small breasts have nearly disappeared, she no longer menstruates" (101). This passage gives evidence that Kirsten is uncomfortable with being female and does not want to identify with the closest female person in her life, her mother. Kirsten avoids eating because "fasting . . . yields an enormous sense of exhilaration, purity, and spiritual power" (Gordon 123). Kirsten is not eating, then, to have a body that is more pure than her mother's "soiled," adulterous body. Creighton also states that Kirsten is "lost' at the beginning of the novel. This once-beautiful girl, now anorexic, filthy, unpopular, and unpleasant, broods over the culpability of her mother" (Novels of the Middle Years 31).

Because of the tension with her mother, Kirsten has been closer to her father, who is an honorable man. Even though Maurie Halleck is dead at the opening of the novel, his presence is very much felt by the reader, especially in Kirsten's mind. According to Creighton, Maurie "embodies love, loyalty, justice, and goodness--values that would redeem the corrupted self-absorbed personal ambition that Nick embodies and that constitute the American dream at its basest level" (Novels of the Middle Years 112). Maurie is loyal to his wife, so he is a positive influence in Kirsten's life. Also, Maurie is loyal to his friends. By confessing to his crimes, "he deliberately sacrifices himself [and his career at the Commission] out of love for Nick and Isabel" (29). At the center of Angel of Light "is the enigmatic love object Maurie Halleck. . . . [H]is Christlike self-sacrifice for them has a devastating and perhaps cathartic effect" (28). Kirsten and her brother, Owen, plot to avenge their father's death by killing Isabel and Nick, the modern day Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus in Oates's version of the Electra story. According to Greg Johnson, Kirsten and Owen Halleck "possess the idealism and skepticism common to
adolescence, but also the strident single-mindedness of their ancestor, John Brown; and like him, they allow their sense of personal righteousness to justify acts of barbaric violence" (164). Kirsten and Owen get their "sense of personal righteousness" from their father, who is a model of loyalty and compassion. The fact that Kirsten is willing to kill for him shows her loyalty to her father.

As a young girl, Kirsten often looked to her father as an ally in her conflicts with her mother. At one point in Kirsten's early adolescence, Isabel referred to Kirsten as "psychotic" (Angel of Light 20). Kirsten "told Father: She's persecuting me," after which Maurie went to Isabel and talked to her about it (21). Isabel even stated "Your father was quite disturbed" about the comment she made about Kirsten (21), which shows that Maurie is protective of his daughter and is the peacemaker between Kirsten and Isabel.

While growing up, Kirsten's not eating may also have been an attempt to get her busy father's attention. Maine states that girls may use an eating disorder to get a uninvolved father involved (119). Even though Maurie tries to be available to his daughter, he is concerned with his own problems at the Commission. But at an important point in Kirsten's life, Maurie does become involved. At a father-daughter lunch, Maurie tries to connect with Kirsten during her rather difficult adolescent years away at school. He questions her about a "Suicide Club," wondering if she has anything to do with it or knows anyone in it. While Kirsten is "[brooding] over her plate, picking and sorting," moving "her fork . . . swiftly," Maurie seems not to focus on her eating, but on the "Suicide Club" (Angel of Light 108). The reader can tell in his hesitation that Maurie tries, even though he falters.

Kirsten, Maurie said in his soft puzzled voice, why don't you look up at me? Is something wrong? I had hoped we might--She raised her eyes to his slowly. A gray hazy stare, revealing nothing.
I'm not one of your witnesses, to be interrogated, she said. It was clumsily done, so she tried again: now the remark was cute. Maurie said gently that he wasn't interrogating her. He had hoped only—He had wanted--. (109)

Maurie does not communicate clearly what he wants, and neither does Kirsten. He goes on,

Kirsten? --you would tell me?—if you knew? he said. He was blinking rapidly. Poor man, poor Daddy, monkeyish and homely, but now almost handsome in his grief. (110)

Maurie, at this point, wants to help his daughter. The fact that his face shows grief illustrates that he truly cares about his daughter.

After Maurie's death, Kirsten, deeply depressed, has severe eating problems. "She lies awake seeing again and yet again the car settling into the swamp, the swamp water rising, her father's pale lank hair beginning to float; so captivated, she cannot attend to being female" (101-2) by putting on the weight needed for a female body. Owen says to her during one of his visits to her school, "You're sick, you really are sick, I'm going to take you back to the dormitory and see about a doctor. A real doctor—a private doctor—someone in town" (43). Kirsten may be mentally ill, but she is severely anorexic at this point because none of her clothes fit and she vomits regularly. Kirsten may be refusing to eat because of her guilt. Because Maurie has tried hard to be a good father, Kirsten feels guilty for her failure to be a good daughter when he needed her the most. She reveals her guilt in the following conversation with Owen:

He asked me to pray with him, he needed me and I said no, Kirsten says carefully, I told him I had a tennis date. A tennis date, Owen repeats slowly. Well. That's all right. No it isn't. You couldn't have known... No it isn't all right. It isn't. (42)
Kirsten feels she could have prevented Maurie from being killed if she had stayed with him. Therefore, she may refuse food and not want to take care of herself because she feels she is not worth taking care of.

Kirsten's anorexia is also a reaction to her inappropriate sexual experiences with one of her mother's lovers, Tony DiPiero. There is a flavor of incest to this relationship because Tony DiPiero is a potential father-figure in the oedipal triangle where he is Kirsten's mother's lover. Tony temporarily replaces Maurie. "In avenging her father by taking over her mother's lover, [Kirsten] . . . is working through complicated oedipal bonds" (Creighton, Novels of the Middle Years 31). So, Kirsten, in true oedipal fashion, rejects her mother for a father-figure, and actually sleeps with this father figure, which leads to problems. According to Maine, "In many cases, inappropriate sexual experiences lead to disordered eating and body dissatisfaction" (100). Gordon agrees with this and states that "for a number of anorexics, unwanted or problematic sexual experiences trigger the crisis in self-confidence that precipitates severely restrictive dieting" (58).

Kirsten's relationship with Tony DiPiero is inappropriate because he is much older than Kirsten and he is abusive. Tony DiPiero, considered "one of Washington's most eligible" (Angel of Light 129), abused Kirsten when she was a young adolescent. At the age of 14, Kirsten went to Tony's apartment to search through his things for evidence that he and Isabel were having an affair. Kirsten, by snooping through his apartment, toys dangerously with Tony, an older, experienced man, and ends up getting hurt. Joanne V. Creighton talks of Oates's daughters who "[toy] exploitatatively and dangerously with a sexuality they don't really understand" ("Unliberated Women" 151). After finding out about Kirsten's having been in his apartment, Tony physically abuses her:
He said nothing. He touched her arm with his forefinger. Just touched it. Kirsten winced... His manner was grave, even courtly. He ran his finger down her arm as lightly as possible... He was in no hurry... He showed no anger, he did not even show a great deal of interest.

Then he took hold of her left wrist. His fingers were dry and strong. As he began to twist her arm Kirsten's knees weakened and she sank clumsily toward the floor. Her murmur was surprised and apologetic. She did not cry out. The bone is going to snap, oh my God the bone is going to snap, she thought; but she did not cry out...

. . . No urgency to his movements, no sense even of curiosity. He hurt her, he was going to hurt her further, but his breathing was even, his manner was controlled; the faint creases about his mouth deepened as if he were going to smile. But of course he did not smile.

Now he gripped the back of her neck. She winced, she sobbed, she stammered for him to let go: he was hurting her...

... Then, quickly, his breathing less controlled now, he ran both hands over her: her shoulders, her breasts, her stomach, her hips, her thighs. There was not anger, no careless haste. No emotion she could discern. He might have been stroking an animal, not to give it pleasure but simply to keep it in place: to assert his own mastery...


Nothing.

His slightly more rapid breathing. His narrowing eyes.

And then it was over—he released her and walked away.

(Angel of Light  141-2)

Kirsten's "souvenir" of this experience, besides emotional trauma, is bruises (142).

Wesley states that Tony DiPiero "retaliates" for Kirsten's intrusion into his private space, his apartment, by "administering unemotional physical abuse" ("Father-Daughter Incest" 259). The word "unemotional" is key here because it shows Tony's power over Kirsten. By being cold, Tony is even more cruel because he gives no reaction to Kirsten's fear during the abuse.

In Tony and Kirsten's "relationship," he has the power. According to Judith Lewis Herman, "the relationship between father and daughter, adult male and
female child, is one of the most unequal relationships imaginable. It is no accident that incest occurs most often precisely in the relationship where the female is most powerless" (4). During his abuse of Kirsten, Tony twists and wrenches Kirsten's body "painfully and quietly...to assert his own mastery" (Wesley, "Father-Daughter Incest" 259). As she is frightened, begging him to stop his abuse, his eyes narrow and he says nothing. Years later, when Kirsten calls him to meet with her, they go back to his apartment to have sex. Because of her physical (bordering on sexual) abuse from him, Kirsten wants to control her body. However, Tony still has power and he sets the rules. He asks, "Do you promise not to cry?" and he tells her, "I warn you, Don't say a word " (Angel of Light 145, 144). The fact that Tony does not want her to cry suggests that he is unemotional and does not care about her grief. He wants sex, and he wants control over her because he does not want her to speak. Wesley states, "Through the oedipal transition, according to Lacan, both males and females enter the symbolic order and suffer the 'losses' of self and world illustrated by Kirsten and Tony, but he acquires the prerogative of power and privilege, while she stands for lack and is formally restricted to powerlessness" (Refusal and Transgression 122-3). Kirsten is also powerless because Tony even compares her to her mother.

Di Piero was incensed, Di Piero was not amused, after all she had broken her promise not to cry; after all, despite her bravado, she hadn't acquitted herself with much style. . . .

. . . Don't confuse yourself with your mother, dear, Tony said lazily, not troubling to accompany her to the door, --you and Isabel aren’t in the same league. (Angel of Light 303)

Kirsten has tried to be in control like Isabel, but she fails. This failure to be in control also hurts Kirsten because after Tony's comment, Kirsten's self-confidence as a lover
is damaged. She even imagines that Isabel may have been watching her having sex with Tony:

Cruel Isabel, sly sneering Isabel, perhaps she had been a secret witness that afternoon in Di Piero's apartment, perhaps she had overheard Kirsten's frightened sobbing, or did Tony afterward recount the episode in full, for the amusement of his Washington friends? (303)

With Tony Di Piero, Kirsten has a masochistic relationship. Wesley states, "Oates's daughters deliberately seek transgressive relationships with father figures . . . to avoid the emotional turmoil and instability of the romance condition of the preoedipal phase when first love was mother" (Refusal and Transgression 117). So this transgressive relationship with Tony is also a way for Kirsten to detach from Isabel. Jessica Benjamin in The Bonds of Love suggests a reason why a young woman like Kirsten may enter into a masochistic relationship with a man like Tony who may give her emotional pain.

I suggest that such a person hopes in a masochistic relationship to overcome her clinging helplessness and separation anxiety even as she simultaneously expresses and gives way to it. Such a person is likely to seek a "heroic" sadist to submit to, someone who represents the liberating father rather than the engulfing mother. This ideal love solves the problems posed by the frustration of desire and agency, the rage at nonrecognition, by offering an avenue of escape and providing a figure of identification. (119)

Kirsten thus separates from her mother and enters the realm of adult sexuality with Tony, an impatient, violent lover, but not without cost.

Kirsten's feelings of powerlessness with Tony Di Piero in her sexual experiences with him may lead her to need to feel in control again. The only way Kirsten may be able to regain a sense of control is through her eating. Girls who are sexually abused, as Kirsten is with Tony, want to be more "in charge of [their lives]" and "no longer dominated" by a man, so they turn to food as their only means of
control (Maine 108). Ellen Bass and Laura Davis comment on this idea and state, "By strictly controlling what you do and don’t take into your body, you are trying to regain the power that was taken from you" (218). Also, a young woman who has been in an incestuous relationship may not eat because she feels she must punish herself because she feels bad about the incest (Herman 100).

With her brother Owen, Kirsten finds a positive male relationship, something she seems to have needed after her father’s death. This relationship with her brother allows Kirsten to believe in herself and to heal herself by eating. As Kirsten and Owen become more estranged from their mother, they become closer and trust each other. At the beginning of the novel, Owen wants little to do with Kirsten. He refuses, at first, to believe that Kirsten’s idea that Nick and Isabel killed their father is true. He even refers to his sister as "the poor cunt" and rejects her: "I don't know you, he shouts. I don't know you and I don't give a damn about you and I reject everything--everything--about you" (Angel of Light 9, 35). Later, Owen refers to his sister as "his only friend" (213) because he has no other friends when he and Kirsten are totally united in their "cause" to kill their mother and Nick. Kirsten asks Owen at one point, "When will I meet your friends, when will I meet Uli? Kirsten says, her face streaming with tears, I'm so lonely without you. . . . Are you ashamed of me?" (318). And Owen answers, "Of course I'm not ashamed, Owen says" (318). Owen really trusts her when he tells her of his involvement with the Doves, an underground revolutionary group. His friends in the Doves even accept Kirsten. Owen tells Kirsten after the Doves have accepted her, "You're my sister, after all, Owen says, suddenly grinning, and now his voice does quaver with an emotion she can understand, you're my Kirsten, after all--right?" (319).
Owen also comes to be protective of his sister. After she sleeps with Tony and is about to pull off her part of the "plan"—to sleep with Nick Martens with the purpose of killing him—Owen wonders,

But does she sleep with them? Owen wonders uneasily, has she ever slept with them, does she ... know? He believes not: there is something tight and stubborn about her, a virginity of the will. It would not have been difficult for Owen to poke about and discover whether his kid sister was taking birth control pills—no doubt Isabel would have told him if he'd asked—but for some reason he had no curiosity. Up to the present time.

What about Di Piero, he asked her several times, and she said that nothing much had happened—nothing at all had happened. . .

. . . And then? Owen said
And then what? Kirsten said.
You and Di Piero.
What about me and Di Piero?
Did he—how did he act?—did he want you to go anywhere with him, did he make any—you know—suggestions—
For Christ's sake, Owen, Kirsten said irritably, we were walking in the goddam park all the time, what do you think? (230-231)

Owen perhaps wants to think of his sister as innocent and pure—his little sister, his "little" Kirsten.

When Kirsten becomes closer to her brother she starts eating again because he convinces her that she needs to be healthy. He is the only one who can make her eat:

*Live*, Owen commanded, *be beautiful again*, was the charge, and so Kirsten has returned to life: she eats breakfasts and lunches and dinners, she tries to sleep eight hours a night, she has cut down the dope-smoking and other pastimes though it hasn't been easy. . . . (312)

Then, Owen praises her for her effort:

You're doing remarkably well, Kirsten, you look so much better than you did, Jesus, the way you looked back in March!—Mother might have been able to have you committed to a hospital, the state you were in—but—anyway—my point is that you're doing remarkably well and in
fact better than I might have given you credit for—so think of the present, think of the future. . . . (313)

When Kirsten has the love and approval she needs, she wants to take care of herself. She finally eats because she feels "good enough" for someone: her brother. He loves her and is not ashamed of her as Isabel was.

Owen is the first person after her father has died with whom Kirsten can have a positive relationship. Kirsten and Owen's relationship is also important because they are both united against a common enemy: Isabel. Kirsten and Owen must trust each other completely to commit murder and they must tell each other everything that they do related to Isabel and Nick. This is the first relationship in which Kirsten has been able to trust anyone completely because she could not trust Isabel, Nick, Tony, or even any of her friends. Owen gives her a sense of stability as someone who is fighting for "justice" with her, and that is perhaps why she eats again. There is some element in her life that is under control: her plan with her brother to kill their mother, dark as it may be.

**Bianca McCullough in *American Appetites***

*American Appetites* takes place in the 1980s, which was marked by increasing polarization between the rich and the poor (Norton et al 1014). Also, more women in the 1980s are working because of economic necessity (1016) and perhaps because of the women's movement which resulted in women wanting more independence. Glynnis McCullough, unlike Isabel Halleck, has a career, which gives her some independence financially, but as a cookbook writer, she does not see herself as a "career woman." Much of her time goes to entertaining her and her husband's friends over lavish dinners. The McCulloughs belong to the wealthy group of Americans who are generally isolated from the poor. So Bianca McCullough grows
up a spoiled, only child in the isolated, wealthy community of Hazelton-on-Hudson in which people like her parents concentrate on careers, extramarital affairs, and dinner parties.

*American Appetites* is filled with food imagery. Food is the constant throughout the novel. If marriages and careers are uncertain, there will always be food and dinner parties. Wesley makes an important point that *American Appetites* begins and ends with a dinner party (*Refusal and Transgression* 150). At the beginning, the hostess is Glynnis who presides over a cocktail party. At the end of the novel, Sigrid Hunt, a guest at Glynnis's cocktail party at the beginning of the novel, is the new hostess and Ian's new lover. Another food image is that Glynnis uses a steak knife as a weapon to threaten Ian in a drunken rage during the climax of the novel (*Creighton, Novels of the Middle Years* 95). And, of course, the central symbol is Glynnis's cookbook, *American Appetites: Regional American Cooking from Alaska to Hawaii*, which illustrates the society of the McCulloughs and their friends in the wealthy community of Hazelton-on-Hudson. The "appetites," according to Creighton, are "huners, ambitions, inchoate longings...forces that contribute to a vague restlessness in the McCulloughs and their friends. They have achieved the American dream and don't know what to do now" (*Novels of the Middle Years* 96).

Meals are also important in the novel. Oates goes into great detail about the food Glynnis prepares and serves. The following is a description of the food at Ian's party:

[T]he sourdough bread is even now in the oven, with twelve minutes yet to go; the preliminaries of the ballotine of chicken à la Régence are well under way--the several chickens properly boned, and the stock for the sauce simmering, and the farce à quenelles à la panade prepared, and the fine-chopped truffles, and the tongue... And the salad greens, in a large wooden bowl, are in the refrigerator, covered; and the tart mustardy French dressing to accompany them has been mixed. Late
last night... Glynnis had made one of the desserts with results that were encouraging: a sour-cream chocolate cake with thick rippled fudge frosting upon which, in crystalline vanilla frosting, she wrote HAPPY 50TH IAN! in childlike block letters. (American Appetites 35)

Near the end of the book where Sigrid presides over a small gathering in which food is served, there is another important meal.

Sigrid had prepared a superb cold scallop salad, had in fact spent much of the morning on it—for the recipe insisted upon fresh squeezed lime juice and fresh chopped basil—and Denis and Malcolm had brought two bottles of excellent white Rhone wine, and there would be a kiwi cream pie for dessert, so the luncheon itself, the crucial matter of the food and drink, could not fail; this Ian understood, for food and drink rarely fail us. (324)

Even if things are tense between couples or friends, the food and wine have always glued these people together. Sometimes they are the only things that keep them together because the socializing of the McCulloughs and their friends revolves around eating and drinking. The novel ends with the food image of the kiwi pie when Sigrid Hunt, as Ian's new lover and the hostess who has replaced Glynnis, states, "This kiwi pie, there's nearly half of it left; who wants more? Won't you all have just a little more?" (340). But the McCulloughs and their friends are a group of people that always wants more. Ian wanting more leads to the death of Glynnis because in a way, he does want to have an affair with Sigrid. Because food is prominent in the McCullough household, Bianca uses it for manipulation. As the dynamics of her relationships with her parents change, so do her reactions to eating. At first, Bianca does not eat to exert her independence from her parents, especially her mother, but later her refusal of food is an expression of the turmoil and despair she feels after her mother's death.

In the family triangle of Ian-Bianca-Glynnis, the relationship between mother and daughter is full of conflict. The following passage illustrates the strain between
Glynnis and Bianca: "There is relief, certainly, In Bianca’s absence, since the strain between mother and daughter has been, these past two or three years, considerable" (44). Glynnis and Bianca’s relationship has been strained for many years:

Bringing forth that child was labor! Glynnis had worked to give birth to Bianca, and Bianca, it seemed, had resisted, as if not wanting to be born; one body, pain-racked, had expelled another body from it in order that both might live. We have never quite forgiven each other, Glynnis thinks. Though in fact Glynnis has forgotten the pain mostly. As she has forgotten, except as a minor stab of a loss, Bianca’s infant brother, to be named Jonathan, who died aged three days. (45)

In this family, as in the Halleck’s, is another lost infant, and perhaps Glynnis resents the fact that her selfish daughter lived instead of the infant boy. And Bianca may feel that she is not a good enough replacement for the infant, as Kirsten feels with Isabel.

Bianca covers up her feelings of inadequacy with her mother by distancing herself from her. At one point, Bianca insults her mother, which further illustrates the tension and distance between them. "Well, fifty isn't really old any longer, is it?" Bianca said. Then, 'For a man, I mean'" (45). After this statement directed at Glynnis, Glynnis thinks of her daughter as "You little bitch!" (45). This passage shows the resentment Glynnis has for the youth of her daughter. She also knows that Bianca prefers her father, which adds tension to their mother-daughter relationship. "Glynnis resented it that Bianca seemed to prefer her father, and that Ian was 'undemanding' of Bianca; it was an old quarrel, an old charge. His attitude was a form of male condescension, she said if not scorn. And Ian protested; you're being unfair, you're being absurd. I love Bianca as she is," and Glynnis answers, "Yes. That's the problem" (104). Glynnis wants Bianca to be more than who she is, yet Ian is more accepting of his daughter.
The conflict between Bianca and Glynnis is like that of Kirsten and Isabel. Isabel also expects more of Kirsten than her husband Maurie does. Also, both daughters are deliberately antagonistic and try to be the opposites of their mothers. Bianca is "a handsome young woman whose vision of herself, so far as Glynnis can determine, is deliberately crude, flat-footed, clumsy, the obverse of her mother's style, it might be said, and in defiance of it" (64). Both Bianca and Kirsten reject their mothers' feminine qualities and their roles of hostess and mother. Bianca, like Kirsten, refuses food to exert control. She learns to use food for manipulation because it is so prominent in her home and because it is Glynnis's main interest. Bianca learns power through food because Glynnis has power with food. Glynnis has power with food and cooking because she plans the menus. For instance, she plans the menu for Ian's birthday party and makes his favorite foods to please him. Also, Glynnis has power in her kitchen because it is set up to her needs:

It is Glynnis's favorite room in the house though she does not think of it as merely a "room": rather as a place of retreat, sanctuary, unfailing consolation and pleasure. Many of the fixtures are new, or relatively new. . . . [O]verhead, hanging from hooks and positioned on the walls, are gleaming copper pans and molds, an assortment of wooden spoons, knives with shining blades, and whisks, and scoops, and carving boards, and bunches of garlic, dried herbs--mysterious dessicated [sic] things whose names and precise functions Glynnis McCullough can call up in an instant, should any visitor to her kitchen inquire. (And this is a Hazelton kitchen much visited.) . . . In a corner of the kitchen is a round wooden table, several chairs, a Moroccan rug, a small portable television. Though the family eats breakfast at this table, the table is really Glynnis's; she answers mail here, does quick handwritten drafts of her writing--food articles and columns, cookbooks. (34)

Anyone else would not know his/her way around this kitchen, but because Glynnis arranged it, her kitchen is her "turf." Another passage that shows Glynnis's power with food and in her kitchen is when Ian is in the kitchen and Glynnis has to help
him: "But Ian's kitchen adventures, amusing to relate to friends as anecdotes, were not entirely amusing at the time; and Glynnis did not much enjoy overseeing her husband so closely, forced of necessity—for of course she was forced—to correct him when he did things wrong, or was about to do things wrong" (39). In Glynnis's kitchen, then, she has the power to have things done her way and she must tell Ian how to do them because he is lost in her realm. Later, Bianca becomes accustomed to this kitchen when she takes over the powerful role of cooking once done by her mother.

Bianca has obviously learned how a women can have power with food because she uses that power at mealtimes with her parents. Meals are the most illuminating evidence of the struggle between Glynnis and Bianca. Ian recalls the meals that Glynnis had cooked that were tense between mother and daughter. "Those meals had begun in hope and ended in strain, wounded feelings, intemperate words" (291). Early in the novel, Bianca refuses to eat the special meal prepared by her mother on the night of her father's birthday. Even though she loves her father and is close to him, Bianca refuses to eat the food her mother has cooked:

"I can't stay for the actual dinner, Mother—I'm sure I told you that." . . .

. . . Glynnis is hurt, and Glynnis is angry; but she says, calmly, "Can't? But why not? You know I've set a place for you."

Bianca shrugs guiltily, assumes another angle at the mirror. . . .

. . . "Beside your father," Glynnis says. "I've set a place for you beside your father." (51)

Glynnis sets a place for Bianca by her father, hoping Bianca will stay because she gets to sit by her favorite parent. Also, sitting by the guest of honor is in itself an honor, but Bianca refuses this special place. The argument between mother and daughter continues:

Glynnis says, as if this were the issue, "You do have to eat, don't
you?" and Bianca says, shrugging, embarrassed, "Mother, I'll eat."
And within seconds, though Glynnis has vowed not to be drawn
into a quarrel that evening—has vowed not to lose her temper with
Bianca, no matter how the girl tempts her—they are quarreling:
their old quarrel of years, in a new or, in truth, not so new guise,
turning upon Bianca's thoughtlessness, her forgetfulness, her
surely deliberate selfishness. "You want to spoil the evening, don't
you," Glynnis says, her eyes filling with tears. "You want to spoil
your father's birthday, and all my plans."
Bianca says meanly, "Mother, the universe does not turn upon
you and all your plans. " (52)

So Bianca eats elsewhere, knowing that not eating her mother's meal will hurt
Glynnis. Bianca uses food to show her autonomy from her mother and exerts her
independence by eating with her friends.

And then Bianca comes home; and Glynnis feels compelled to
speak with her, if only to show her, the hurtful little bitch, how
little her absence meant: how little, in truth, her mother had been
hurt by her selfish behavior. "And did you enjoy yourself, with—
who was it, Kim?" Glynnis begins.
And Bianca says quickly, "Yes. Kim. And, yes, I did"—peeling off
her sweater—"and how was Daddy's party here?"
"Daddy's party was fine," Glynnis says, betraying no irony, no
anger, not even reproach, as, all but ignoring her, Bianca stretches
and yawns, and shakes her head as a dog shakes its
head. . . . "Where did you eat finally?" Glynnis asks.
And Bianca says, shrugging, "Nowhere special."
Glynnis says, "Yes, but where?"
And Bianca turns away, bored, sullen, belching beer. "One of the
usual places."
Why do you hate me? Glynnis thinks. Why, when I love you,
when I would love you, except for your opposition? (64-65)

According to Kim Chernin in The Hungry Self, "Food is never very far from our
struggle to establish an identity (102). Therefore, Bianca establishes herself as an
independent person outside of the McCullough home by using food to separate
herself from her mother, especially, by either not eating her mother's food or by
eating away from home.
Because of the strained mother-daughter relationship in the McCullough family, Bianca and Ian are close. But Bianca is also the "pulse" that keeps this family alive because when she is around, Ian is happier. When Bianca goes to college, "[Ian] misses Bianca, of course; misses that other, if unpredictable, corner of their triangle. Misses, in Bianca, a part of his youth" (American Appetites 45). Another reason that Ian may miss Bianca may be because when she is around, he can focus on her instead of the problems he and Glynnis are having. Maine states that one parent "may become overly close to the child" which is "potentially disastrous, because it keeps parents from facing any problems within their marriage" (114). The marriages in American Appetites on the outside appear to be happy but are "full of rage, infidelity, and desperation" (Creighton, Novels of the Middle Years 97). Glynnis has several affairs with Ian's friends, while he remains faithful in their marriage. However, Glynnis does not trust him, and becomes extremely angry when she suspects that Ian may be having an affair with Sigrid Hunt. Glynnis is a hypocrite because extramarital affairs are acceptable for her but not for her husband. Also, after their daughter leaves for college, Glynnis and Ian become more distant.

Now that Bianca is away at college and Glynnis and Ian are alone together, for the first time in nineteen years, it seems to Glynnis that their relations are more tentative: at times more romantic, yet nervously so, as if something were not quite settled between them. . . . If, for instance, she touches Ian, in affection or playfully, he is slow to respond: and then responds as if by rote. In sleep, he no longer responds at all, as if sleep were a counterworld, into which he disappears, and Glynnis cannot follow. (American Appetites 44)

The fact that Ian does not respond to Glynnis shows that he does not know how to function without Bianca to focus on.

While Bianca tries to assert her independence with food, she is also perhaps trying to assert it with her body by showing that she is maturing and ready to move
into relationships with men. She shows her attraction for older men in a seductive
dance she does at her father's birthday party, aimed at her father and his friends.
(Bianca also does her dance to divert attention to herself and away from Glynnis,
which is another stab at her mother.)

But now, dramatically, as if on cue—for Glynnis is about to summon her guests to dinner; it is almost nine-thirty—Bianca reappears, in theatrical attire: a black cutaway coat and trousers, starched white shirt, black derby jauntily aslant on her head. . . . [The guests] know that Bianca has been involved in theater, dance, and "performance arts" at college; but they are not prepared, ah they are not prepared for this.

Bianca's face is powdered a deathly white, like a geisha's her lips are a luscious bee-stung red; her eyebrows and lashes are blackened as if with soot. Her cottony fawn-colored hair has been pinned back under the hat, and dangling rhinestone earrings gleam in her ears. And she wears spike-heeled black patent leather shoes! Glynnis thinks, This is not like Bianca at all. This is not Bianca, at all.

. . . With no word of explanation and no acknowledgment of her audience, Bianca begins her dance on a percussive note, strutting so heavily the carpeted floor shakes . . . . She high-steps, she blows moist kisses at the audience; rolls her eyes, winks, smirks, leers. . . .

. . . Then, to Glynnis's horror, Bianca begins to dance more suggestively. . . . She throws her head back until the cords in her pale neck stand out; she moves her rather plump, fleshy body against the beat and the grain of the cacophonous music. In her demonic exuberance she collides with a chair and seems not to notice, gives the fireplace screen a glancing kick. . . . She is mocking, funny, defiant, in her heavy-footed strut: swinging her hips clumsily, going through a routine of tics, twitches, salutes, winks, shrugs, and shudders, and a simulation of kisses aimed at her audience. As Glynnis and Ian stare in disbelief, Bianca begins to strip: throwing off the cutaway coat, tossing aside the hat, slowly and provocatively unbuttoning the starched white shirt, all the while smiling, smirking, winking at her audience of middle-aged men and women, most of whom are no longer laughing. For this is not funny, is it?

But under the shirt Bianca is wearing another shirt, identical to the first; and under her trousers—no wonder they were so bulky!—another pair of trousers, identical to the first. And under her
second shirt there is a third; and under the second pair of trousers—not a third pair, but a black leotard. . . . ([Glynnis] tries not to see how tight Bianca's leotard is, how revealingly snug against the fatty quivering buttocks, the crotch, the bas relief of pubic hair . . . for this is not parody, or even metaphor, but the real thing, the stark defenseless unmediated flesh of an overgrown child, at which one should not look except in love.). (49-50)

While Bianca is in the most seductive part of her dance, her stripping, "Glynnis's eyes [film] over with moisture" (50). Glynnis is embarrassed that her daughter is being sexy in front of Ian, and Glynnis's lover who is present, Denis Grinnell. In the scene with the dance, Bianca is using her body for power to get the attention of the men, especially her father. According to Maine, "If a daughter doesn't feel loved, she may act provocatively to try to assure herself attention from other men" (103). Perhaps while she has been away at college, Bianca feels that her special position with her father is threatened. Therefore, she wants to assure herself that he finds her attractive and that she is still special to him, or she at least wants to get attention from other men her father's age (possible father surrogates).

Another scene in which Bianca is seductive is the scene at the hotel pool where she swims and is watched by her father and another older man. In this particular scene, Bianca wears one of Glynnis's swimming suits. (Bianca often wears her mother's clothes after Glynnis's death.) Bianca wears this revealing bathing suit to display her body for her father and whoever else might be at the pool.

Ian could not resist glancing up to watch Bianca in the pool, in her gleaming black rubber cap that looked like a helmet, and her one-piece black bathing suit that gave her smooth rounded flesh a curiously ascetic look. . . . Though she had lost weight since her mother's death Bianca was not yet thin, not even slender; she had the full-bodied boneless look of one of Renoir's young women, both childlike and womanly, an opulence rather more of nature than of human artifice. (American Appetites 212-13)

Bianca seems to be oblivious to the men watching her, although she probably
wants the attention.

If Bianca was aware of being so closely observed, she had too much composure to give any sign. . . .

. . . When, at the end of her swim, Bianca climbed up out of the pool, breathing hard, her columnar legs streaming water, and pulled off her cap and shook her long gleaming hair free, Ian heard the man beside him suck in his breath noisily and murmur, no doubt for Ian's sake, "Jeezus. Look at that."

"Excuse me," Ian said, annoyed, "that young woman is my daughter." . . .

. . . [The man] squinted at Ian with a pretense of surprise, smiled his broad damp smile, seemed about to wink. Or did he wink? He readjusted his buttocks in the canvas chair, tugging at his trunks to loosen the crotch, and said, in an undertone, one man to another, "Well. Too bad, buddy." (214)

This scene at the hotel pool shows an interesting dynamic between Ian and Bianca. Ian seems to be noticing Bianca's maturing body for the first time.

After Glynnis's death, the family dynamic changes slightly as Bianca takes more of an interest in her mother. To her mother's funeral, Bianca wears "a black silk shell and a matching jacket . . . and a skirt . . . The silk had belonged to Glynnis" (124). Bianca also takes up some of Glynnis's hobbies. For instance, she takes an interest in spirituality and Eastern religions. "Bianca had discovered an aged paperback copy of The Tibetan Book of the Dead in a remote bookcase. The book, which had belonged to Glynnis in the 1960s, was faithfully annotated through two thirds of its length" (133). Bianca reads this book faithfully and contemplates its ideas. It is as if she is trying to get to know Glynnis and connect with her, to make up for the bad relationship she had had with her mother when Glynnis was alive. Bianca is also concerned that Glynnis's soul is still in her body after her death (136). Perhaps the most important way Bianca tries to become close to her mother and her memory is by finishing the cookbook American Appetites. Even after Glynnis's
death, the cookbook will be published. "[Bianca] worked on the manuscript, sitting at Glynnis's place at the kitchen table, industriously typing up notes, collating recipes, talking on the telephone with friends of Glynnis's who had shared her interest in cooking and with Glynnis's editor in New York City" (290). While working on the cookbook, Bianca tells a friend, "I really feel close to Mother, for the first time I guess since I was a small child" (290).

Bianca also takes on many of Glynnis's roles after Glynnis's death. While she is still close to Ian, she assumes a wife-like role. During Ian and Bianca's exile in the hotel, Bianca "saw to such routine but exhausting tasks as ordering meals from room service, making purchases in the hotel drugstore, dealing with the hotel staff. It was she who answered the telephone when calls came from Ottinger, or his office" (205). In essence, Bianca takes care of things for Ian who can hardly function after his arrest for the murder of his wife. Bianca also spends many hours in the kitchen cooking, as Glynnis did.

Earlier, Bianca did not eat to spite her mother, but after Glynnis's death, Bianca refuses food because of her guilt. She feels she was not a good enough daughter to Glynnis and must punish herself. Bianca becomes obsessed with food while working on her mother's cookbook.

The actual cooking, begun tentatively, took up more and more of Bianca's time. Glynnis had left variants of certain recipes, as many as six for a single dish, for instance, and Bianca could not decide which was the preferred one. . . . The more ambitious meals were likely to be served as late as eleven o'clock, at which time Bianca would seek out her father . . . excited, nervous, apologetic beforehand: "I don't think this has turned out absolutely perfectly, Daddy, and I'm terribly sorry to have taken so long. . . ." (290-91)

Bianca, although obsessed with cooking, and trying new recipes, hardly eats. She prepares the meals but "she had very little appetite for the meals she prepared"
She refuses to eat her own food when she had earlier refused to eat Glynnis's cooking. "Ian... recalled... those many hours at the dinner table when, balky and pouting, Bianca found her mother's superbly prepared food not to her taste... Now it was her own food Bianca was refusing" (291). Bianca blames herself for not being able to cook as well as her mother. "Glynnis would certainly have made it better: had made it better [Bianca thinks]. Bianca messed her food about her plate, trying a few mouthfuls, frequently murmuring, disappointed, 'Not quite, not this time,'" (291). She "was losing weight steadily, Ian saw. Even in the midst of his own self-absorption, he saw. Her clothes swung loose, her cheeks were becoming hollow. A grim sad satisfied look to her face in repose" (291). When Ian asks Bianca why she doesn't eat, the says, "Oh, I am , believe me I am , but sometimes I can't keep it down" (291). This is evidence that Bianca has an eating problem. She perhaps loses the food she eats out of guilt for having refused her mother's food when she was alive. Perhaps Bianca believes that because she did not eat her mother's food, she does not deserve to eat now. According to Chernin, "Women troubled in their relation to food...are deeply preoccupied with making some return to their mother for the sorrows and deprivations they believe they have caused" (66). Bianca may be losing her food to sacrifice herself, to stay ill and in the home to take Glynnis's place with Ian and to assume her roles as cook and caretaker for him. Bianca does, after all, offer to take a leave of absence from college for a semester. "She said, casually, I was thinking, Daddy, it wouldn't be any trouble for me to take the fall semester off. And stay home--if you wanted me to" (American Appetites 223). Maine states, "Often disordered eating is the only way the daughter can feel a sense of control over her body and can discharge her pent-up anger and despair" (101-2). Bianca's refusal of food, then, illustrates her despair over the loss of
her mother because she cannot make up to her mother all the pain she caused to her by not appreciating her or her food.

Bianca is also in a state of despair because she is not sure whether or not Ian is innocent, and she becomes disillusioned about her parents' relationship. During the time when Bianca becomes interested in her mother's activities, she becomes more distant to Ian. At one point, she is even hostile towards him. After Ian's trial, where he is found not guilty of second-degree murder of his wife, Bianca's reaction is not positive because he has had to reveal the relationship with Sigrid Hunt. Bianca "edged away and shot him a look of hatred. Her face was clenched like a muscle, her eyes bright with tears. 'Murderer,' she whispered. And that was all" (American Appetites 319-20). Therefore, Bianca has lost all faith in her father (and in the idea that her parents had a solid marriage) and truly believes he is responsible for Glynnis's death.

Although a seemingly minor character, Bianca stands out because she has been a source of conflict to her parents but is also a contrast to her parents. She refuses food, unlike her parents, so symbolically, she refuses the appetites of her parents--their appetites for money, success, sex, and material wealth. Bianca's career path is entirely different than that of her parents and their friends. Bianca states,

"[T]here's this program in Thailand, for teaching English and just sort of helping out, in, I guess you could call them, rural villages. . . . It's no big deal: nothing like the Peace Corps. What I'd hope for is that I'd learn, you know, from the Thais. Their way of life, you know, and their tradition. I'd learn, I'm sure, a lot more than I'd be teaching them . Then I could come back and get my BA, East Asian Studies probably, and I'd have an advantage; I will have learned the language, and learned about the religion, the specific kind or kinds of Buddhism they practice . . . " (225)

So Bianca rejects the affluent lifestyle of her parents; she wants to live in a rural setting of poverty. She even rejects her parents' religion (Unitarianism) for
Buddhism. In essence, Bianca rejects the American suburban culture of her parents for an exotic foreign culture. Eventually, she rejects her family. Ian states, "When she comes back to the States she doesn't plan to live with Sigrid and me" (333). Because Glynnis is gone and Bianca no longer believes in Ian, she refuses to have anything to do with the remainder of her broken family.

Bianca changes more than anyone else in the novel, even more than Ian who has gone through the death of his wife and a murder trial. Creighton states that Bianca is ultimately a positive figure because she is "'turned from a spoiled adolescent into an idealistic young women'" (Novels of the Middle Years 99). The last postcard Bianca sends to her father shows how distant from her former life she has become: I am fine, I am well, I hope you are well, please don't worry about me, in fact I hope you will not direct your thoughts toward me. "in a moment of time perfect enlightenment is obtained." Love, Bianca. (American Appetites 329). As her short note shows, Bianca thinks more about the spiritual than the material. She has seen how Ian went from having everything to having nothing, not even his family, so she wants a new life. Bianca's refusal of her parents' food, then, has ultimately led to her refusal of them.

Hilda Pedersen in Wonderland

The section of Wonderland in which the Pedersens are prominent characters takes place in the 1940s when World War II was being fought in Europe and before the U. S. was involved in it. But the Pedersens, in their big house, and in their fat bodies, are isolated from the rest of the world, as Dr. Pedersen states, "This war is not very real to us yet" (Oates, Wonderland 101). Hilda Pedersen is isolated within her home. "For health reasons she did not attend school. Professors at nearby
universities had invited her to study with them, but she had always declined" (93). She prefers to be isolated in her own world of numbers and food.

Food is prominent in the Pedersen family as it is in the McCullough family. In the Pedersen family, eating is a ritual and one of the most important activities of their lives. According to G. F. Waller, in the Pedersen household, eating is "a sacred act, an obscene mock-Eucharist" (39). In the following passage Hilda describes the act of eating:

"It was fascinating, that activity. The lips parted, the mouth opened, something was inserted into the opening, then the jaws began their centuries of instinct, raw instinct, and the food was moistened, ground into pulp, swallowed. It was magic. Around the table, drawn together by this magic, the family sat eating, all of them eating, glowing with the pleasure of eating together, in a kind of communion, their heads bowed as they ate. (Wonderland 125)"

The Pedersens are totally absorbed by the act of eating, which they all do together, unlike the Hallecks and the McCulloughs.

Oates goes into great detail about the Pedersens' huge meals. For a typical lunch, the Pedersens eat the following foods:

"A first course of chicken noodle soup: in large gleaming white bowls, with mushroom caps and rough, coarse buttered toast. . . . The blueberry muffins were served hot, in a silver bowl, with a white napkin covering them. . . . Dora took the soup bowls away. She returned with a large platter, which she brought to Dr. Pedersen. He said, "Mary, what is this? Not braised duck?"

"Yes, dear, with that cream sauce you're so fond of." (91-2)"

There is still more food:

"The potatoes were passed around a second time . . . Rich, creamy mashed potatoes, with cheese and onion. . . . Now a large plate of vegetables was being passed around--creamed cucumbers, green scallions on toast points, glazed carrots. And more mashed potatoes. Dora brought out another platter: a small roast surrounded by boiled potatoes and onions." (94)"
Their lunch, which lasts an hour and a half, culminates with dessert: "peaches and cream, and chocolate cake with a stiff, white frosting that had been shaped into tiny points, like the surface of a stormy sea" (96).

The Pedersen's Christmas dinner involves even more food. "The house was filled with the smells of Christmas food--roasting turkeys, roasting ham, baking pies, Christmas cookies, Christmas candy. Christmas dinner itself lasted for many hours" (112). And, in addition to Christmas dinner, the Pedersens have a midnight supper on Christmas:

All the Pedersens went out to the kitchen, where Mrs. Pedersen opened the refrigerator and took out food, bowls of food, food wrapped carefully in waxed paper, and made them a supper. Hilda helped her, giggling and pretending to be drunk. They had warmed-up turkey and gravy and dressing; warmed-up ham; several loaves of good rye bread; whipped potatoes. . . And slabs of leftover apple pie and minced meat pie that Mrs. Pedersen said would not keep, and an entire orange chiffon cake that Mrs. Pedersen had kept hidden just for midnight supper. Jesse and Hilda had several tumblers of milk, and the others had coffee with whipped cream spooned into it. (114)

The Pedersens do not have dainty helpings, but "slabs" of food and "bowls of food" are passed around. Food is precious in the Pedersen household. In the above passage, food is "wrapped carefully in waxed paper" as if it were a precious thing to be taken care of. At a later meal, food is passed "hand to hand, around the table, bowls passed carefully, as if their contents were living, precious forms of life" (121).

Hilda Pedersen in Wonderland is similar to Kirsten and Bianca in that she comes from a wealthy family and uses food negatively. However, instead of refusing food, Hilda is obese and eats compulsively, so her relationship to food provides a contrast to Kirsten and Bianca. All of the Pedersens use food negatively to fill the sense of emptiness in their lives. Diane Tolomeo states, "the hunger of the
spirit is sharply etched in the overstuffing of the body. . . . Spirits go unnourished but the body is filled with food" (514). Calvin Bedient agrees and states that Dr. Pedersen's children are "badgered" and "gifted" but are "gross, ravenous eaters" and "fat, as if to fill the place where [Dr. Pedersen's] love should have been, or as if to make themselves too huge to go down his greedy throat. There they all sit at the dining table, gobbling, competing with their grinding jaws" (125). The Pedersens are victims of food and what it represents: greed and gluttony.

According to Ellen Friedman, "All of the Pedersens are crazed by an obsessive hunger, attempting with their expanding waistlines to fill space, to possess the world with their own physical being" ("Journey from the T" 102). Waller states, "The Pedersens, 'with their soft, gelatinous bodies,' are a horrifying caricature of affluent consumers" (39). They, like the McCulloughs and their friends in American Appetites, cannot get enough. The amount of food these five people eat at one meal illustrates their greed in terms of food, but also a fear that they will not fill themselves enough. Hilda, particularly, has this fear and uses food to fill her void that results from feeling unloved and inferior.

Hilda Pedersen escapes from everyone and everything because she is ashamed of who she is. Hilda feels that she is not good enough and not worthy of love because she is female and obese. As she watches her father's controlling treatment of her mother, Hilda cannot help feeling inferior as a woman. When Hilda tries to stand up for herself saying, "Father, I concentrate all the time!" after Dr. Pedersen's statement that women cannot concentrate, he counters her with the idea that women are not capable of self-discipline: "'Even you, Hildie, with your enormous talents, even you must be carefully disciplined. The discipline must come
from other people" (Wonderland 96). To avoid possibly being rejected by her family, Hilda pushes them away.

When Mrs. Pedersen left them, Jesse said to her, "Why do you insult your mother? You know she loves you."

Hilda stared at him.

"She loves you. You know it. They all love you. We all love you," Jesse said.

Hilda's gaze moved slowly down, away from his face. Her face closed into an expression of inestimable sadness (147).

Hilda's sad expression comes from the fact that she does not believe Jesse. She ultimately does not believe anyone could love an ugly, obese girl like her.

She refers to herself as

fat, ugly Hilda. . . . A head of ordinary size, with a thatch of straw-colored, listless hair, still frizzy from a permanent wave given to her the month before. It was strange that her head was of ordinary size. The skull was ordinary but the flesh packed on it was not ordinary. Everything ballooning. Swelling. Bloated. Upstairs, in her room, Hilda would smirk at herself in the mirror, bunch her fat cheeks up so that, when she released her smile, sharp angry creases showed in her skin. (123)

Hilda has been obese for most of her life. When the family looks at the family picture album, Hilda turns away in disgust:

She turned away as the photographs of herself began: a child of about six, already heavy. . . . As a small child Hilda had been pretty and cheerful, but as the photographs progressed her smile faded, her face soured, until the picture in Life showed her [as a child prodigy] a beetle-browed girl with a woman's body shapeless as a tub. (118)

Hilda, a very angry young woman, craves love and shows this craving through eating. Ross Labrie states, "When thwarted the craving for love sometimes takes the form of an insatiable, suicidal hunger, as in the [case] of . . . Hilda Pedersen in Wonderland. . . . Hilda feels that she has a 'tiny sac inside her,' an 'elastic, magical emptiness that could never be filled no matter how much she ate'" (22). To try to fill
this emptiness, Hilda eats compulsively, even though she knows she cannot fill her void. Kim Chernin in *The Hungry Self* talks about the compulsive eater's framework for thinking. She states,

Women who eat compulsively . . . have made their bodies the recipient of feelings they cannot bear to hold in consciousness. Their rage is expressed through their mouths, their need for love and solace is experienced as a longing for food, their guilt comes to them as a feeling of fatness, their shame is transmuted into a sense of dislike for their bodies. (136)

Even though Hilda hates herself and her body, she keeps on eating, and enters a vicious cycle of eating then hating her body even more.

Hilda eats when she feels ashamed and wants to escape. Many of these times of shame occur with her father, which fuels her anger against her father. Hilda does not want her father to see her eating. "Hilda ate quickly, blowing on the soup to cool it, but leaning back behind Jesse so that Dr. Pedersen would not notice her" (*Wonderland* 91). Food and eating have always been centered around tension and conflict for Hilda because judgments were given at the Pedersen dining room table. According to Maine, if mealtimes are "a time when punishments and criticism are dispensed and conflicts are expressed" then "food and eating represent tension and conflict" (121). Therefore, Hilda carries these negative feelings about eating with her all the time. During one of her contests, Hilda eats because she is ashamed that she is not doing well enough and is afraid of being judged negatively by her father.

Ashamed, I cram my mouth with something—some chocolate—I am ravenously hungry and dare not look at anyone. . . .

. . . Now they are hooking up the wires on me again, on my forehead, on a mountainous arm, around my mountainous chest, deft and furtive, as if they are anxious to get away from me. I ignore them. A young doctor and a nurse, I think it is a nurse, I ignore them. I hardly bother to chew the chocolate in my mouth; it is my jaws, my perfect teeth, that do the work. . . .
... I yank up my socks. Is Jesse watching? Is he proud of me? My socks are a little dirty from the chocolate on my fingers. I run back to Father and I know that everyone is staring at me. . . .

... Father catches me playfully and makes me sit down.

"The next several questions . . . the next several questions deal with feats of both memory and calculation," the examiner says. He speaks slowly and apprehensively. "Would you, Hilda and Oscar, would you multiply the fourth number on the first card that was held up to you by the seventh number on the second card--"

It takes me a few seconds to answer this question, but even so I am a little ahead of Oscar. Be he too answers it, shouting . . .

... "Would you divide the sum of the numbers on the third card by the cube of the forty-third number on the eighth card . . . ."

Five, six, seconds pass. Where is the answer? And then the answer comes to me: I give it, fast. Oscar is answering at the same time.

Before the doctor can ask us another question, I take a piece of candy out of Father's pocket and tear off the wrapper. . . ." (Wonderland 136-37)

As the previous passage illustrates, Hilda eats to consume a void that is beginning to widen because she is afraid that she will fail her father and everyone else if she does not answer the questions quickly and before Oscar does. Even though eating is associated with negative experiences (contests, meals at the dining room table), food can be a source of comfort for Hilda because it can temporarily numb her to what is happening. In the contest, she can focus on chewing and how the food feels in her mouth instead of on the fact that she might not answer the questions quickly enough.

Another instance in which Hilda feels that she has failed her father is her shopping trip with him. Hilda is a young woman of 14 growing up during the 1940s when fashion dictated straighter styles and thinness was "in" (Powers 208). Therefore, shopping for clothes is hard for Hilda, because as Mrs. Pedersen states, "Hilda has trouble. . . . We have trouble finding nice clothes for her . . . ." (Wonderland 123). Dr. Pedersen does not believe this (perhaps it is not as hard to find attractive clothes for obese men) so he takes Hilda shopping for a dress, convinced that she
can look pretty despite her size. He asks her, "Do you want to look bad in New York? Don't you want to look pretty?" (121). For Hilda, shopping is an humiliating experience, especially with her father, and she would rather wear ugly dresses instead of being humiliated in a store. Powers states in her book that shopping is a "humiliating experience for a woman who is obese or simply larger than the cultural standards. Salesladies may scorn a woman who is unable to wear a certain size" (229). But, Dr. Pedersen takes control of Hilda's clothing. Oates describes in great detail Hilda's horrid experience trying on dresses:

She got the dress off the hanger and saw with dismay that it looked too small. Too small! She held it up against her body, staring down at it. A green dress with a white velvet bow at the neck, a party dress, it would make her look enormous... a huge cow... But she had to get it on, she had to get it on. Her father was calling. "Hildie. Will you hurry."... Slowly, ah, slowly, she drew the dress up. She avoided looking in the mirror. Over her hips, slowly, slowly, but what a bright green it was--too tight--a droplet of sweat fell from her face onto the front of the dress-- "Hilda."
"Yes, Father. Yes."...
... It was a terrible strain, getting the zipper up. She had to reach up behind herself, her arm twisted, her shoulder contorted... then, suddenly, she felt the dress rip under one arm... She hesitated. Then she regained her courage and this time she got the zipper all the way up.

The dress was on! (Wonderland 128-29)

But the dress is too small and she has to buy an uglier, brown dress that is two sizes larger. "This was a brown dress with a small girlish collar. Fiercely she returned for her father's approval, hunted and panting in a body that had been measured, according to the clothing merchants of the world, as demanding a size 23 dress" (129-130). Hilda's shopping experience is a double agony because besides trying on dresses, she has to get her father's approval. Hilda is twice as nervous shopping for
dresses with her father because she wants to look good for him. Yet, deep down she knows she will never be good enough for him and is humiliated that she cannot wear a smaller size for him. After this clothes shopping experience, Hilda hates herself, her body, and her father for putting her in this humiliating situation.

After the humiliating dress shopping episode, Hilda eats. She eats ice cream with her father: "There was no use thinking of anything except the Banana Royal, which had to be eaten quickly before it melted" (130). To avoid thinking about how angry she is with her father for making her try on dresses, Hilda focuses on the banana split and turns food into her only solace because food will not judge her. Food, for a short time, will take the place of her deep craving for love and acceptance by her father. It is interesting that Hilda eats with her father, the person she is trying to avoid. But, "food is strength, a way of equalizing oneself against Dr. Pedersen" (Pinsker 65). Sanford Pinsker goes on to state that,

Hilda . . . is a study in passively brooding resistance: "There . . . beneath her heart . . . she lived in secret from them. From all of them." An ice cream sundae and an enormous banana split are her rewards for suffering through the indignities of trying on a size twenty-three dress; nervously munched candy bars are a way of energizing oneself for "contests" with an idiot savant. . . . But her interior personality that Dr. Pedersen cannot touch schemes about patricide in an image as chilling as it is poetically appropriate: "Did he know about her secret self, which was not his daughter at all or even a female? . . . she had even smashed a water glass once, wrapped in a towel, with the idea of grinding the glass down fine to put into his food, to kill him!" (64)

The fact that Hilda imagines killing her father with food shows that food carries power for her. According to Ellen G. Friedman in Joyce Carol Oates, Hilda retreats from her father in her womb, her "'secret space'" (112). She also retreats farther inside her folds of fat, hoping that because she is obese, people will stay away.
Food, then, is her weapon against her father and everyone because she can totally immerse herself in her food and shut out the rest of the world.

Hilda also expresses her anger towards her father by deliberately making herself ugly. According to Mary Allen, "Fat girls balloon perversely fatter, often merely to spite men" (137). The scene in which Hilda wears a burlap dress to dinner is to spite Dr. Pedersen because she is ugly in the dress. He states,

"Why else does she appear at luncheon in a dress like that? It isn't even a dress! A sack—not even very clean—"
"Hilda dresses nicely for church, Papa, She—"
"Mary, you must not contradict me. I am speaking of Hilda's appearance right now. Why does she come to the table in a dress like that? It looks as if she made it herself."
Yes, she had made the dress herself, out of several large pieces of cotton. It had started out as a joke, a mockery of a dress, a shapeless bag. Trying it on, she had discovered that it was so ugly that it detracted from her ugliness—really, it was a wonderful dress for her! She had insisted upon wearing it, in spite of her mother's doubts."

(Wonderland 123)

Hilda is angry at her father because he wants to control everyone. She tells him at one point, "'You want to stuff me inside your mouth, I know you! I know you!' she cries. 'You want to press me into a ball and pop me into your mouth, back where I came from! You want to eat us all up'" (139). Meals at the dining room table in the Pedersen household illustrate the dynamics of this family in which Dr. Pedersen is the controlling head. According to Brenda Daly, "Like many families, the entire Pedersen family lives according to this static model, controlled by Dr. Pedersen, the 'head,' the monologic intellect" (177). Dr. Pedersen presides over his family in the dining room, chewing intently large amounts of food while he quizzes his children. Joanne V. Creighton states that the Pedersen dinners are "orgies of gastronomic excess where the enormous intake of food is matched by the Pedersen children's demonstrations of prodigious intellectuality" (Joyce Carol Oates 75). The dining
room table is the place where the Pedersen children must demonstrate their knowledge to Dr. Pedersen and prove that they are worthy to be his children.

At the Pedersens', each day began at seven o'clock. They sat down together at breakfast at seven-thirty, the five of them, and Dr. Pedersen began by asking them what they had done the evening before. He was usually brisk and jocular at this meal. Then he talked about the "Map of the Day," the general structure the day would take for each of them—what plans did they have? what did they think they would accomplish? At dinner this "Map" would be measured against their actual achievements. (Wonderland 81)

According to Powers, obese children "grow up in a family setting where they are used by one or both parents as an object to fulfill the needs of the parent" (19). Dr. Pedersen needs to be recognized and he wants to do it through his children. He hopes he will get recognition through his son Frederich's musical genius and though Hilda's contests where she proves her mathematical ability. Dr. Pedersen has already been recognized through Hilda who appeared in Life magazine as a big story, "Math Prodigy from Upstate New York Baffles Professors" (Wonderland 118).

The meals in the dining room show the position of the Pedersen women. Mrs. Pedersen and Hilda are served last (92). Even though Mrs. Pedersen has prepared the food in her kitchen, she must be served last in the dining room, where the power that was hers in the kitchen diminishes. Mrs. Pedersen's role, like that of Glynnis McCullough in American Appetites, is to prepare the food. It is clear that Dr. Pedersen expects that Mrs. Pedersen's main job is the cooking when he states, "Well, Mary, in spite of the many distractions of your life, this was an excellent meal. What have you planned for dinner tonight?" (97). Mrs. Pedersen's job is to plan the meals and cook them and to try not to be distracted by other, lesser worries. Hilda learns this role from her mother. For example, at the Christmas midnight supper, the Pedersens eat "omelettes stuffed with mushrooms and chunks of ham, made just for
fun by Mrs. Pedersen and Hilda who was supposed to learn how to cook someday soon, taught by her mother" (114). But planning the meals also gives Mrs. Pedersen power in her kitchen. Of course she tries to make Dr. Pedersen's favorites, but she has the power to choose when to make them and what other foods they will be served with. Mrs. Pedersen also seems to be most comfortable in her kitchen where she sits "at the large worktable in the center of the kitchen, a table made of plain, untreated wood" (83). Mary's kitchen with its large worktable is her "office" which is rather plain because she is hard at work there, carrying out plans for the most important part of her family's days--the meals. In the dining room, she is usually silent, as is Hilda, while the domineering Dr. Pedersen presides and controls the topics of conversation.

The dining room table is also the place where the reader sees the dynamics of Dr. and Mrs. Pedersen's relationship where he is superior and she is inferior. Interestingly, meals are the only times when the reader sees Dr. and Mrs. Pedersen together (Petite 227). Mrs. Pedersen is dominated by Dr. Pedersen such that she struggles to keep her own identity. Her statement, "I am still Mary Shirer" illustrates this struggle (227). Her marriage, because it is one in which the man, Dr. Pedersen, is superior and she is inferior, "is destructive of female identity" (229), which is evident in Mrs. Pedersen. Because Mrs. Pedersen struggles with finding and keeping her identity, she feels isolated from her husband and her children. Another aspect of Dr. and Mrs. Pedersen's marriage that shows his power over her is that she cannot interrupt her husband when he is speaking. When she tries during dinner to defend Jesse's reading of a canal book, Dr. Pedersen says "Mary, please don't interrupt us" (Wonderland 90). Also, Dr. Pedersen will not allow his wife to
drive. There is evidence of Mrs. Pedersen's fear of asking her husband during dinner about driving in the following passage:

"I hate to be bothering you, Karl" Mrs. Pedersen said, "but it's really all right if I stay home. I don't like to leave Frederick anyway. I was going to ask you if you'd thought any more about my driving lessons . . ."

"I haven't given it much thought, really. I've been very busy at the Clinic." (92, emphasis mine)

The fact that Dr. Pedersen has not thought about his wife's driving lessons shows that he does not want her to learn how to drive. He wants to keep her isolated at home. Joseph Petite states that many women in Oates's fiction are "given a home and economic security, [but] they are generally isolated in that home" (229). Dr. Pedersen's attitude towards women, particularly his wife, is generally negative. This negative attitude is evident in his statement that he makes during one lunch, "Women cannot concentrate. Even gifted women, even women singled out for exceptional histories, cannot concentrate. Is this why they are so charming?" (Wonderland 96). Apparently, Dr. Pedersen likes subservient women who cannot concentrate or think. He finds them "charming."

Because of Dr. Pedersen's controlling presence which creates turmoil in this family, his wife and children find ways to escape from their reality. His control fuels Hilda's anger towards him. According to Robert H. Fossum, Dr. Pedersen tries to control his children and his wife, but Hilda and Frederick "defeat him by retreating into their own wonderlands, Hilda's built with mathematical, Frederick's with musical symbols, while his wife periodically escapes into disorderly drunkenness" (57). The fact that his wife and children need to escape from him shows Dr. Pedersen's control because no one can confront him. They need to employ passive resistance or strategies of escape from his domineering presence.
Hilda's best escape is with food because she can concentrate only on her food and shut out her father. Food can also make her ugly, by transforming her body into folds of fat. Often, women use food and body weight as a way of distancing themselves from others, particularly men. Geneen Roth states, "the very purpose of compulsion is to protect ourselves from the pain associated with love" (23), or from the lack of love. Therefore, compulsive eating can numb one temporarily to the fact that love one receives may be conditional, as it seems to be with Hilda. As long as Hilda does well at contests, her father will love her. That is why she is so afraid of failing at them and must use food during her contests to strengthen herself against the possibility of failure. Roth sums up the idea about compulsive eaters in her statement, "Something is wrong and we are using food to express it" (103). Indeed there is something wrong in the Pedersen family because all of its members are obese people who eat to fill their voids.
CONCLUSION

Food and body image have been problematic for women throughout history. In three of Joyce Carol Oates's novels, these struggles are illustrated in the three adolescent girls: Kirsten Halleck in Angel of Light, Bianca McCullough in American Appetites, and Hilda Pedersen in Wonderland. The time period of Angel of Light is the 1970s when dieting is prominent because of the increased desire for fitness precipitated by the "Me Generation." American Appetites takes place in the 1980s, during a time of cultural emphasis on being thin because of fashion and because the ideal, successful woman has a more masculine body, one that has fewer curves. In the 1980s, women are more career-oriented and move away from having only the roles of wife and mother. Kirsten Halleck in Angel of Light and Bianca McCullough in American Appetites both live under a standard for thinness for women in the time periods in which they grow up, which influences how they view their bodies. The families of Kirsten and Bianca are also prominent in society, so looking good is important.

Kirsten and Bianca also experience turmoil in their families which contributes to their eating disorders. Both girls grow up in families where the marriages of their parents are full of mistrust, infidelity, and anger. When the relationship between the parents is not good, the entire family feels the effects. Kirsten feels the effects more than her brother, and because Bianca is an only child she is deeply affected by her parents' troubled marriage. Because food is prominent in both households (Isabel Halleck and Glynnis McCullough are known for hosting gala parties), both girls use food, or rather refuse food, as a way of dealing with their pain.

The mother-daughter relationship is especially significant to the issue of women's eating. Kirsten and Bianca have conflicts with their mothers, which
contributes to their eating problems. Kirsten's conflict with her mother is largely due to the fact that Isabel Halleck has been unfaithful to her husband, Maurie, whom Kirsten adores. Isabel has also been cruel to Kirsten by insulting her. Because of Kirsten's anger toward her mother, she does not eat to avoid growing into a mature, womanly, and "sinful" body like Isabel's. Kirsten has also had inappropriate and incestuous sexual experiences with one of her mother's lovers and has felt powerless and out of control with this older, more experienced man. After her sexual experiences with Tony Di Piero, Kirsten wants to feel in control again and uses food as her means of control by restricting what goes into her body. Bianca also resents her mother and refuses food in order to assert her independence from her mother. She will not eat the food her mother cooks to separate herself from Glynnis. Later, after her mother's death, Bianca will not eat out of guilt for not having eaten her mother's food. As the dynamics in her family change, Bianca's refusal of food has different meanings.

Hilda Pedersen in Wonderland also grows up in a wealthy family in a time when thin women are valued, the 1940s. However, during this time, careers are less important for women, and women tend to stay in the home assisting their husbands, as Hilda's mother does. Hilda herself stays at home and does not even get her education outside the home. The family of Hilda, like those of Kirsten and Bianca, is prominent in society, but the entire family is obese, so Hilda does not stand out as "different." Yet, Hilda has her struggles with body image, especially when she must shop for clothes. She also experiences turmoil in her family. Her parents have a bad marriage because her father, Dr. Pedersen, is extremely controlling. Hilda watches as her mother's spirit has been suffocated through the years. The once vivacious and slender Mary Pedersen has become frightened and fat. Because of the turmoil Hilda
feels in her tense family situation, she, like Kirsten and Bianca, uses food to express her pain. Instead of rejecting food, Hilda eats compulsively to fill her emptiness which comes from feeling unloved. Hilda eats and hides in her numerous folds of fat, hoping her obesity will push people away. Because of her feeling of powerlessness with her father, Hilda uses food as her weapon to push him away by either immersing herself in her food so that she cannot focus on the pain he causes her, or to become so fat and ugly that he will stay away from her.

All three girls—Kirsten, Bianca, and Hilda—feel that in some way they are not good enough. All three girls feel that they are not good enough daughters. Kirsten feels that she is not beautiful enough, Bianca feels that she is not a good enough cook, and Hilda feels that she is not a good enough prodigy. These girls also feel powerless to make their families "right," so they get power and control through the only means they can—through their eating.
NOTES

1 The first edition of *Wonderland* was published in 1971 and has a different ending than subsequent editions. According to Brenda Daly, the ending of the first edition is more tragic, with "Jesse as a contemporary King Lear carrying the dead body of his daughter," but "[i]n Oates's 1973 paperback edition of this novel, she rejects tragic closure" (155). My references in this paper are to the 1992 Ontario Review Press paperback edition.

2 See also Bender's *Joyce Carol Oates, Artist in Residence*, pages 53-4 and James A. Key's article, "Joyce Carol Oates's *Wonderland* and the Idea of Control."
WORKS CITED


WORKS CONSULTED


