My relationship with my mother is one of the most complicated things in my life. She is my biggest fan and my harshest critic. I am afraid because Looking at her is like looking in a mirror.

I want my mother to be happy with who I am. She knows best and she loves me. She always puts me ahead of herself. This relationship has taught me about true selflessness. But this is a bad thing. I never put myself first. She never encourages me to prioritize my feelings because she thinks that doing so is a bad thing.

I give too freely to others: my time, my energy, my love, my forgiveness. I keep the peace at my own expense. When I want to relax, I am lazy. When I am having a hard day, I need to get over it because I have to fulfill my responsibilities no matter what. Even when I am not living with her, I can only imagine the guilt she would make me feel for how I lived. So I get up on Saturday mornings to clean the entire house, because that’s what I was taught.

I care too much about what my mom thinks. This relationship has taught me compromise. I want my mother to be happy with who I am so much that I sometimes think it would just be easier to compromise on what I want for myself, simply to avoid her comments. Sometimes she is the voice in my head, and sometimes I don’t even realize it’s her. Even when she is comforting and encouraging, my anxiety still sounds like her. She is paranoid and judgmental.

My mother has no respect for boundaries. She does not listen, or knock on doors, or give me the space I need. She hovers and gives her opinion unsolicited. It has been this way my whole life and so I think it is normal, and it’s not. She insists we are the same and it undermines my sense of self. “WE are so loud. OUR hair needs to be fixed this way.” If I try to express myself in a way that is different I am met with questions and judgement. She looms over me “You are going to regret that haircut, trust me.” “That outfit does nothing for your figure.” She claims to know me better than anyone, but I feel like she will never truly understand me. I hate that feeling. Anytime I do something that she would not endorse, I need to explain myself to her because she demands it. But it’s a waste of breath because it hurts my feelings when I confuse her. What would she think of the real me? What do I think of the real me? Who is the real me?

She is a bully under the pretense of love. She has a list of criticisms that she verbalizes on heavy rotation. “ Shave your armpits, its unhygienic, I am just looking out for you. Engage your core, suck in that belly. Stand up straight, or other people will judge you and make fun of you. If I don’t tell you, nobody will. You would be so beautiful if…. You are so close to being perfect.”

She is even hard on herself, verbalizing all of her insecurities. When I see her do this, how could I not feel that judgement indirectly directed at me because of all of the ways we are similar, and all of the ways she might consider me to be even worse? If she is not good enough for her own standard, then I will never be good enough.

I could not always see that my mother is a damaged person. She used to fly off the handle at the smallest inconvenience. I was afraid to misbehave because I did not want to be yelled at. She hasn’t done this in a long time, not since she was unmedicated. But sometimes I anticipate these reactions, and I feel like I am constantly on defense because of this past. She complains constantly, and is so negative, focusing on everything that has gone wrong. I thought that was just how mothers acted, angry. She is a force to be reckoned with, and she always has to get her way. As I have interacted with the world, I have come to the realization that my mother is extremely damaged.

Over the years she has opened up about insecurity, not feeling good enough, feeling lonely. I feel guilty that she feels this way, even though it is not my fault. I have seen her go through so much pain and suffering, and I have seen the sacrifices she has made as a mother. I probably know too much about my mom. I give her advice and affirm her feelings and do whatever else I can so she is happy. I spend a lot of time with her and sometimes I feel guilty to leave. How have I become her emotional caretaker? It’s very difficult to see such a strong presence in my life be so weak, and I can’t stop myself from putting her needs above my own.

I know I am doing the selfless thing when I support her, but it makes me feel so bad at the same time. This is what I need from her, as my mother, as my parent. But she could never support me in the way I support her. There is always something to do better or fix, and my feelings are not rooted in reality. If she does something to upset me and I confront her, she has excuses. I cuts very deep to give her the support I desperately wished she would give me. Maybe it would be easier if I set more firm boundaries, but then again she is not good with boundaries.

I feel like it is hard to exist separate from her. I don’t feel like my own person sometimes because I live my life for her. But she supports me in so many ways, in ways that so many other mothers wouldn’t support their children. So how could I feel anger towards her? So I listen to her little voice in my head, even when I wish I wouldn’t. I wish I was not like her, but I know that to a degree, I am.

It all makes sense when I look at her relationship with her own mother. She resents her, and is annoyed by every little thing she says and does. My mother says she is not like her mom, but she is all too similar. I am terrified that I am looking into my future. I don’t want to turn into my mom, irritated by my mother and miserable in her presence. My mother and my grandmother are not bad people, nor are they bad mothers. They have simply hurt their children deeply. Maybe they do not realize it, or maybe they don’t want to admit it.

I feel bad to say any of this because I love her, and depend on her and have learned so many wonderful things from her. I know it would hurt her feelings to listen to me list all of the ways she has let me down. I don’t want to make her hurt, even though she has hurt me. My mother is actually really great to me too.

My mother is so thoughtful. She does so much for me unprompted, just because she was thinking of me. If she sees my favourite foods on sale, she will buy it for me. If she sees something she thinks I would find interesting, she shares it with me. She is an excellent gift giver, and remembers everyone’s birthday. I have no doubt in my mind that she would drop everything if I needed her, because I have seen her do this time and time again. Even now that I am grown, she makes my lunch before work, and does my laundry. She has been a source of constancy throughout any instability in my life.

We joke around all the time, and she never tells me to stop being silly. She makes me laugh so hard. I never have to worry about not being serious enough because she knows that there is nothing wrong with having fun.

She has a flare for the dramatic and theatrical. Sometimes this is annoying, but most of the time it is entertaining. I think sometimes she acts a certain way because she knows people expect it from her and she loves playing into a character. She knows she has star-quality and never backs down from an opportunity to shine. She is confident in her abilities to dazzle a room and keep the attention of others. I admire this.

She was never afraid to be herself. This relationship has taught me about true authenticity. This is a good thing. I understand the value of being myself, unapologetically. She never fails to celebrate my quirks, because she knows what it’s like to be unfairly criticized for the qualities that make us unique.

My mom cares about what I think. She sees me as an individual, and respects what I have to say. Even if she disagrees with me, she is willing to listen and change her mind because she thinks I am smart. She is outspoken and interesting. Would I be who I am without her example? Who would I be without her example? Would I still be me?

My mother is happy with who I am. She knows best and she loves me. She always tells me that I am her favourite person and her best friend. We share a lot of interests and we have a lot to talk about, more than other mothers have to talk about with their children. When I am upset, she knows how to make me smile. So I love to be around her, and I even love how similar we are.

My relationship with my mother is one of the most complicated things in my life. She is my biggest fan and my harshest critic. I am proud because looking at her is like looking in a mirror.