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EXAMINING DESIRE: MEANINGS, MEASUREMENTS, AND MUSINGS

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Abstract

Within the space known as desire, as we move beyond one-dimensional conceptualizations we find a vast range of experience. Through the application of selected philosophical and psychological concepts with writings on desire by six Canadian women writers, this interdisciplinary discussion reveals the idiosyncratic nature of desire as it varies over time and experience. To this end, desire's complexity is brought to the foreground and its fluid, layered, and multi-dimensional quality is confirmed. More specifically, the discussion examines desire as it carries traces of its history to future places in time, as it finds ways to manifest, despite attempts to contain its expression. Likewise, desire shapes from individual reflections of knowledge, which represent intra-subjectively meaningful experiences. The trajectory of desire, as it develops from early experiences of trauma, as well as in contradiction to rational beliefs, is also discussed. Lastly, the author explores her own desires, which have evolved from early childhood experiences and perceived misconnections with intended objects of affections.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT…… 2
TABLE OF CONTENTS…… 3
EXAMINING DESIRE: MEANINGS, MEASUREMENTS, AND MUSINGS…… 4
PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT…….. 6
FUSING PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXTS WITH CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE…. 12
MEASURING DESIRE…….. 13
Desire as Reflex…… 14
THE MEANING OF DESIRE…… 17
MUSINGS ON DESIRE……. 20
DESIRE AND TRAUMA EFFECTS……. 26
DESIRE THROUGH A SELF-REFLECTING LENS……... 33
CONCLUSION……... 41
REFERENCES…… 42
NOTES…… 45

Examining Desire:

Meanings, Measurements, and Musings

At this point in time in our mass media-driven world, which has been co-opted by the immediacy of cyberspace, the very idea of desire evokes one-dimensional, sexed-up images of contrived and clichéd passion. Yet in actuality, within the space known as desire, there lies a vast range of experience (Brand, 1999). Beyond the first-glance, predictable phenomenon that desire has become, its nucleus continues to hold faith, ferocity, and a driving impulse to resolve tension. Similarly, the urge to diminish distance, move closer to the satiation of needs, and make sense of relentless inclinations is firmly embedded within the core layers of desire. Discovering beauty, particularly amidst emotional pain, as well as the re-imagination and re-assembly of missed or severed connections also reflect desire's manifestations. In this way, to each individual, desire is a catalyst for movement, journey, and history.

The means used to understand desire are, likewise, vast and include writing, reading, and translation, which, in essence, are significant acts of desire (Brand, 1999). More specifically, the act of writing involves emotional risk, a willingness to surrender to a sometimes-vulnerable place, and a crossing of boundaries into another person's distinctive space. Both writers and artists seek to uncover the meaning of desire through the creative exploration of our human sensibilities. Similarly, philosophers, who developed "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, in Bearn, 2000, p.443), ponder its significance within humanity in the context of worldviews, while psychologists seek to define its capacity within the conscious and unconscious psyche.

Through the application of selected philosophical and psychological concepts with writings on desire by six Canadian women writers, the task of my interdisciplinary discovery is

to examine the complexities of desire through an exploration of its fluid, multi-dimensional, and layered qualities. Within the echelons of this discovery, the idiosyncratic nature of desire, which shapes over time and experience, is revealed. Specifically, one strand of this inquiry examines Burnard's (1999) belief that desire is an experience so profound in nature that it coincides with an impulse to protect its innermost and intimate details. Each experience of desire, she believes, is distinct and unique, "best born new, each time, in each new body" as it "has nothing to say across the divide that separates one generation from another" (p.94). Conversely, this leads to an examination of Brand's (1999) belief that desire indeed interweaves with cultural and generational history. The knowledge of this history, she argues, is what brings desire to consciousness.

A further strand of my inquiry examines Musgrave's (1999) narrative on the link between desire and history, particularly as desire acted upon without boundaries shapes, initially, into an addictive-like impulse and, across time, a distant impulse. In a similar context, I explore Crozier's (1999) theory that desire carries traces of its history to future places in time. That is, time, place, distance, and experience influence the meaning of desire. As well, I discuss Mootoo's (1999) experience with same-sex desire as it emerges across time and within the context of culture, despite attempts to contain its expression.

One final strand of my inquiry discusses Lau's (1999) profound insight into desire and its propensity to enmesh with early familial influences, traumatic experiences such as prostitution, power and control and, paradoxically, self-sabotaging impulses. Lastly, I analyze desire from a self-reflecting lens. Here I conclude that desire manifests and finds place and altered trajectory from childhood experiences and intra-subjective interpretations, which further confirm its fluid quality. However, I begin with a brief history of the philosophical context, as these roots

continue to push forward and find place in contemporary feminist writing on desire.

Philosophical Context

As a central figure in post-structuralism and one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, Gilles Deleuze's (1925–1995) desire theory casts doubt on the validity of Western conceptualizations of desire, which he argues are sated with three *maledictions*: A sense of lack every time desire emerges, hope for discharges (of pleasure), and the pursuit of the impossible *jouissance* (joy or pleasure, especially sexual pleasure) (Deleuze, 1973). Conversely, lack, according to Deleuze, is linked to interest, which forms from rational, social influences, whereas desire forms from irrational sources and is always positive (Smith, 2007). He goes further, arguing that "underneath all reason lies delirium and drift"; therefore, desire exists within "all kinds of libidinal-unconscious flows that constitute the delirium of this society" (p.75).

In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze & Guattari (2004) further clarify the parameters of desire within the context of society, theorizing that subjectivity emerges from *desiring machines*; that is, through the course of universal history, successive *mega-machines* or social forms "organize, canalize, and repress desire" (Schuster, 2009, p.4). Therefore, within the context of capitalist society, subjective desire builds from unconscious drives.

At this juncture, Deleuze (1973) deviates from Freudian theory, which delineates desire as, among other occurrences, a "disagreeable tension" (p.96) rooted in hedonistic intentions. As well, if desire is tension, it follows that a discharge (pleasure) is necessary so as to induce calm until desire is again recharged. Alternatively, Deleuze proposes a circular theory where, foremost, desire is defined as "a function of a field of transcendence" and as movement toward Other (p.101). *Other*, to Deleuze, is the "expression of a possible world" (Reynolds, 2008, p.74),

or movement beyond existing states.

Further drawing from Plato's method in *Phaedo* (i.e., a cyclical method), Deleuze (1973) constructs a second arc in the circle, which is fundamentally aimed at Other. Ironically, however, he argues that fulfillment is unattainable because of desire's *pseudo-immanence* quality. In other words, fulfillment is a mere *illusion of satiation* obscured by a temporary state of pleasure. Pleasure, then, serves to calm desires. Lastly, the function of the third arc is to pursue the impossible need to reaffirm and move toward transcendence, or beyond the cycle (Deleuze, 1973).

Comparably, retracing desire theory further back in history, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a German philosopher widely known for his synthesis of early modern philosophies of rationalism and empiricism, espouses a more logical account. Human autonomy is prominent in his philosophies of pure reason, practical reason, and the power of judgment, and provides foundation for his argument for the structural nature of all human experience. In this sense, scientific knowledge, morality, and religious belief are "mutually consistent" because each is founded in the nature and structure of human autonomy (Stanford Encyclopedia, 2010, ¶ 1). Kant's desire theory is firmly embedded within this logic.

Accordingly, Kant believes our rational nature leads us toward an end goal; therefore, the causes of our actions are never our desires or impulses. Instead, when we act to gratify a desire we choose to act on a maxim, or one of two principles: The *hypothetical imperative* (a principle of rationality, which prescribes actions to satisfy a material desire) or the *categorical imperative* (an unconditional principle, which prescribes how to act, regardless of the goal or desire, i.e., moral laws applied to everyone). Actions toward material goals are not freely taken; instead, they are intentional actions taken to satisfy a desire that is not within one's control. Yet we sometimes

fail in this regard because our capacity to rationally shape our desires is limited.

Importantly, within Kant's philosophy of human autonomy desire assumes an additional representative function whereby sexual desire is "nothing more than an animal inclination" (Papadaki, 2007, p.10). More specifically, that a man's desire for a woman can never be attributed to her true characteristics; rather, her sex is the object of his desire as sex represents the satiation of desire. In this sense, desire, "by means of its representations, is the actuality of the objects of those representations" (Smith, 2007, p.75). This means "[i]n its lower form, the products of desire are fantasies and superstitions; but in its higher form (the will), the products of desire are acts of freedom under moral law…" (p.75).

Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), known as the most systematic of the post-Kantian idealists, (Stanford Encyclopedia, 2010), counters Kant's belief in the human capacity for rational thought. Instead, Hegel argues that the function of desire is to shape interactions between self, other, and the world. In this sense, the Hegelian view of desire is self-consciousness returned from otherness; it is "the unity of the I within itself" (Houlgate, 1994, p.13), while *otherness* refers to the separation between self and another. Therefore, when we negate the other we resolve separation and "affirm ourselves" (Kain, 2005, p.60).

Although Hegel argued that desire indeed seeks to negate the object, its function is not to fill a void within the subject; rather, it is to "confirm and enhance the subject's sense of self" (Houlgate, 1994, p.13). Therefore, desire is the movement of consciousness, not the absence of emptiness. Desire, then, is intrinsically contradictory because it needs the other so that it can enjoy itself *alone*. Yet once satisfied, self-consciousness cannot remain in a state of self-certainty; instead it must again seek out new objects of desire to consume. In this way, as Judith Butler observes, desire "affirms *itself as an impossible project*" (p.14).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), an Austrian-born Jewish philosopher noted as one of the founders of phenomenology, argues that experience is the source of all knowledge (New World Encyclopedia, 2008). From a Husserlian perspective, phenomenology is a "self-grounding discipline built upon rigorous self-examination" (¶ 12). Likewise, to Husserl, unlike objective phenomena, which lack intentionality, the consciousness is always intentional. Accordingly, he developed phenomenology as a study of consciousness, inseparable from the social, political, cultural, and historical environments. It follows then, that from an ontological and phenomenological sense, desire, which emerges as a form of consciousness, is always intentional. Furthermore, intentionality, or direction toward an object, including the awakenings of emotions and desires, emerges from consciousness from a position of background or nearer to the pure ego; therefore, the ego plays an active role in desire fulfillment in the sense that desire originates from the phenomenological stream of consciousness (Kockelman, 1994).

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist undoubtedly influenced by Freud, configured his *Desire is the Desire of Other* theory from his *Mirror Stage* developmental conceptualization of identity. At the outset, Lacan's theory diverts from the above-mentioned theories in his assertion that human desire for others is not a universal truth (Sharpe, 2005). Instead, Lacan contends that, notwithstanding innate biological needs, children learn how and what to desire. Yet as the child attempts to satisfy these needs s/he becomes caught up in the dialectic of her/his exchanges with others. Likewise, as the sense of self (*the Mirror Stage*, a permanent structure of subjectivity) develops from the identification with the images of others, Lacan theorizes that we desire either directly, through another, or others. In this way, an object may become more desirable for individuals when there is a perception that others desire it. Moreover, when an individual's biological needs become inseparable or subordinated to

the demand for recognition and love from others the *decentring* of desire becomes evident. This notion has bearing on Lacan's alternative understanding of game theory. Specifically, that we alter our decisions regarding wants and desires in order to affect and be affected by the decisions of others (Sharpe, 2005). As well, independent of the maneuvers of a subject, the logic of the unconscious reflects the "hidden consequence of individual choice" (Nobus & Quinn, 2005, p.168) and compels us to act on decentred desire.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian physician trained in neurology, is widely known as the father of psychoanalysis. His theories brought a new frame of reference for understanding human psychological development and therapeutic interventions for abnormal psychiatric conditions. Numerous Freudian themes continue to have pervasive influence in the twenty-first century, including dreams, the unconscious, infantile sexuality, ego defense mechanisms, and his tripartite theory of the mind's structure (Thornton, 2010).

Freud's desire theory is premised on his theories of dreams and the unconscious; that is, a dream is a fulfillment of a wish (a desire). Likewise, he draws on this dream theory to refine his theory of the psychic apparatus, which defines desire as *cathexix*, or a concentration of emotional energy on an object. Accordingly, desire is only satisfied once; therefore, a subsequent manifestation of desire is merely an impulse that seeks to reestablish the image of a lost object, sometimes to the point of (psychotic) hallucination. Dreams, from this premise, serve the purpose of expressing the attainment of desires with the consent and control of the preconsciousness (Delaroche, n.d.).

One additional centralizing assertion of Freud's theory is that gender is invariably linked to sexuality; therefore, gender, desire, sexual identity, and personality develop in conjunction with biological sex and mature heterosexuality.[1] As well, gender fuses into one multi-faceted

expression of core identity (male or female), including gender roles (attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and values considered normative for a particular culture) and sexual orientation (preference and desire for sexual partners), which are indistinguishable from each other (Shields & Eyssell, 2002).

Freud's *Oedipus* narrative is also significant to his desire theory as it identifies the development of gender identity as a masculine process whereby a boy assumes his father as his ideal and his mother as his possession. As such, Freud claimed that gender identity develops in response to the *Oedipal Complex* and fear of castration as the boy who represses his desire for his mother possesses her by vicariously identifying with his father (Rocchi, 2009). By contrast, a girl's penis envy drives her to transform this impulse into a desire to be impregnated by her father, even though she fears his physical invasion. In response, she identifies with her mother and assumes the lifelong inferiority of a woman (Shields & Eyssell, 2002). However, framed from a position of male superiority and heterosexual desire, this theory has generated much criticism and debate. For example, Judith Butler (1990), an American post-structuralist philosopher, boldly challenges many of Freud's theories. Foremost, she disagrees with his position that gender identity is a desired event or accomplishment, arguing instead that it is never achieved; rather, one's gender identity reflects the imaginary and the "phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitation" (Rocchi, 2009, p.174). Siding with Lacan, she further theorizes that gender identity and desire are temporal constructs; they reflect learned but variable behavior over time, expressed in thought, language, and the body.

Butler (1990) also criticizes Freudian-influenced heterosexual assumptions, instead expounding a counter position, beginning with a deconstruction of binary gender categorizations. As such, she tears down Freud's theory, which links male and female sexual identity as the

source of gender (masculine or feminine), particularly because it also infers a polarized desire toward the other gender. Alternatively, in stark contrast, Butler proposes a gender continuum, which accounts for the development of gender and the expression of sexuality and desire beyond biological factors. Similarly, she argues that gender and desire develop in fluid contexts, which means the expression of each is contingent on cultural influences and idiosyncratic experiences. In this sense, gender and desire are potentially impermanent.

Fusing Philosophical Contexts With Contemporary Experience

The foregoing philosophical theories have significant bearing on contemporary Canadian women writers in several ways. First, prominent historical themes continue to emerge in contemporary contexts; for example, as Deleuze theorized, desire continues to be influenced by *mega-machine* (societal) forms, within the context of universal history. Likewise, subjective and collective forms of desire, as influenced through a vast array of contemporary media, continue to function through the Western maledictions of lack, pleasure, and the pursuit of Other.

Kant's rational theory also continues to resonate in at least two regards: First, material desires predictably lack control, in fact they sometimes reflect addictive impulses. Second, desire has a representative nature, particularly as an infinite range of media-generated images continue to inundate the cultural psyche of Western society. Similarly, amidst this backdrop, the Hegelian assertion that desire is oftentimes irrational (i.e., shaped by interactions between self, others, and the world), remains challenging to refute.

Conversely, Husserl's theory that desire assumes a phenomenological quality (i.e., that knowledge or consciousness of self is intentional and, therefore, so is desire), continues to ring true, at least in a Lacanian sense. In other words, desire is not universal; rather, it is idiosyncratic and variable between individual experiences. Finally, although Freud's theories of desire, gender

identity, and sexuality continue to influence mainstream psychology, paradoxically, feminists like Judith Butler and other experts in their respective fields now draw from his work to build foundation for their own counter positions. Consequently, across the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, sociology, cultural and equity studies and others, new theories are emerging to account for the fluid and culturally-contingent nature of desire, sexuality, and gender identity. This intersectionality is explored further below.

Measuring Desire

The measurement of desire, as determined by its capacity, depth, and ability to resonate within time and space, is contingent on *who* is measuring its parameters; that is, whether the inquiry is initiated by psychologists, philosophers, artists, writers, or ordinary and often-love struck individuals. In general, there are two modes of desires: Acquired desires, which vary across individuals, and natural desires, which are both pervasive and inherent to the human experience (M. Adler, 1991). For example, songwriters Bruce Springsteen and Patti Smith (2006) delve into the most pervasive and accessible nature of desire (desire as longing) in the timeless lyrics of *Because the Night:*

> Take me now baby here as I am
> Pull me close, try to understand
> Desire is hunger is the fire I breathe
> Love is a banquet on which we feed
>
> Come on now try to understand
> The way I feel when I'm in your hands
> Take my hand come undercover
> They can't hurt you now, can't hurt you now

Because the night belongs to lovers

Because the night belongs to us… (p.101)

This kind of *lover's desire* is ubiquitously familiar; it speaks to the acquisitive nature of desire, where we are driven by our impulses, compelled to satisfy them and find momentarily relief for the pangs of longing (M. Adler, 1991). It also reflects a lack of presence, an empty space, with pleasure as its units of measure. However, as elaborated below, desire is clearly embedded in more intricate layers of complexity.

Desire as Reflex

The human desire for sexual pleasure is attributed to a reflex response intrinsic to our genetic system, which serves to preserve our species rather than our intra-subjective impulses. Much like our taste receptors that register pleasure when we eat certain foods and encourage us to take in the nourishment we need to survive, the pleasure of sexual touch urges the human body to reproduce and propagate its genes into future generations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In this sense, human attraction is a reflex response based on physical reactivity, essentially, an adherence to our genetic programming. Generally, we follow these genetically-programmed impulses, taking the pleasure they elicit; however, if we do not exert some control over our desires, other goals become blocked. In contemporary society, this has become problematic in some cases where individuals prioritize spontaneous impulses at the expense of other desires. Blindly adhering to genetic and social instructions coincides with a lack of control of consciousness and a risk of the seductive draw of the impersonal forces of desires. For example, the individual with no bounds on desires for alcohol, food, or sex becomes hostage to these excesses, unable to direct his or her own psychic energy. As the desire-control balance stretches

in favour of cravings and impulses, desires risk developing into addictions. The addictive person is then vulnerable to the exploitation of others (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

In *Junkie Libido* (1999) poet-novelist Susan Musgrave traces the early underpinnings of her own intimate history with irresistible and non-discriminating dalliances with desire back to her teen years. She is brutally honest, admitting she was at the mercy of these desires, unable, or unwilling to resist their drug-like hold on her.

Interestingly, Musgrave's story supports Irvine's (2006, p.11) assertion that "a single rogue desire can trample the plans we had for our lives and thereby alter our destinies." Without intervention, Musgrave's first exploration with desire led to a desire-compulsion; that is, a perpetual cycle of *chasing desire*, which led to relationships with convicted criminals and drug addicts, and an unsettled lifestyle that coincides with such choices.

Musgrave (1999), who grew up on Vancouver Island in the 1960s, confesses her desire-addiction was first sparked when she was just fourteen years old. Disregarding advice from guidance counsellors to *save herself* for the *right man*, she lost her virginity to a brown-eyed boy who, she says, "wormed, poked, prodded, stabbed, tore, thrust and otherwise negotiated his way inside the place I didn't know I had" (p.24). After the awkward sexual fumbling, he kissed her and bicycled her home. Throughout that summer she and her hormone-raged teen lover consumed each other, "making love in forests and fields, in broom closets…on railway tracks… in Chinatown back alleys…" (p. 25). She writes,

> When I had my first orgasm I thought sex had driven me insane, that I was going to drown in the rogue wave of terrible pleasure that rolled over my body and pulled me down in a libidinous undertow. I didn't care. Sex was worth dying for, not just once but over and over. (p. 25-26)

However, the all-consuming nature of Musgrave's desire was not without complications. She discovered that what she really desired was *to be* desired. The chronic cycling of the pursuit, capture, and conquest of desire led to a loss of innocence and a fear for the inevitable end of pleasure. Ultimately, when the passion turned to depression, she sought her next desire fix. She went from man to man, finding that as she got older she was less discriminating, admitting she was an attraction addict, and when she needed a quick fix she stopped being selective; any man was the right man, as long as he could jump start her *junkie libido*.

As Musgrave (1999) recounts her experience with her first husband, a trial lawyer, the irrational nature of her desire becomes starkly evident. At some point in her marriage she rejected the "cool, dependable fires of attachment" (p. 32) by hooking up with one of her husband's drug smuggling defendants. Inexplicably, she recalls how she was attracted to his "shadowy eyes" (p.34), which, years later, she interpreted as a desire to connect with the dark emptiness within herself.

Life with her drug-smuggler lover was chaotic and self-defeating. Even when he betrayed her with a would-be poet, she remained by his side; the infidelity, it seemed, only further ignited her desire to be with him. Desire, concludes Musgrave (1999), has served to keep her "in the wind and on fire, burning wild, out of control, and in need of a search party to find my own self after a night in bed with some – in retrospect – wholly insignificant other" (p.40). In this sense, she believes, desire is suffering, and the more suffering, the greater the desire.

In 1986 Musgrave married her second husband, Stephen Reid, author, notorious bank robber, and self-confessed heroin addict (Musgrave, 2011a). More than a dozen years have passed since her writing on desire and her newest collection of poetry, *Origami Dove*, reveals how, across time, desire, when consistently paired with emotional suffering, becomes crushed by

the gravity of chronic disappointment. In *Conjugal Visit* a wearier Musgrave (2011b) writes,

> Nothing
> out of the ordinary, only the same
> forgivable habit. I say *nothing*
> when you ask what's the matter
> later, and then I start weeping
> I can't help it. I can't
> stop. (p.6)

Clearly, desire can be measured by its impact on relationships and life experiences. For Musgrave, the compulsive and unstoppable nature of her desire has, across the years, led to recurring frustration. It also confirms that the human capacity to tolerate chronic and sustained desire-drama is not without limits. Instead, when desires cannot be met, pain emerges from the gaping hole of defeat and dissatisfaction. In the end, rather than feeling satisfied and inspired, the sober realization that we have either longed for the *wrong* desire or cannot satiate our desires leaves us feeling deprived and depleted (M. Adler, 1991).

The Meaning of Desire

According to Russell (1930), the roots of desire can be traced to individual needs for power or, more specifically, "some kind of power forms the normal and legitimate aim of every person whose natural desires are not atrophied" (p.181). The type of power we seek is contingent on individual desires. For example, just as one individual desires power over the actions of others, another desires power over the thoughts of others, while others desire power over their own emotions. Russell believes the only person indifferent to power is the person who is wholly indifferent to people in general. As such, the individual desire for power is generally acceptable

as communities are built on collective efforts of desire-driven individuals.

Conversely, Ontario-based novelist Bonnie Burnard (1999, p.89) takes a counter position, arguing that "intimacy is the place where desire thrives." As such, she is reluctant to reflect on desire as, being like experiences of childbirth, cancer, or war, unless there is direct engagement, it is difficult to comprehend in any meaningful way. In line with Russell's reasoning, this could be interpreted as a desire for power over one's own emotions; however, Burnard leans toward a more protective depiction of the power of desire. As well, she believes talk *kills* desire, at least in terms of desires of the heart, and separation, like breathing and swallowing, must endure between the two. When desire is examined insistently, she argues, it surrenders to words and becomes *idea* rather than experience. Talk of desire, she further contends, leads to badgering, coaxing, and the pursuit of control even though desire has its own language and our attempts to master it inevitably fail miserably.

Burnard (1999) further observes that the women she knows rarely speak of desire. Occasionally, the topic surfaces, rising "obliquely and often with soft laughter folded in for protection" (p.100) as if there is a mutual understanding that the sacred value of desire must be defended through silence. Alongside this hushed recognition, she believes, is a general understanding that desire is true for all women and this brings her a sense of reassurance that intimacy will be honored and preserved.

Burnard's perspective is clearly valid; however, I disagree with the notion that desire must be sheltered with silence. This is unnecessarily protective because intuitive individuals *read* desire in others; its vibrant resonance is unmistakable, particularly in the case of intimate desires: When attraction-desire floats into the room every intuitive person knows. True desire is not always easily contained; similarly, unspoken desire does not always protect or conceal its

appetitive, large-looming power and presence. Lorna Crozier (1999), a Saskatchewan-born poet, agrees. Upon reflection of her own desires across the years, she writes, "[d]esire is both here and there, both inside and outside my body" and "…desire has a past, chapters in life, a ghostly history" (p.66). Desire, even when unspoken, leaves traces of memory on the heart and in the body that can be re-imagined, reignited, or revisited at any given moment. Desire is like a phantom as its presence leaves an indelible and looming presence in some long-lasting form. Crozier (1999) describes it eloquently:

> Desire is a restless ghost. It taps on our windows with the small knuckles of the rain, keeps us awake all hours of the night, arriving in shapes we least expect the way a poem sometimes comes out of longing. (p.74)

On the other hand, Crozier (1999) emphasizes another facet of desire where silence indeed seems appropriate: As a curious teenager, learning to kiss with a childhood friend in the basement, taking turns in the roles of *man* and *woman*, then reversing. Now some forty years later she rarely sees her friend, yet when they reunite lingering traces of shame and guilt prevent them from talking about their shared secret; they have no need to speak of the touching *down-there* and the desperate adolescent need to unlock the secrets of sex and desire. This could not be spoken of now that so much distance had passed; they had each moved on and had no inclination to revisit clumsy and curious youthful explorations.

"There is so much silence surrounding desire,
yet the mouth is the first part of the body to act on what it wants."
(Crozier, 1999, p. 67)

Musings on Desire

In *Subjects of Desire* Judith Butler (1987) builds from the work of Hegel to explore the relationship between desire, recognition, and Other (Other, in the Hegelian sense, as mentioned above, refers to an element of self-consciousness that aims to resolve the separateness between self and another). This leads to further inquiries: What kind of journey is desire that its direction is so deceptive? What kind of vehicle is desire? Does it have other stops before it reaches its mortal destination? Butler concludes that desire is an "abstract human longing that is challenged throughout its travels" (p.xix) She elaborates this point further by drawing from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), speculating that the subject's (the individual's) desire is formed by its philosophical intentions: The subject wants to know itself and within the boundary of self, the external world. In other words, the subject seeks to reveal its sense of Otherness as a *reflection* of itself, not simply to integrate the world but to externalize and embolden the borders of itself; its aim is to reveal to the world that which lies within awaiting self-discovery.

However, described as "immediate, arbitrary, purposeless, and animal" (Butler, 1987, p. 1), desire, in philosophical terms, has been deemed as something to move beyond, if not for any other reason, because it weakens philosophy's stance of indifference and dispassion, which has shaped philosophical thinking. Desire, within philosophical realms, is also considered a treacherous undertaking given its narrow, focused, and engaged characteristics and its tendency to blur lucid vision. Yet, despite the fact that Western thought has traditionally harbored skepticism toward philosophical ponderings about desire, in the Hegelian spirit, there is a profound need to explore the relentless human attempts to become self-sufficient, overcome external differences, and connect to these differences, which eventually emerge as features within oneself.

Currently based in Toronto, Shani Mootoo, a writer and visual artist of Trinidadian descent, personifies how desire shapes from multiple influences, including social environments and innate inclinations. Her story responds to Butler's three central questions about desire. First, she describes how her own desire journey was initially deceptive because she was raised in a culture where same-sex relationships were not supported; even as a child, she had no reference point for her emerging desires.

Mootoo's desire journey is also multi-faceted, involving experiences of family and social life, Canadian and Trinidadian culture, and the coinciding development of creative expression. Just as Butler concluded, for Mootoo, getting to the truth of her desire has been a complex and challenging journey, eloquently documented though much of her work. For example, in *Photo Parentheses* (1999) Mootoo shares a memory of herself as a five-year old child wearing a frilly dress when she would have preferred to wear a sailor suit. She highlights this memory as one of the first in her awareness that she "did not fit her body well" (p.108). Although she had been taught to act and dress like a typical girl, she was certain that in time it would be revealed that she was actually a boy. She also recalls from the photo that she had "already been touched" by one of her father's card-playing friends (p.109), although she does not specifically elaborate on whether this experience played into her pressing desire to break free from her own body; that is, whether the sexual violation of her body further affirmed her belief that she was trapped in the *wrong* body.

Mootoo (1999) also recalls a time when she was six-years old, attending an all-girls school in Trinidad, and participating in a play with older girls from the local secondary school. Mootoo played the part of a tin soldier, which meant she dressed as a boy. She recalls observing the two lead girls in the play, one playing a girl, the other a boy, as they kissed during rehearsal.

She clearly remembers her self-contained excitement at the thought of acting as a boy while kissing a girl: Her "tummy quivered" and her "thighs tickled inexplicably" (Mootoo, 1999, p.111) as, from the sidelines, she so desperately wished she were a boy so she could experience this excitement in real-time.

Reflecting further upon her childhood, Mootoo (1999) portrays her family life as oftentimes chaotic and confused. Her father, a charismatic public figure, had frequent affairs and Mootoo interpreted his behavior as a betrayal to the family. In response, Mootoo's mother sought solace and advice from her as she was the oldest child. Consequently, Mootoo perceived her mother as weak, vulnerable, and unattractive to her father. She saw her mother as secondary to her father, as she let her own dreams dwindle and die, all the while submissively waiting for him as he went about with his life. As a result, Mootoo concluded that "to be a man was to do" and to be a woman was "to be done unto" (p.114); therefore, she resolved to never live in the shadows of a man.

When Mootoo (1999) was fifteen years old a neighborhood boy confessed his love for her. Certainly, she enjoyed the friendship but when he tried to kiss her, she felt annoyed as, in her mind, he had ruptured the friendship. She later realized her desire was to be *like him*, not desired *by him*. It was not until some years later when she returned home from university studies in Canada that an opportunity for the *open expression* of her desires presented itself through a mutual attraction with a Spanish-Moroccan woman. Although the woman was married to a Trinidadian husband, the two became fast friends, which led Mootoo to want more. This unfolded in one occasion when they were alone in the garden and the woman initiated the unraveling of their unspoken desire. After that day they met secretly for a year, until Mootoo

could no longer tolerate living a life of secrecy. Determined to live life to its fullest, she returned to Canada where she was free to engage in relationships with other women.

Early on in her new life Mootoo (1999) questioned where her desire for women came from. Was it the abuse? Was it her father's infidelity and an impulse to retaliate for the betrayal of her mother? In recent years, she has cast off this probe for the "finer details, the shapes and patterns" of her desire (p.124) as now she no longer carries the burden of hushed secrets of desire. Instead, the desires that lie within her have been discovered and shared.

Mootoo's story reinforces a number of Butler's Hegelian-influenced thoughts on desire. First, when Mootoo was younger, she wanted to know her desires, within the boundary of *herself*. She tried to understand why she felt like she was in the *wrong body*. She was also profoundly aware of her longing to explore her desires with other girls and, later, women, but was inhibited by her upbringing. As if testing the external boundaries of her desires, she sought to reveal this part of herself, at first through secret fantasies of kissing girls. Eventually, with encouragement from the Spanish-Moroccan woman, she was able to express and explore her true desires. In a Hegelian sense, Mootoo is now finally in a place where her sense of self and her desire for women have merged into one self-proclaimed identity. Presently, her complex desire journey has led her to a place of acceptance, inner peace, and confirmation that she indeed is in the *right* body.

Meanwhile, additional layers of desire further reveal its complexity. For example, within desire, self-consciousness ever-presently coincides. Self-consciousness, according to Hegel, *is* desire. In other words, desire symbolizes the *reflexivity* of consciousness, the necessity that it become Other to itself in order to know itself (Butler, 1987). In this sense, desire is inexorably connected with the quest for self-knowledge, reflection, and the pursuit of identity in what seems

to be distantly familiar. Concurrently, each subject *is* its travels and *is* every place it discovers. To this end, desires will be satisfied when a relation to something external to consciousness is discovered within oneself. Particularly, when the "discovery of substance as subject" and the "experience of the world as everywhere confirming the subject's sense of imminent metaphysical place", desire will be satisfied (Butler, 1987, p.9). Desires will remain unsatisfied when there is an "ontological rupture", that is, a sense of being in a place where external dissonance is irreconcilable (p.8).

Reflected another way, Jean Hyppolite, a French philosopher and supporter of Hegel, argues that desire, in the human experience, is the power of the negative (Butler, 1987). Human desire reveals the subject's relationship to that which is *not* itself; that is, to difference, to the strange, the new and unfamiliar, the absent, awaited, the lost and the hollow spaces. Following this deduction, desires are satisfied when the "transformation of difference into identity" (p.9) is achieved. In other words, when the strange becomes familiar, when the awaited arrives, when the lost re-emergences, when resolution emerges. In this sense, desire is "something to be labored and worked through" (p.9).

In *Arriving at Desire* (1999) Dionne Brand, a Caribbean-born poet-novelist, traces the roots of her desires back to her childhood when a book about the Haitian revolution roused her interest. The book, *The Black Napoleon*, which chronicles the Toussaint L'Ouverture-led uprising against the French, was old and weathered and hidden at the bottom of a drawer by her grandmother, its hidden nature making it all the more intriguing. Brand was mesmerized by this history, which was unfamiliar to her as she did not know about slavery at the time. To her, the book represented a "mirror and an ocean" (p.132) as there was something familiar about the people reflected within her. It was also expansive in the sense that the pain of the people was

deep and sustained, whereas in her childhood experience, pain had only been quick and transient. In a strange but connected way, she felt inhabited by the revolution and its profound terror. As a result, she felt she had lost her innocence. After gaining this knowledge, a clear divide emerged between the time before knowing its contents and the present; she became acutely aware of this transformation, which brought both pleasure (a satisfied sense of knowing) and distress (a loss of innocence that could never be returned).

A second book, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence, also strongly influenced Brand, even though she only read it once at about the age of twelve. Covering the book with brown paper, she and her friends read it quickly and surreptitiously as they somehow knew they were accessing secrets. Its words made her feel older and worldly; its raw descriptions made her feel as if she had been "let into another skin, a woman's, a man's, a country's" (Brand, 1999, p.134). Yet she also felt burdened, much like knowing something she should not. She was a different girl after reading it.

Brand (1999) confesses that these two books ignited an uncontrollable hunger within her, which led to "all the books that followed" (p.136). Books, she surmises, "leave gestures in the body", a "certain way of moving, of turning, a certain closing of the eyes, a way of leaving hesitations" (p.137). What is most fascinating to Brand is the elusive yet seductive ability of books to imprint profound desires within the body. Ironically, although she has remembered and re-imagined each of these books over the years, she confesses, she cannot recite a single line. Yet clearly, the ability of books to jolt, impress, and draw out historical memories by bringing together conscious and unconscious aspects of experience goes beyond mere words.

Brand's story embodies Hegel's notion that desire *is* self-consciousness (Butler, 1987). As Brand (1999) devoured the words on the pages, they stirred something within her: She

became acutely aware that she was uncovering knowledge, which, strangely, was already part of her and this compelled her to seek further. In *The Black Napoleon* she recognized the pain, the passion, the terror as it was already within her. She devoured the book, seeking a deeper connection to her identity through this history, intuitively knowing it would be revealed in these pages. She found that, just as Hegel predicted, each subject *is* its travels and *is* every place it discovers (Butler, 1987). Similarly, as Hegel anticipated, Brand found desire in the power of the negative. Something within her was missing; yet a longing was satiated within the pages of these books. Brand's desire was to resolve the missing pieces of her identity and history, as revealed in her connection to *The Black Napoleon*, and her burgeoning sexuality, as articulated in *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* Here, Hegel's assertion is confirmed: Human desire reveals the subject's relationship to that which is not itself, to difference. For Brand (1999), these two books exposed missing connections in terms of cultural history and knowledge of desire and sexuality. After reading these works, Brand transformed these differences into her identity. It is of no surprise, then, that once these strange and distant stories became familiar to Brand she felt resolution as awaiting desires had been satisfied.

Desire and Trauma Effects

Predictably, traumatic events coincide with variable degrees of psychological harm and suffering (Herman, 1997). Inasmuch as one single devastating experience can become the trigger point for complicated emotional effects, including the manifestation of a vast array of post-traumatic responses, chronic and recurring abuse and trauma can induce a range of subtle to devastating psychological disorders. Despite the deeper understanding of the link between trauma and psychological disorders commonly diagnosed in women, the role and manifestation of the effects of victimization within individual lives remains unresolved. This, despite the fact

that victims continue to challenge the therapeutic community to help reconstruct fragments of memory and history and shed light on the meaning of present symptoms with past experiences. This is no easy feat, as Herman (1997) emphasizes, "[t]o study psychological trauma is to come face to face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and the capacity for evil in human nature" (p.7).

Freud, nonetheless, ventured to tread into this daunting territory. For example, in *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896) he traced back the presenting symptoms of his female patients to trauma resulting from sexual abuse, sexual assault, and incest (Herman, 1997). His early case studies indicated that diagnoses of hysteria (i.e., exhibiting symptoms of emotional disturbance and/or psychosomatic complaints) in women were linked to one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience. However, just one year later he retracted his theory of the origins of hysteria, concerned for the possible social fallout from his controversial ideas. That is, at the time, hysteria was common among women, and if their stories were true, then "perverted acts against childhood" (p.14) were prevalent among both the proletariat of Paris and the bourgeois families of Vienna. Consequently, Freud turned away from his female patients, which is captured in the well-known case of his patient referred to as *Dora.* Dora was exhibiting symptoms of hysteria and although Freud accepted Dora's experiences of sexual exploitation by her father and his friends, he refused to validate her feelings of humiliation and outrage. Instead, Freud insisted on exploring Dora's feelings of erotic excitement, implying the exploitation somehow satisfied her desires. In turn, the doctor-patient relationship became emotionally contentious and Dora broke off the sessions, which Freud viewed as revenge. This experience later became the catalyst for Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, or as Lacan interpreted it, the launch point of a "science of a new object, the unconscious" (Althusser, 1996, p.17). Likewise, as psychoanalysis possessed a

theory and a method, it would serve as a powerful method of therapeutic practice; that is, as a means to uncover the contents of the unconscious (Althusser, 1996).

Despite the value of psychoanalysis in contemporary society, recurrently, a lack of consideration for the victims of sexual exploitation has generated a definitive reverberation: Where no blood has been shed, so to speak, victims' wounds are often discounted or minimized. As explained by Haaken (1996, p.1086), "[t]here is a liberatory aspect to the implicit recognition here that feminine spaces are often receptacles for male conflict. Men often do act out their own frustrated longings and displaced rage through women." Likewise, the hierarchy of male privilege and control assumes that female victims of abuse will tolerate mistreatment as part of their subordinate lot in life.

In order to move past the abuse, as part of the therapeutic process, therapists help women reclaim a sense of integrity and entitlement through the re-projection of powerful feelings back to the abuser. Yet, within this space, there is a narrow parameter for the woman to integrate unresolved feelings or destructive impulses into a positive sense of self (Haaken, 1996).

The story of Evelyn Lau, a Vancouver-based poet and novelist, exemplifies one trajectory of male-inflicted trauma, its impact on desire, and Lau's efforts to recover through writing and therapy. Lau is best known for her work *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* (1989), which chronicles her teen years in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a once-vibrant urban hub now plagued with drug-related crime and social ills, as she tried to blend in with the concrete decay, living and working amongst prostitutes "with their twisted faces stitching a jagged path down the sidewalk, the groups of dealers huddled in rank doorways" (Lau, 2009, ¶ 2).

In *Psychiatrist*, when Lau (1990) writes of an experience with her therapist, it is assumed she is seeing him to recover from her past trauma. However, the poem infers that the relationship

has become an outlet for Lau's transference of boundary-crossing desires for her father-figure therapist. *Psychiatrist* goes on to eerily capture the response of Lau's editor, who seems to find some perverse pleasure in the salacious details of Lau's private desires, all the while disregarding Lau's pain:

> and this, it has opened a wound in me…
>
> …we laugh about you over wine
>
> unlocking secrets
>
> examining the boxes of intimacies
>
> - you hold no magic here -
>
> her eyes approving each betrayal… (p.11)

The story behind Lau's desire for her psychiatrist traces back to her early home life. In *Father Figures* she confesses that, "[d]istance for me kindles desire" (Lau, 1999, p.45). Rather than desire that was close and possible, such as the freckle-faced boy or classmate, she developed crushes for teachers. Interestingly, the focus of her distant desires was usually someone she had only met a few times and who was not likely aware of her interest. Lau was guarded with her desires, usually keeping them private, knowing if they were revealed they would evaporate.

Ironically, although Lau's (1999) infatuations parallel situations of unrequited love and anguish, Lau delights in them as she believes they are innocent, imagination-inspired desires that rarely go beyond cuddling and kissing or the complications of sex and the everyday-types of difficulties typically found in relationships. In this sense, Lau is in control of all facets of her desires. There is no rejection and heartache; no one opens her heart and then leaves without explanation. There are no threatening consequences of desire, such as the jealous wife who reads

attraction where there is none, severing the beauty of a relationship before it even gets started. There is no drunken kiss one night regretted the next morning when awkward distance emerges. Moreover, given Lau's (1999) introduction to sex through prostitution (her body bargained for by men paying for her time), it is of no surprise that Lau's desires now are "strangely divorced from sex" (p.47). Rather, what she desires most is the "entrance into another's life, the sudden flare of emotional contact, intellectual stimulation" (p.47) as this kind of desire, she has determined, can be as powerful as the desire for sex. Overall, Lau's experiences make her acutely aware of the damage desire causes and, as such, she takes a protective stance to preserve its capacity to incite new, secret delights.

Reflecting back on her family life growing up in Vancouver in the 1970s and 1980s, and retracing the development of her desires, Lau sketches fairly precise recollections. As a child, Lau (1999) adored her father; however, she also recalls that after he read her bedtime stories he would go down the hall to his wife, which triggered strange and recurring fears in her that her mother was lurking in the darkness waiting to injure him. She feared that if she lost her father she would lose her protection from her mother who, to Lau, was a "frightening force in the family" with her "unpredictable rages and humiliating dominance over her" (p.49). These fears culminated into reality when Lau's father lost his job and Lau, in an effort to escape her mother's control, became obsessed with writing as a form of escapism. Yet as her father remained unemployed, he began to withdraw his affection for Lau. The family tension escalated and Lau became an outcast at school, praying for death each night as relief from the unbearable pain. Eventually, at the age of fourteen, Lau ran away and turned to prostitution as a means of survival. Prostitution, however, only confused her understanding of desire and inhibited interest in her own sexuality. Sex paired with father-like figures attempting to manipulate and exert

power, control, and neediness over her only distanced her further from the expected teenage parameters of desire. In turn, as sex with clients was often so repulsive, as a coping mechanism, she numbed herself with painkillers.

As a result of these experiences, Lau (1999, p.55) admits there have only been a handful of times when she experienced fleeting "plain, simple, lusty desire" and, in response, she did everything to protect herself from it as it made her feel as if she had lost control. Lau confesses she wants to trust in the intransience of love and desire but comes to the sober realization that she has difficulties accepting this in reality. In fact, for her, the thought of sharing her life with an equal partner "almost repulses" her as it does not coincide with her fantasy of finding an ever-elusive father figure (p.59).

Lau's story reaffirms Schroeder's (2004) belief that desire is more complex and convoluted than its initial insinuations of passion suggest. Desire moves us to act, and in Lau's case, this has meant a constant moving away from mutual, equal-footed desire. Shroeder goes further, like Butler, believing desire is an abstract experience, compelling us to move toward or refute a sense of incompleteness. In Lau's experience, this sense of incompleteness stemmed from the perceived loss of her father's affection. Elusively, thereafter, sometimes only in her imagination, she pursued men who would never reciprocate her desire, for the obvious reason: *She* never expressed her desire openly. In all likelihood, Lau could not pursue desire with realistic possibilities, fearing that if she connected with another person, that person, like her father, would eventually withdraw and she would remain eternally broken. As a result, her one-sided desires remained both unresolved and impeded by a compulsion to control the outcome.

Lau's story parallels the notion that our beliefs coincide with our perceptions of the world. Desires, like beliefs, have a direction of fit and the effects of desire reveal themselves in

the movements we are compelled to make (Schroeder, 2004). Amidst desire, there is tension and a willingness to act in accordance with the direction of our desires. We feel our desires take control; they focus our attention and bring "one's eyes or thoughts to a particular person or scene again and again" (p.14). For Lau, this tension brought profound contradiction: She experienced an intense desire for her father's affections as well as the recurring betrayal by the father-figure types who paid her money for sex. In *What We Do in the Name of Money* Lau (1990) describes one incident of prostitution, which creates a vivid, yet distanced, third-person account of how her desires have manifested into a paradoxical dynamic of desiring the presence of father-figure men, while also feeling repulsed by the closeness and connectivity of this impulse:

> …every time you see a father now
> in real life or on TV
> you see you're young enough to be their daughter
> instead you've become the girl they visit…
> …walk fast to the door
> his mouth opens as if to swallow you
> like the boxes of shortbread cookies he consumes
> in his unconfessed loneliness
> you know him well, 2 years and enough conversations
> but tonight the history doesn't show
> you light his cigarettes, put on coffee
> exaggerate the slavery he hands you with the folded bills… (p.45)

Desire Through a Self-Reflecting Lens

My earliest memory of desire traces back to the last day of kindergarten. A round-faced, brown-eyed boy named Brian gave me a colorful bouquet of flowers, along with his parting words before summer began, that he hoped to marry me one day. In my five-year old mind, I liked Brian a lot; however, looking back now, although I did not have the language or comprehension to explain it then, despite feeling delighted by his affections, I also felt somehow removed from them, as if I they were never really going to connect. Perhaps this was a brief foreshadowing of how my desires would unfold in the years ahead.

Another early desire memory takes me back to my second year of elementary school. One day after school, while waiting for my mother to pick me up, I was playing a game of boys-chase-the girls in the playground. My mother pulled up just as a blonde-haired boy, my current *crush*, was taking me by the hand across the playground to the *monkey bars-jail*. When I reached the car she said that my father would not approve of me holding hands with the boys. Even then I thought it was strange to be told that holding hands with a boy was wrong; this stirred a wave of confusion in me. It is unclear to me how this experience links to others, but at the end of the year my teacher wrote in my report card, "Kim would enjoy school more if she could overcome her fear of boys." I have no memory of what this means, as looking back, I was a busy, yet determined, independent, tom-boy kid who liked scholastics and doing art projects. Maybe my *fear of boys* came from my home life.

Our family home was a place where friends, neighbors, and extended family often stopped by unannounced for a cup of coffee. In the warmer summer months, coffee turned to barbeques by the pool, while kids swam or jumped on the trampoline. Our doors were never locked and we always had lots to do. I rode dirt bikes through the backyard trails for hours at a

time with my sisters and the neighborhood kids. We converted old sheds to play-forts and played in abandoned vehicles in the back bushes, make-believe driving to all kinds of imaginary destinations. My parents also operated a business out of our home where their male employees would come in and out of the house throughout the day. Most of the men that came through our home were loud and often drank beer after work with my father. Even as a kid, I was repulsed by this behavior; it was not compatible with my quiet and contained disposition and it made me feel uncomfortable and unsafe. As these were the only men I came in contact with, I started to develop an emotional apprehension toward men and a subtle anxiety in their presence.

My apprehension toward males was only further reinforced in high school. Although I was interested in a few boys in junior high, my desires remained ungratified; I never really connected with boys in any meaningful way, always feeling *back-pocketed* by them. Although I considered these boys my friends, they pursued the girls with rumored reputations for sex, all the while maintaining a friendship with me. As one boy said, "You're really great, but I'm not ready to get serious right now." At 15 or 16, neither was I, but they never bothered to ask me what I wanted. It was assumed that because I was *nice* and fun to hang out with that I needed to be *preserved* for more serious times. This enraged me: That the girls who *put out* went on dates with the boys on Saturday nights, while these same boys spent Saturday afternoons riding dirt bikes with me. I began to desire the power boys had to maneuver relationships. I also resented them for obliterating my interests and for choosing the *party girls* over me.

When I was sixteen years old I got my driver's license, which brought a sweet freedom in the ability to escape far beyond the confines of the suburbs. I remember one night driving with two guy friends, one from school and one of his older drinking-age friends, curiously cruising around Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a notorious place for drugs, crime, and prostitution. As

we drove past the old, run-down hotel strip the older friend pointed out the Native women and the half-breeds like me who blended in with the rest of the crowd while working as prostitutes. He also rattled off the rates they charged for various sexual activities. I was shocked. Until then, the only Métis people I knew were family members, so when the low place and value of Métis women was pointed out to me so bluntly, it confirmed, in my sixteen-year-old mind, that I could no longer identify as Métis as I could not be associated with such a down-trodden destiny. This was a profound turning point for me in that I felt my worth was confirmed as *less-than* non-Métis women and I would not be valued or desired because of my *Indianness*. From that moment on, and for many years to come, I began to despise the slightly slanted shape of my eyes and the white-brown patchiness of my skin that made me neither fully white nor fully Indian. I felt stained by *white people's* misperceptions of the Métis, which I knew I had no power to change.

About a year later, when I was seventeen, I was at an outdoor field party for students who were graduating that year, which is where I met Tony, who was nineteen and living in a neighboring community. After the party, Tony often called me and I drove out to see him a few times. One August night, after a party by the river with a few of his friends, as I drove him back home, he suggested we pull over by a wooded park area. As soon as I pulled over, I knew it was a mistake because his increasing intoxication was now contained inside my car and I somehow felt unsafe. He tried to kiss me but I pulled away, turned off by the alcohol-induced affection. He was angry and got out of the car. I hesitated a moment, contemplating whether I should just leave, but also worried he would be stranded in the wooded area. I decided to get out of the car to see if the tension could be resolved. Before much was even said, he grabbed me hard with one hand, pulled me into his body and yelled "…who the fuck do you think you are, something special because you got a hot car? He then called me a "stupid, half-breed bitch" and, with barely

a pause, kissed me hard, stuffing his angry tongue down my throat. I pulled away, grabbed his beer and threw it at him, and ran to the car. He was right behind me. I locked the door, then the other, as I scrambled to start the engine. He yelled, "…you fuckin' bitch", as he pounded on the driver's side window and the roof of the car, denting it. I got out of there as fast as I could, looking back in the rearview mirror as he continued to curse me. Meanwhile, with my legs shaking and adrenalin pounding through my body, I clutched the steering wheel with trembling hands, thinking to myself, "never again."

After that night I spiraled into a deep depression, though I did not label it as such at the time. I felt an intense desire to flee from everything – school, friends, family, and my part-time job. Underneath the pain was a pressing desire to escape from the disappointment and the missed connections that stemmed from a need by boys and men to have power over me, misreading that I would never let that happen. I felt an urgent need to move on from the burden of pain, believing the resolution would be found in music.

I first started playing guitar and taking lessons when I was fifteen, after hearing *The Doors* and the haunting voice and lyrics of Jim Morrison. However, in order to write songs and play in bar bands I needed to finish school, so I worked hard to graduate a half-year early from my peers so I could spend time practicing music and getting ready to perform in bands as soon as I turned 19.

My first music adventure was with an all-girl alternative rock band. My boyfriend at the time, who was likely worried I would be spending less time with him, sarcastically asked me, "Why do you want to be in *that* band, you're never going to be famous?" I joined the band because music was a natural desire and inclination, an extension of self-expression. Music empowered me; it did not deconstruct parts of my soul, one fragment at a time, like my desire for

male companionship. Needless to say, I broke up with my unenlightened boyfriend the next day. I remember getting into my car, sobbing hysterically, not understanding why he could not support me, knowing I made the right decision, but also knowing that if I chose the path of music I would likely be alone because men choose women who make them, not other interests, their priority. And so it has been. A few men have come and gone into my life, always leaving profound imprints on my heart. Some have been intimate and long-lasting friends, but for various reasons, such as power struggles and the recognition of incompatible values, my relationships never evolved to other levels. Still, other relationships have probably passed me by as I was oblivious or frozen by my past hurts, which have made me unskilled at the art of flirting.

For me, for more than twenty years, music has mostly replaced my intimate relationships because relationships have been anxiety-filled, abandoning, and rejecting. Freud might call this sublimation - a defense mechanism used to channel sexual desires into creative outlets. Yet it may be even more complicated in that one fascinating aspect of music, for some artists, is that creating and performing music, like drinking, eating, and sleeping, becomes a deeply ingrained desire. This is true for me; music is always in me. It has made me feel like I have authentically followed my purpose and destiny in life, despite the hardships it has created in the form of power struggles with males in the music industry. From time to time, this desire is tested. I lapse in judgment, believing there is a man *out there* who will accept and support my desire for music. The last time was about three years ago when I met a First Nations man who had just broken up with the mother of his young child. I cautioned myself not to get in too deep; however, after the second night we were together, he woke up early in the morning, quietly gathered his things, reached over to kiss me and said he had to leave. I said nothing, intuitively knowing it was a final goodbye. Six months later, I returned home to find he had called. I never responded; I could

not re-open that wound again. I could not play the power-struggle, relationship-physics game with my heart yet again; that is, when the other person senses you want intimacy, they pull away until *they* desire to move closer.

Nowadays, I generally find a sense of tranquility and confirmed destiny in my aloneness as this has allowed me the freedom to accomplish my dreams in music, poetry, and academics, and to reconnect with my Métis culture. Part of me always knew this would be my journey and most days I am grateful and fortunate for this freedom. It is only on the days where I feel tired, or a lapse in strength or motivation that I wish I had someone to share the journey with. In the meantime, I put one foot in front of the other and remain open to the fluid transformations of desire.

As I reflect back on my own story, desire can be understood from Freudian logic as a disagreeable tension (Deleuze, 1973). Early on, I felt attraction desires and tensions because I somehow could not meaningfully connect with the object (boy or man) of my affections. In this sense, I refer back to Butler (1987) who, drawing from Hyppolite's musings, argues that desire reflects the power of the negative; it is a longing. As Derrida explains, desire is a wanting, a "painfully empty intention seeking completion" (Bearn, 2000, p.454). Desire *is* lack, "a vessel desiring satisfaction, wanting to be filled with meaning" (p.455). But when we discover that desire and meaning cannot always be accomplished, our lives become "draped in black" (p.455).

The truth of this assertion became the foreground of my world when, at the age of sixteen, I realized I could not connect with the boys I desired and I felt empty. I felt this a few years ago, when I could not connect with the Native man beside me in my bed, who left with barely a word. But what I have learned is that desire has a transcendent quality because it is a process, a flow, a journey, and a reflection of needs at different points of time. Desire transforms

from history to the present by a fusion of life experiences and lessons. Like Mootoo, despite the sometimes-perplexing journey, I know I am not in the wrong place. My missed desires have a purpose. Time and time again, they bring me back to the path I should be on. They remind me of the truth of my authentic being. For me, this means following my compass for integrity, honesty, and inner peace. It means experiencing both firsthand and vicariously through study and hearing the stories of others that reinforce my strength to press on through acquired knowledge and personal growth. It means translating what I observe into poetry, music, personal vision, and it is reflected in my work in the Aboriginal community.

As well, beginning in my childhood, when I look back on the themes that thread through my desire experiences I find disconnected affections, anxiety triggered by males, resentment and anger over male power and privilege, and a need to distance myself from the prejudice surrounding my cultural heritage. These themes reinforce Franke's (2000) postulation that desire has a history; it is a "complex combination of external systems of social forces and internal personalized conventions residing in the unconscious" (p.205). Yet, at the same time, desire is "not subject to cleaning up, to being purged of its nasty, messy, perilous dimensions" or its "contradictions and complexities of simultaneous longing and denial" (p.207). This is evidenced in Musgrave's story. However, I believe, over time, desire reaches a juncture in the road where there is an opportunity to assert boundaries so as to chart future pathways of desire or concede to its powerful reflex. In other words, there comes a point in time where we either make rational decisions about whether desire is acted upon or, like Musgrave, be swayed by the irrational nature of our desires. As I feel confident in my ability to make rational choices, I look forward to the next juncture as I know it will be meaningful in some new and unpredictable way.

Lighter Now (Bayer, 2011)

I am lighter now
that time has passed
from the moment where
hurt rocked every cell
in my broken and defeated body.

Each frame of the moment
is seared within my mind's eye:
morning had barely broken
its soft light seeping in
the side of the wispy curtain;
sitting on the edge of the bed
you reached silently for
your keys on the table as I
turned to lightly caress a line
down your back (for the last time).

You turned intently,
embracing my eyes with
a closed-mouthed smile
and my intuitive lips with
an unspoken and gentle ending.

Though the door closed softly

the sound resonated with finality;

at first I am sickened and broken…

later, the sun awakens across the sky

I realize, I am lighter now.

Conclusion

This exploratory trek through the varied complexities of desire confirm its fluid, multi-dimensional, and layered qualities and, as predicted by Brand (1999), a vast range of experience. Undoubtedly, desire animates the world as it develops from different places and through the passage of time (Irvine, 2006). Lau's story illustrates how desire shapes from early trauma. Mootoo's story reveals how powerful desires are not easily contained as they eventually find ways of expression, even when the journey is painfully long and convoluted. Crozier's story emphasizes desire's ever-looming presence, which, like finely etched memories, reveal traces in unsuspecting moments. Both Brand's story and my own illustrate how desire as knowledge is like a mirror, reflecting back the innermost valued parts of ourselves that seek connection with the external world. Musgrave's story shows how many of our most profound and life-affecting desires are not rational; rather, they gush forth into our consciousness, uninvited and unannounced and, where unrestrained, they take control of our lives.

Lastly, although the source of our passionate desires is emotion, we can take comfort in knowing our instrumental desires materialize from our intellect, our consciousness (Irvine, 2006). Chains of desires are formed through an imperfect collaboration between these two sources; nonetheless, each has veto power over the other. This is how we know that desires often discover us, not the reverse (p.279), and our attempts to master their hold inevitably fail miserably (Burnard, 1999).

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Notes

[1.] This section is adapted from my unpublished literature review (Bayer, 2011, October 28), which was completed in preparation for this project.