



## Dreaming Sexed Identities and Althusser

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**SUMMARY** *Dreams, this article argues, are imaginative experiments in which people think and feel through culturally prescribed identities. Dreams often dramatize the scene of what Althusser calls “interpellation”: they depict how others in a culture “hail” the person and thus position her in power relations. Yet, dreamers also explore potential transgressive identities and dream plots play out the probable consequences of assuming these identities in the waking world. [dreams, identities, ideology, United States, sex–gender]*

Exploring the dreams of a U.S. undergraduate whom I call Alice, I hope to show that dreams often evince imaginative thinking about transgressive ways of being in the world. This imaginative thinking, I argue, eludes certain regulatory censures inscribed in language that tend to limit identity experimentation. My inspiration here is Althusser (1971) who says that our identities are to a degree fixed by interpellation. Interpellation refers to the way one is “hailed” by the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA): in other words, the way one is repeatedly recognized in accordance with one’s social position (sex, race, income, etc.)—by many people in one’s society, particularly those in positions of power. In dreams, people register and sometimes evade such hailings—particularly when they include ascriptions of inferiority—by enacting socially improbable identities in dream plots that also reflect the likely consequences of these enactments.

Lacan (1968) tells us that the infant’s experience is fragmentary—a series of disconnected events. In the mirror phase, which occurs around the age of two, the child’s imaginal mind begins to organize these fragments as images. When we learn language, the logical–practical mind that he calls the “Symbolic” displaces the Imaginary, which recedes into the background. Yet, “for the Lacanian,” Butler tells us, what the Symbolic “fails to order will emerge within the imaginary as a . . . site where identity is contested” (1997:96–97). There is a range of normative identities that Alice encounters in her culture and probably enacts in waking life, but these fail to encompass her. Dreams are the homeland of the Imaginary and offer a site where Alice can contest these identities in figurative forms; that is, as represented through characters or objects associated with a particular identity in the social world.

I take identity to be the result of successive acts of identification. People tend to identify with certain ideas or principles, with their individual or collective successes and failures, with their families or other social groups, and with figures in their social world. They also tend to attribute qualities, and so assign

identities to other cultural subgroups. Such identities, of course, are ideological: they do not reflect the real distribution of penchants and capacities. Individuals, in turn, tend to internalize such attributions so that they become personal identities. Yet, when these identities denote or connote inferiority, this internalization is ambivalent, as Bhabha points out in colonial context (1994; cf. Mageo 2008). This ambivalence provokes an identity-sorting process that we will find in Alice's dreams.

Psychologists since Jung (1968, 1970; Hollan 2003) have seen characters and objects in dreams as symbolizing parts of the person. These characters and objects, however, have more than individual significance: they draw from a cultural common of symbols to represent a repertoire of identities in the social world. Cars, for example, have rich significance in the United States and symbolize an important U.S. identity: the person as mobile, fast, and free of constraining social contexts such as those one escapes "on the road" (Mageo 2006, 2011a:161–172)—an identity that is marketed along with cars in the advertisements that assail Americans daily. Dreams weave together elements of this cultural common with personal history, as Alice's dreams will show. For this reason, reading dreams with a limited amount of life history and associational data, supplemented by ethnographic knowledge, can allow a researcher to shed light upon the relationship of the dreamer to her culture. To know the full meaning of a dream for the individual no doubt requires the time that therapists and their clients invest but, inasmuch as dreams traffic in public symbols, their meanings are also open to cultural interpretations. Investigating dreams' cultural symbolism is indispensable to understanding the identity work in which dreamers engage. A cultural interpretation must throw light on the dream's internal coherence, the relation of a dream to an individual's other dreams and its place in personal history, but this interpretation must also link the dreamer's emotional dilemmas to the politics of a particular time and place.

In this view, the dreamer enacts or fails to enact an identity associated with a cultural symbol in a little drama complete with other dream characters that depict the reception the dreamer anticipates for such an identity. Yet dreamers are safe from the penalties that attend upon such experiments in waking life. Dreams afford a space to break out of an old identity or perform a new one insulated from others who might judge a dreamer's performance as inappropriate because such breaks and performances violate tacit or explicit social rules about what is suitable. Contemporary psychologists studying dreams distinguish between rapid-eye-movement (REM) dreams and non-REM dreams. While non-REM dreams merely practice daytime activities, REM dreams use remote memories and associations to reassess and even reinvent them (Barrett and McNamara 2007; Stickgold et al. 2001; Stickgold and Walker 2004). Yet such mentation reinvents our identities, too.

Both the dream and identity are meta-discursive categories that wrongly presume universality.<sup>1</sup> People in many cultures, for example, understand what Westerners call "dreaming" as travel in the spirit realm (Lohmann 2003; Mageo and Howard 1996). Giddens (1991) argues that high modernity is an apocalyptic era that creates inner fragmentation. People counter this fragmentation by telling stories about themselves to themselves and to others that help them sustain a personal identity. When people treat dream narratives as in-depth

psychological reports, dreams also contribute to this endeavor; and, in turn, this contribution helps to explain why “moderns” often take a personal-interpretative approach to dreams. It is nonetheless worth investigating the cultural psychology of dreams as well as that of personal identities and how they entwine with one another.

My subject here is also U.S.-sexed identities, by which I mean identities stemming from sexual difference, but identities that have lost their mooring in actual sex and become public property to a degree—a degree that women like Alice exploit in dreams. Children learn sexed identities through early socialization practices and the structure of family interpersonal relations, although the extent to which they internalize these identities varies (Chodorow 1978; Tavris 1992). Yet culture is what we share. Childhood, adolescent, and adult same-sex peer cultures have rituals, practices, and discourses that foster identities shared among their members. U.S. ballgames, for example, foster many young men’s masculine identities, while shopping for clothes fosters many young women’s feminine identities. Despite this developmental experience, once social identities exist, in principle, anyone can appropriate them. I mean “can” in the existential sense. Everyone in a culture observes and to a degree understands the identity, along with its attendant advantages. Norms, sanctions, and interpellation, however, circumscribe this existential “can.”

Freud (1953) saw dreams as evading the norms and sanctions that limit sexual and aggressive wishes, but surely our wishes are also for a broadened scope of being and action—a scope that is bounded by the identities ascribed to us and also potentially offered by identities assigned to others. Such wishes are more likely to the extent that others in a dreamer’s culture attribute her subgroup a subordinate role.

### **Alice’s Dreams**

Alice took an undergraduate course of mine entitled “Culture and the Self” in which students kept dream journals, studied dream talk and practices in various cultures, and wrote about their dreams using a variety of projective methods among which they could choose. These ranged from classical methods such as psychoanalysis and Jung’s analytic method, to methods of my own devise. I reduced each method to a set of “steps,” which I will describe where relevant in this paper’s progress.<sup>2</sup> For five semesters between 2004 and 2006 at Washington State University (WSU), I collected dreams along with student interpretations. At each semester’s end, students filled out consent forms in my absence, indicating their willingness or refusal to allow me to use their final paper and dream journal in my research (IRB No. 5921). I gave no extra credit for participating, and students who were randomly chosen on the spot from volunteers placed the consent forms in an envelope and sealed it in front of the group. The envelope remained unopened until after I submitted grades. The majority of students agreed to participate but some did not. Most WSU undergraduates are from Spokane, the second-largest city in Washington, from mid-sized towns of Yakima, Ellensburg, and Wenatchee in the middle of the state, or from Seattle and other towns of the Northwest coastal plane. It is this

Northwestern U.S. culture during the period of my subjects' childhood, youth, and young adulthood that I find in their dreams.

Alice and I did not have a personal relationship, nor did I contribute directly to her dream analysis. The projective methods she learned in the course allowed her to supply relevant life history and associative material and to come to her own conclusions about the dream. Alice was in several respects a typical WSU undergraduate: young, white, middle class, and in the throes of forming a successful adult identity. Her identity experiments in dreams resemble those of many other students—resemblances I consider in the concluding section. Yet, she is unique among my students in that she often has what she calls "lucid" dreams: she realizes she is dreaming and can "change dream scenes, send people or objects away as well as conjure them at will, 'rewind' and 'replay' . . . live past my dream 'death' " and "fly by thought." In many of these dreams, however, such as the first one considered here, she is aware she is dreaming and her body is under her control, but scenes change spontaneously and people interfere with and directly challenge what she calls her "authority."

It is possible that in her "lucid" dream reports, Alice was showing off for me—a behavior promoted by the U.S. classroom context with its direction to excel. While Alice claimed, "In most of my lucid dreams, I . . . have absolute power," in her journal, "lucid" dreams where she controlled only her dream persona were far more common than absolute-power dreams. Even these tended to be a "rewind" of a dream that Alice did not control and that ended in disaster—in one case, for example, in the death of her sister. Her bravado is evident in the dream we are about to consider, but this bravado usefully accentuates those (re)evaluations of identity that, as the concluding section of this article suggests, are evident in many instances of ordinary dreaming. Alice titled the following dream, "The Rebellious Girl."

I was driving down the freeway in a blue minivan. My brother was in the passenger side . . . we were just chatting away as I drove . . . suddenly I realized that I was dreaming. I got very excited. I told my brother, "Hey, this is my dream! I'm going to wreck the car!"

Driving is a significant act for Alice: she has had a recurrent dream since childhood, one she cannot control, in which she is on a bus going the wrong direction. After Alice's declaration in the Rebellious Girl dream, her brother becomes "really concerned" and says, "What? No, don't wreck the car!" but Alice is convinced she is dreaming:

So I steered the car right into the cement wall at the edge of the road. The van spun a couple times, then came to rest astride the cement wall. I looked over at my brother who was unconscious but appeared unhurt. I could hear the sound of sirens coming, so I hopped out of the van and ran away from the scene.<sup>3</sup>

In 19 percent of the 995 undergraduate dreams in my 2004–06 sample, pivotal action occurred in relation to a car. The car is not only close to a practical necessity in many U.S. locales, but is also a major identity symbol—a symbol that is phallic in its contours and historically associated with masculinity. Adolescent U.S. males may practice masculinity by working on a "hot" car, or

racing one, or by borrowing their dad's car to take out a date. U.S. advertisements most commonly portray adult males as proud car owners and drivers and suggest the car is an extension of the driver's masculinity, while they often position women as passive passengers casting a glance at the kids in the back-seat. Even the brilliant and masterful "Bones" in the U.S. TV serial by that name rides when her male partner is in the car.

In this respect, the Rebellious Girl dream features an identity reversal. Alice's brother is a passive, anxious passenger, while she is the driver. Through the figure of the car, Alice usurps a masculine identity along with a zoom-zoom freedom to defy others' expectations (as she defies her brother's expectations along with traffic laws and what Americans call "good sense"). She assumes a "bad boy" devil-may-care identity that people typically accord to males in U.S. society: Billy the Kid with his six-gun, or super-cool James Dean racing his car in *Rebel without a Cause*, or Jack Kerouac (2007) in *On the Road*.<sup>4</sup> Alice appropriates this identity by her fast, mobile, wild behavior: not only does she do just as she likes, but also blithely hops from the wreck and runs off. Think of the dream sirens as Althusser's police—the Ideological State Apparatus incarnate—coming to recall Alice to her considerably less rebellious waking identity. "In real life," she commented, "I have never stolen anything and always try to be responsible for my actions." In a sense, then, Alice's transgressions amount to adopting somebody else's norm (and the privilege that attends on it), yet there is transgression. Gender norms suggest essentialized identities; reversing these identities is deconstructive in that it reveals their nonessential character.

The dream car in fact belonged to a male—Alice's former high school boyfriend: he drove it on their dates, but it was actually his family's van. If cars are still likely to be a male domain (think of the proverbial mechanic with the monkey wrench), Alice's "boyfriend's car-family van" is a dense and complicated symbol. In recent decades, mom-the-chauffeur driving a van converts this classic phallic symbol into a womblike vehicle. The dream car as a cultural symbol presents a potential combination of sexed identities that the dreaming Alice considers. Hollan (2003) says that for North Americans "one's car is one's castle and its boundaries are sacred," which is a variation on the U.S. adage, "a man's home is his castle." Note that the first thing Alice does to her ex-boyfriend's car is to violate its boundaries. In this respect, too, Alice acts the part of a "bad boy." Bad boys, as U.S. cultural symbols represent an enviable freedom: to gainsay social codes but still be admirable. They can do so because their sins are apparent rather than real—they violate conventions rather than moral principles in a society that distinguishes between the two.<sup>5</sup> Because Alice realizes she is dreaming, she also realizes that her violent behavior has no real-world consequences; it is on this basis that she claims the freedom to commit what she called in her analysis "criminal acts." Wrecking and deserting her boyfriend's car-cum-family-van, however, may also represent a rejection of maternal care as a limiting element of a possible future feminine identity. I venture this interpretation because Alice dismisses any need to care for her brother in this dream scene and because in the next scene and the last of her dreams that I analyze, Alice acts in a way that suggests acute ambivalence about maternal care.

Alice chose a Jungian approach to her dream. The "steps" I gave counseled Alice to view the dream as a metaphor for a current life situation, one tied to

personal history—a technique Jung calls “amplification” (1972:90–113). Alice linked the dream to her breakup with the ex-boyfriend who drove the car. He was, “the one person I felt that I would be with forever . . . it broke my heart when he broke up with me. Since that time, I have carried . . . a lot of emotional baggage, which has affected my subsequent relationships.” Alice may appear supremely carefree, but the dream alludes to a situation where she felt heart-broken, as in Jung’s idea that the dream compensates for the dreamer’s waking attitudes and orientations. The two relationships she had since her breakup, she continued, “were pretty bad. I think my wrecking their van in the dream symbolized my willingness to leave those memories behind and choose a new path for myself.” Through the dream, Alice shifts from passive to active: from a boyfriend wrecking her life to wrecking his car for fun.

I am currently in a healthy relationship with someone who I find to be my equal in all respects. . . . Finding this person has forced me to learn to trust someone completely again. . . . My brother . . . is the member of my family that I am closest to in real life. . . . Leaving him with the wrecked car was . . . feeling like I was finally able to leave the sometimes oppressive influence of my family when it comes to dating, and be with someone of my choosing.

The term *forced* is curious here, especially in conjunction with Alice’s stress on “choosing a new path” and being with “someone of my choosing.” For many Americans choice is synonymous with freedom and agency (Beeman 1986:59). Yet Alice equates trusting a person she has chosen with relinquishing agency, temporarily sliding back into the passenger seat.

Alice’s comments accord with McCollum’s (2002) description of the contradictions characteristic of romance in the United States. On the one hand, Americans in love say they are compelled toward a certain person; on the other, that being with this person is the most important life choice they can make. Here “choice” is a culturally constituted “reaction formation”: a defense in which one adopts a description of one’s feelings or actions opposed to their felt character. In her description of her current relationship, Alice uses the U.S. discourse of romance. Although almost all Americans use this discourse at times, people regard it as “what women want” and romantic films are “chic flicks.” Thus, in her waking life understanding of her identity, Alice had not shed U.S.-style femininity. Yet as the dream progresses her behavior becomes bolder and others’ disapproval dramatic:

I found myself in an amusement park. I walked down the main strip and looked at all the booths, grabbing food or drink where I desired. The people behind the counters often glared at me or yelled something, but I felt like they knew I was some kind of special being, who did not need to follow the rules like everyone else did. I kept walking along until I came to a quilt auction on a small stage. Most of the people appeared to be older women, but I recognized the girl who was supervising the auction: it was the . . . president of the English club here at school. . . . I thought it might be fun to snatch the quilt. So I ran up onto the stage, grabbed the quilt, and ran away with it tucked under my arm.

This second dream scene repeats the structure of the first. In the first scene, Alice wrecks a car that does not belong to her and runs off; in the second, she

is running away with a quilt that is not hers. Both scenes dramatize being fast–mobile–free and appropriation. Hermes, the Greek god of thievery, is also the god of boundary crossings, which Brown (1969) sees as symbolic of crossing beyond the normal limits of existence. Stealing as a lark, I suggest, is yet another way Alice appropriates a bad-boy identity to cross beyond the normal limits of her waking persona and expresses the residue that this persona fails to order. In popular U.S. movies, *The Thomas Crown Affair* or *Oceans Eleven*, for example, thieves are mercurial bad boys who appear to violate the laws of time and space, not only those of society. They are also Oedipal sons, snatching a desirable woman from a father figure; their tales enact and celebrate a masculine identity. Alice, however, steals from mother figures rather than father figures. The dream narrative continues:

Where the stealing food caused little or no commotion, stealing the quilt . . . start[ed] an uproar. Immediately, I heard myself being followed by a horde of people. I kept running, staying just out of their reach, and laughing all the while. . . . The girl from the English club was beginning to catch up to me, as was another girl. . . . I decided to fly away. . . . I wasn't fast enough and the other girl caught my pant leg. It was my best friend from high school, Agnes. I kicked at her but she wouldn't let go. She said . . . "Alice, you can't do this!" But I kept struggling to get away from her. "It's just a dream," I told her, and kept kicking. She held fast . . . I didn't escape.

In a number of cultures, shamans cultivate lucid dreaming (Kracke 1992; Tedlock 1987). They exercise the Imaginary in powerful ways. In her lucid dreams Alice generally feels guilt for agency: "I usually get the impression that my ability to control the dream is wrong . . . because of how angry the people in my dream sometimes get at me." Like the people who chase her in the *Rebellious Girl* dream? Alice thought this dream "was indicative of a division within myself . . . two schools of thought competing viciously in my head." One "school of thought," Alice asserted was "the value system I hold as a result of . . . actively practicing Christianity." Presumably, in the dream, the older women at the quilt auction and the English club president who supervises the auction (and is thereby identified with it) personify this Christian "school"–"value system." So does her restraining friend Agnes. In the United States, people usually associate quilt auctions with country fairs and quilts with what we might call traditional feminine–Christian folkways. One might consider the classic amusement park, in contrast, with its roller-coaster cheap thrills, too-sweet tasty treats, along with the echoing laughter of a disorienting House of Mirrors (offering mirror jokes on normal identity), kids' standing carnival. There kids get to run wildly about, scream, gorge, and generally indulge impulses that adults might normally urge them to repress. If, as Erikson (1963) argues, the locomotive mode is the *jouissance* of middle childhood, then the amusement park is a place of impulse indulgence indeed! Alice, jubilantly crashing cars and snatching quilts, personifies this other "school"–"value system."

The amusement park dream site also seems to be a metaphor for happiness and good times. Previously Alice worried about what her family thought of her boyfriend. This time: "I have been more concerned with whether or not we make each other happy," just as she makes herself laugh in the dream. Alice

believed the amusement park expressed a “repressed” part of her, symbolized by “stealing food, snatching the quilt, and running away from authority”; and, I would add, wrecking the van. In turn, Alice thought these transgressions represented sex.

The boyfriend who owned the van . . . was a very strict Christian and . . . believed that we . . . incur[red] a burned on guilt for every sexual act committed. This association of sex with shame and guilt . . . was the main reason for my dissolution of two subsequent relationships. . . . My blatant acts of misconduct in the dream reflect my desire to be free of the oppressive societal restrictions on sex.

In another dream, Alice is having sex in a large car under blankets with her current boyfriend. An old man in another car cranes his neck and writes down their license number. Soon, two beefy agents from the FBI or CIA hail them—she is not sure which. This confusion condenses the two agencies. Her boyfriend eludes the agents, but they haul Alice into a big building and interrogate her, then sentence her to prison and lead her away in chains. On the way, she glimpses her boyfriend astride his motorcycle outside. He looks like he wants to say something. She ignores him, afraid of getting him in trouble. Not understanding, he gets angry and speeds away. She begins to cry. In both scenes of the *Rebellious Girl* dream, others chase Alice; in *Car Sex* dream, she is caught. All those who are after her act the part of Althusser’s famous policemen who personify ideology. For Althusser, ideology

transforms individuals into subjects (it transforms them all), by the . . . operation which I call interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most common place everyday police or other hailing: “Hey, you there!” . . . Assuming that the theoretical scene I’ve imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, [s]he becomes a subject. Why? Because [s]he has recognized that the hail was “really” addressed to . . . [her] . . . and not someone else. . . . Hailings . . . hardly ever miss their [wo]man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really . . . [she] who was being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomena, and one which cannot be explained solely by “guilt feelings,” despite the large number who have “something on their consciences.” [1971:162–63]

Being caught goes a step beyond being hailed, entailing interrogations and subsequent confessions—Foucauldian technologies of self (1980) through which an identity is developed and confirmed. Alice is recruited to a guilty feminine sexual identity (perhaps a slut?). If Alice shows shame and guilt about sex, symbolized by the voyeuristic man who cranes his neck, and then by being cross-examined, chained and jailed, she plays the role of the brave, self-sacrificing male hero in many U.S. adventure movies who refuses to divulge the name of his accomplice to the authorities. Yet she also seems to feel guilt about her hero identity: this is one interpretation of her boyfriend’s angry misconstruction of her refusal to hail him when he appears at the interrogation station.

Alice struggles against conscience in her dreams, personified by her pursuers. Thus, in the *Rebellious Girl* dream, the older quilt women, and possibly Agnes and the English club president, are normative feminine personae in hot pursuit of the carnivalesque Alice. Agnes is also, Alice remarked, “a mother figure to me”:

She is always responsible, thoughtful, and cautious. . . . Pulling me back down to the ground. . . . I have spoken with her . . . about my new boyfriend. . . . She is happy that I am finally with someone I can open up with, but she always tempers her joy with a note of caution. Am I using protection? Have I ascertained his sexual history? What am I doing to protect myself from possible emotional pain? . . . Her presence represented the practical part of myself, telling me to . . . proceed slowly.

While cars are mobile and fast, like Alice in the dream, Agnes advises slowing down, being cautious like a “nice girl” should, as Americans say. Yet Agnes outruns Alice in the dream: probably no one is faster than the ISA. The dream scene alludes to how people in Alice’s social world maneuver her into what they consider an advisable identity.

Althusser argues that we are hailed as “a sexual subject (boy or girl)” who we already are by “pre-appointment” and who “will bear its Father’s name, and will therefore have an identity” (1971:164–165). Interpellation is a particular form of recognition that places the person in a patriarchal structure: under his or her father’s name that is. One hears an echo of Lacan’s *le nom du père* (1977), by which he refers both to the name and to the “Law of the Father,” as well as to Freud’s superego and the discursive order of which it is a part. This structure, Althusser continues, is “pathological” and “implacable.” Alice’s dream renders it as one that holds her down and from which she cannot fly away. Yet Alice also attempts to bear away the quilt, which is associated with mother figures like Agnes. If the quilt women personify a traditional U.S. femininity, they also represent a maternal care identity: quilting is a homely art; rural mothers used to quilt to keep their children warm at night. In Gilligan’s terms (1982), they have a “care ethos.” Alice rebels against this feminine identity in the first dream scene by asserting that she does not really need to care either about her boyfriend’s car or about her brother. In the amusement park pursuit, Alice is caught by a character who personifies a cautious care-giving identity. Not only the law of the father but also that of the mother seem to interpellate Alice. But is the resulting identity pathological as Althusser argues? Alice’s next dream will tell.

### The Man Doll

In her dream journal, Alice has two recurrent dream identities. One is the mischievous-transgressive bad-boy identity evident in *The Rebellious Girl* dream; the other is the heroic identity evident in the *Car-Sex* dream and the dream to follow, which was not lucid. Alice titled it “*The Tanaka Doll*.” Alice is again at an amusement park, one that reminded her of a park she had visited called *Splash Mountain*.

[W]e were all herded into a cavelike place which was quite dark. I could make out . . . the river which the ride utilized for its little boats. I was near the back of the line, but still close enough to see people filing into the boats in the very front. Suddenly, a huge tidal wave swept through the cave. . . . People were screaming and running around, shoving each other in a mad rush to get out. . . . I ran forward because I could see that a few people had merely been knocked down by the wave and desperately needed help. . . . I recognized a man in very bad shape. . . . [H]e is no one that I know in real life [but] I knew him in the dream to be a young, attractive Japanese man named Tanaka. As I approached him, I realized that he was not dying from . . . the wave . . . but . . . starving to death. His body was caved in upon itself, very small and skeletal.

Alice moves from being in a cave, part of an amusement park ride, to finding a character that is “caved in” on himself: Tanaka, then, personifies the opening dreamscape. As the dream progresses, Alice and a few of her friends surround Tanaka and “fold him up into a miniaturized form . . . like a little doll. I cradled the doll gently in my hand and walked as quickly as I could to the nearest nurses’ station, which I knew to be nearby.” Here folding reconfigures Tanaka as miniaturized, “a little doll,” and cradling reconfigures him as a baby: this is the role dolls often represent in girls’ play—babies or small(er) children. Today U.S. boys also play with miniature people toys, but Americans call these “action figures.” Dolls are traditionally feminine figures through which girls enact identity fantasies. As a male doll, Tanaka blends qualities Americans associate with femininity and masculinity. While her boyfriend’s van in the *Rebellious Girl* dream represents a hybrid that Alice rejects/escapes, Tanaka is one she wants to save and finds attractive. Alice continued:

When we reached the station, I handed the tiny Tanaka over to a nurse who promptly hooked him up to some kind of intravenous machine which supplied him with fluids, while other lines monitored his life functions. We were only allowed to watch very briefly before we were herded out the door by a nurse. She told us that she believed Tanaka’s situation to be very grave, if not fatal, and that we should come back tomorrow and check on him. My friends and I, all in tears, nodded and left the nurse’s station.

In the dream, Splash Mountain is associated with risks: first the wave, suggesting a loss of control, then degeneration towards death. Here Alice imagines the social consequences of carnivalesque escapades: play at the amusement park long enough and down disaster cascades!

The next day I returned alone to the park to check on Tanaka. They let me enter without paying once I told them I was only there to check on a sick friend. I remember noticing that the park was almost deserted and was . . . cold and I was wearing a summer dress. I walked quickly to the nurse’s station. . . . [A] nurse greeted me and simply said, “I’m sorry.” I started to cry then and ran out of the building. As I was walking back out toward the doors, I looked up at one of the rides and saw to my surprise a fully healed and gorgeous-looking Tanaka, smiling down on me and waving. I waved back.

Alice analyzed this dream using a method I call *Dream Play* (2001), which combines elements of Gestalt Therapy and Jung’s *Active Imagination*. In *Dream Play*, one begins by fantasizing a dialogue with a dream character, alternating between being this character and being oneself, acting out a dialogue between the two. Alice first chose to dialogue with Tanaka. She role-played both sides of the conversation and gave me the following transcription.

Alice’s *Dream Play* follows:

Me [Alice]: Uh, hi there. . . . I have no idea who you are.

Tanaka: . . . I might be some kind of ideal for you. Like an ideal man or something.

M: An ideal man?

T: . . . I’m really attractive when I’m not dying of starvation. And I’m Japanese, which reflects your fascination with Eastern cultures. Also, . . . I’m pretty successful monetarily. Don’t I remind you of anyone?

M: Now that you mention it, you do. You remind me of a Korean guy who was in my Chinese class. He was really cute; I had a huge crush on him. That guy could really dress well.

Tanaka condenses three Asian cultures: he is a Japanese boy who represents a Korean whom Alice met in a Chinese language class. He configures a masculinity that blends capacities Americans typically associate with women (dressing well) and with men (monetary success). Alice imagines Tanaka's mixture of male and female capacities as ideal. It is also true, as we will see below, that Alice takes for herself an identity that Americans usually ascribe to males—the hero—and displaces a feminine identity onto Tanaka—as in the feminization of Asian others *à la* Said (1978).

Me [Alice]: But what's the deal with you starving to death?

T: . . . It might have something to do with the conversation you had with Jim the other day . . . the one where you were telling him about your friend that was dying of anorexia? She just looked like a skeleton. You guys were talking about how people sacrifice so much to be attractive.

A little later in her fantasized dialogue, Alice described Tanaka as “dying from anorexia.” Tanaka's skeletal form, then, evokes a woman who sacrifices everything to be attractive and a mental illness with which U.S. girls are more likely to be afflicted than boys (Gremillion 2003). Often, a culturally prescribed (pathological) feminine identity, one I call “the pinup,” afflicts girls with anorexia: an identity as a perfectly desirable object for a romantic other embodied by the svelte supermodel and Barbie doll. Yet, anorexic fasting is also a way some young U.S. women try to assert control over their personal boundaries and thus introduces the agency issues at play in Alice's *Rebellious Girl* dream. Next Alice role-played the nurse.

Nurse: . . . You are the type of person who really wants to do something with your life that helps people. It's not that far-fetched that you would run toward the disaster and try to help people rather than run away from it like everyone else.

Me [Alice]: . . . What do you think the significance is of the tiny doll I was able to create?

N: . . . Like I said before, you have a desire to help people and it often translates into a mothering thing with you taking care of people, or helping them. It bleeds over into your relationships too. You're always trying to fix people.

Alice intervenes to rescue Tanaka but then hands him over to a nurse, an expert: she shifts from the role of hero-savior to helper. Other female dreamers in my collection who took the hero role in their dreams also saw themselves as “helpers”—assistants both to the person they saved and to others involved in the rescue. In other words, even as heroes, they felt they should take a subordinate role. By reconstituting Tanaka as baby-like, moreover, the dream also reconstitutes Alice as mother-like. Nurse's reproach, that Alice's “mothering thing . . . bleeds over . . . [into] trying to fix people,” further complicates her hero identity. “Fixing” is an activity associated with U.S. males. Through fixing things, they demonstrate their ability to solve problems, along with mastery and control (Mageo 2011a:50, 79–84, 90; Tannen 1990). When worn by a woman,

evidently, a “fixer” identity (rescuing Tanaka and presumably others knocked down by the wave) is hailed as boundary confusion: mistaking other people’s problems for ones own and intruding on them. Yet, Nurse fixes people all the time. Is that okay for her?

In the *Rebellious Girl* dream, remember, Alice is a thief; the archetypal thief is [s]he who crosses (violates) boundaries, as Alice does by wrecking her ex-boyfriend’s car and by stealing food and drink and then the quilt. Alice’s conversation with Nurse continued:

Me [Alice]: . . . I think it’s strange that I was supposed to think Tanaka had died when really he was just fine.

N: I thought it was a pretty clear message for you. Sometimes people don’t need to be fixed by you. Sometimes they can do it all on their own.

M: . . . I could apply that to my relationships. I . . . try to butt in where I am not necessarily needed and try to fix things. . . . I should have a more open approach to people, let them live their own life. And stick to helping people who really do need my help, help that I can give in good conscience.

To me, Nurse’s voice is familiar. I have often heard her counsel in my mind. I too have wanted to help others who appear wounded. I have leveled the same reproach at myself saying: “Don’t impose, don’t interfere.” Alice soon begins intoning the same cautions that Nurse does. She thought that the dream,

represents my desire to help people who are less fortunate. . . . I have always wanted to do that, and it is reflected in the way I often “mother” my friends and boyfriends. I also need to realize that my ideas of a good life may not be shared by people of my culture or others, and I need to be cautious not to oppress them with my value system.

Wait a minute! Tanaka was broken and Alice did save him. Respecting others’ cultures is a laudable principle and, given Americans’ history of assimilation at home and invasion abroad, it is warranted. Yet why the (self)-criticism when Alice is so successful in this dream? Alice even defers to authority, to medical “experts,” at the appropriate time. According to Nuckolls (1998), Americans assign independent personalities to men and dependent personalities to women. Nuckolls documents these expectations in the diagnostic categories of U.S. psychiatry (1998:108–160). Yet, since Ralph Waldo Emerson (1882), if not before, Americans generally have expected themselves to be self-reliant. In this sense too, as Chesler (1972) points out, U.S. femininity represents a pathological model of personhood: one defined by its difference from this norm. Alice counters this dependency in her *Rebellious Girl* dream: she is highly autonomous, active, and jovial. Like the male heroes of U.S. adventure films, in the *Doll Man* dream, she intervenes to take responsibility for others, rushing in to save them from the wave in this dream and then rescuing Tanaka.

Remember Nurse was wrong: Tanaka was not dead but “fully healed” and “gorgeous.” Can we trust her voice? She is a voice that tells Alice she can’t succeed when that’s not true. She is a voice that calls, in Althusser’s words, “Hey, you there!” (1971:162–163). Witness Alice turning around at the call, “believing–suspecting–knowing that it is for [her], recognizing that ‘it is really [she] who is meant.’” “Boundary confusion,” as U.S. psychologists apply that

term, may sometimes be a schizophrenogenic censure of a more inclusive sense of self than is normative in the United States, particularly when this sense is conjoined with a desire to take the lead as Alice does in this dream. Nurse polices Alice's social performances: she is an internalized ISA officer, seeking to confirm Alice in a pathological role. Like the FBI-CIA officers in the Car-Sex dream, Nurse embodies a draconian superego: she would find an excuse to reproach even when Alice saves a life. Alice's role-play gives us a chance to catch her at work.

Alice's dream and dream play, then, reveal two pathological identities that conspire to interpellate her. The first, displaced onto skeletal Tanaka, is that pinup identity that revolves around a feeling that one should sacrifice to be attractive to another, which drives some girls, like Alice's friend, to self-destruction. The second, symbolized by Alice herself, is a hero identity, one with maternal overtones. This identity does not itself appear to be pathological. Yet Nurse, who personifies Alice's conscience, does have pathological traits. Nurse first wrongly denies that Alice's actions are efficacious: she says Tanaka is dead (indicating Alice's lack of belief in herself?). Then, in role-play, Nurse tells Alice she should mind her own business. As Butler (1997) points out, conscience is the psychological force that makes us into subjects. In Althusser's terms, to the degree that our cultures feature inequitable power relations, conscience is likely to be, at least in part, an internalization of ideology. But how do ideologies get dream deep, such that young woman like Alice must fight these battles night after night?

### **Mirrors, Mothers, and Men**

Althusser says the "structure of ideology" is a "duplicate" or "mirror," and "subjectification" is a mirror process (1971:168). To understand this cryptic assertion, let us turn to Lacan's idea of the "mirror phase" (1968). Althusser and Lacan do not discuss each other's ideas about psychological development, but the insights of the two converge in this trope in a productive way. The mirror phase typically occurs between six and 18 months of age when the child begins to recognize its image in mirrors. The child also begins to recognize itself, its identity that is, in its mother's eyes (Lacan 1968; Winnicott 1967:149-159): the mother has an idea of her child as a sexed person, an idea it begins to "see" in her regard. The mirror phase coincides with the blossoming of the Imaginary (Lacan 1968). If identity is something we first discover in the mirror and through the Imaginary, it makes sense that dreams (where we continue to think in images) should concern our identities. Internalizing ideology as identity, then, is likely to begin in the mirror phase.

Althusser's famous scene of the hailing policeman has two dimensions: the person is named, just as Althusser says, the infant is given its father's name, but the person is also seen—recognized for who she is. There is, then, a discursive aspect to interpellation and an image aspect. From a Foucauldian perspective, too, becoming a subject and subjection are the same discursive event: one is named within a social discourse, and this discourse predicates power relations. Yet Foucault also grants the visual a place in power relations in his idea of the Panopticon (1977, 1980)—a metaphor for the modern state, where to be seen is subjection.

Subjection via sight is in line with classic studies of the gaze, such as Mulvey's (1992) work on cinema and Berger's work (1972) on Western nudes. In gaze theory, the gazer wields power by regarding another as an object. Yet gazing does not always aim at objectification. The face-to-face position in which Western mothers hold babies nurtures intimate regard (Winnicott 1967:149–159). Thus, because of a lack of eye-to-eye contact, blind babies' mothers often feel less attached (Brooks-Gunn and Lewis 1982:163–164). In Samoa, caretakers hold the child facing outward toward the group (Ochs 1982). Samoans neither cultivate intimate regard nor the personal attachments it supports (Mageo 1998, 2011b). In the United States, however, subjectivity develops through intimate mutual regard. Moms treat kids, even before they can talk, as interlocutors in a meaningful dialogue in which they have personal thoughts, feelings, preferences, and volitions (Ochs 1982). For girls, this subjectivity nurturing connection persists into childhood: it is acceptable for U.S. girls to remain dependent on Mom longer than boys. Thus, an interviewee for my book on U.S. dreams said that while growing up she was a "mommy's girl" (2011a:44), a common U.S. expression; I have never heard a U.S. male describe himself as a "mommy's boy."

When U.S. girls enter into social life, they begin forming girl-friendships, where they continue to practice the style of engagement they learn with Mom. In Tannen's (2001) study of conversations between same-sex pairs of young U.S. children, girls draped their arms about one another and gazed into one another's eyes as they chatted; boys sat parallel looking off into space. Canaan (1990) documents U.S. high-school classroom behavior. While boys joked in attempts to dominate public space, girls passed notes to a girlfriend, continuing to practice private interpersonal connection.<sup>6</sup> Intersubjectivity resurfaces for both sexes in U.S. heterosexual relationships, probably inveigled in by girls whose same-sex rituals and practices supports this dialogic kind of engagement throughout childhood and adolescence. Dialogic gazing is neither objectification nor confrontation: it is recognition—the prince recognizing Cinderella for who she is, despite her cinder-strewn rags, in the critical scene of the folktale. Tanaka, remember, is Alice's "ideal man" and, potentially, a romantic other. Waving, he hails Alice, who hails him back, both with a loving gaze.

If intersubjective regard is mom's gift to girls, it has a downside. Someone who knows you extremely well, like mother, may be a singular monitor of your behavior: this situation is also one of intimate surveillance, which U.S. kids are likely to introject along with mother's milk. Boys, to an extent, are granted a reprieve from intimate surveillance through gender disidentification: gender reminds them and their mothers of their difference (Chodorow 1978). Thus, Irigaray (1993:47) asserts daughters are often denied, "equal recognition as a [separate] subject," equal to sons that is. What this means is that it is probably harder for girls to get an internalized intimate surveying other out of the self. This is why, I believe, anorexia is a girls' illness in the United States. In anorexia, girls act out anti-incorporation: by refusing to eat, they try become master of their bodies if not their fates in an oral mode (Gremillion 2003)—a mode that psychoanalysis suggests refers back to their earliest relations with their mothers. Anorexia, of course, is an extreme version of widespread practices for U.S. girls—dieting and exercise. As in anorexia, in these practices shape regu-

lation becomes a site to enact boundary regulation and to assert autonomy through a modern version of what Foucault calls the “care of the self” (1986).

In Alice’s *Rebellious Girl* dream, Agnes is a mother figure. Her rap is a typical U.S. mom’s rap to both male and female teenagers, certainly since AIDS. Nurse is also a maternal figure: nursing a baby is what mothers do. Agnes and Nurse exemplify a maternity that combines recognition with intimate surveillance. Is that why Alice steals the quilt? Alice wants what mothers give, loving recognition, and yet also to outrun their counsels and controls. Together, Agnes and Nurse present the face of a feminine superego prevalent in places like the United States where girls’ early affective relations are narrowly focused on intersubjective engagement with mothers. There, Alice’s dreams suggest, women are particularly vulnerable to this feminine form of superego.<sup>7</sup>

### **Scarlet, Betsy, Bob, Reb, Monroe, and Marilyn**

A superego resembling Alice’s Nurse appeared in a car-crash dream of another young woman I call Scarlet. When she role-played the dream, the male ambulance driver together with a twelve-year-old Mexican boy driver of the wrecked car (who bled from head to toe) censured her for “overreacting,” and called her “hysterical,” even though she only made sensible inquiries. In response, Scarlet like Alice concluded that she should curtail her “need to fix things” and leave that to experts—those specialists in whom Giddens (1991) says moderns are supposed to place their faith. Like Alice, Scarlet had a heroic-inclusive sense of self. In high school, she was a leader of a youth church group. She persuaded the group to travel to Mexico and build a house for a poor Mexican woman. But Scarlet’s boundaries, like Alice’s, were insecure. She told me that during high school her mother once gave her a Slimfast shake for breakfast one morning even though she arose daily at 5 AM to work out. She was extremely upset. This long-remembered reaction to a singular, gentle, if misplaced counsel suggests boundary insecurity: one reacts strongly because one fears one cannot resist—that the other’s view deprives one of choice, the issue Alice raises in relation to her two boyfriends. A boyfriend, I suggest, who proclaims the girl “beautiful,” often replaces a girl’s internalized surveying (m)other, which is one reason why romance is likely to be so emotionally important to U.S. girls.

Other female dreamers, like Alice, tried out transgressive identities, although sometimes the dreamwork displaced transgression and its consequences onto another character. A dreamer I call Betty, for example, was afraid to talk in class despite her strong intellect. She was overweight and shy because of her shape. She dreamt of a woman lecturer who represented her identity aspirations. In the dream, police arrest the lecturer, suggesting that Betty experienced the lecturer’s behavior (talking in a class) as transgressive. The lecturer owned a muddy purple hotrod. Betty associated the mud with failing to “care” for herself (she ate junk food) but also with the exciting “mud racing” she did with her boyfriend: lifted trucks splashed through pools of mud. Her boyfriend, by the way, thought she “was still in perfect shape.” Another dreamer, Betsy, also like Alice in her *Rebellious Girl* dream, sported a bad-boy masculinity. This identity was evident in Betsy’s waking personality: in high school, she played

hooky to go wakeboarding or race a hot car around with her boyfriend. In her dream, she rear-ends and races away from a man who hails her repeatedly until he finally chases her off the road.

One young man in my 2004–06 collection transgressed by borrowing a pinup identity; a gender reversal dramatized in the dream he shared. Bob called himself a “pretty boy” and liked men to admire his physical attractiveness. He was from a rural Idaho town; in high school, his peers hazed him for not being manly. In his dream, a homely man pursues him. Out of kindness, Bob goes about in public with his admirer. He associated the homely man with a gay close friend who was not good looking and was jilted by a lover. This friend committed suicide. The homely dream man, I suspect, also signified the reaction and the consequences Bob anticipated for assuming a homosexual identity: others reacting to him as if he was morally unattractive such that, in effect, he would be committing social suicide.

Most young men in my collection, however, did not appropriate a feminine identity, although some of their dreams shared themes with those I have just described. Reb, for example, dreamt of two thugs who chase him; he dodges first their car, then their bullets. A beautiful woman appears whom Reb tries to shield but the thugs, aiming for him, shoot her. In Reb’s role-play, “she” expresses disappointment: he was not the hero she expected. In this regard, Reb is similar to many young men in my study whose dreams are about succeeding, or more commonly failing, to enact a male identity and often about a woman who fails to recognize them in this identity.

Thus, Monroe dreamt of himself as a Viking mechanic with the jet pack whose job it was to fix an aircraft carrier. He believed the carrier represented his girlfriend. She was about to leave town and the relationship for a far away job. In the dream, the Viking attends a party on the dock only to turn around and discover that the carrier has left, failing to recognize, as Monroe remarked in role-play, that she needs him to “fix” her. It makes sense that, if internalized ideology is about differential relations of power, to the degree that males are still privileged, for them the identity question is one of adequacy. Their dreams would then tend to explore the hypothetical consequences of being or *not* being adequate. In Monroe’s dream, the Viking mechanic drowns in the sea, which probably represented Monroe’s own unrequited needs. Here, of course, there is ideology too. Reb and Monroe’s feelings of failure derive from a gender ideology. Yet in waking or dreaming it is probably harder to resist power relations that appoint you to “top dog” status: one wants to feel entitled to be hailed in such an identity. People have more reason to resist and recursively replay hailings that position them in an inferior role.

Less frequently young women’s dreams suggested a feeling of not measuring up (or down) to a pinup identity. Marilyn dreamt of shopping for shoes in one dream and shopping for clothes in another. Although she was very petite, in both dreams everything was too small for her. She was caught in an identity contradiction. The pinup is a romantic-sexual identity, one that probably made her attractive to her prospective Arab spouse, but his wealthy parents expected her to be chaste, which was out of line with her actual behavior. In another dream, she has to run half-naked to a car while her boyfriend’s mom watches; then she can’t find the keys.

## Dream Plots and Identities

Returning to Alice let me complicate my position that dreams play out transgressive identities and, perhaps, go a bit beyond Althusser's work. Alice's dreams do play out transgressive identities and the reception she expects these to provoke in others. Indeed, Alice tries out that free-wheeling identity symbolized by the car and discovers that her brother complains and cops come after her. She tries out a thief identity and realizes that mother figures try to hold her down and "talk sense into her" (as Americans say). She tries out a sexual identity and sees that the state wants to interrogate her and her boyfriend misunderstands. She tries out a hero identity only to learn that an expert in authority tells her that she has failed when she has not. These dream experiments show others in the act of interpellation and amount to commentaries both on what Alice has internalized and on her own prospects of rejecting or revising these internalizations. I suggest even more broadly, however, that dream plots are what dreamers imagine would happen (and, indeed, register what has happened to them or to others that they observe) should they assume an un-ascribed identity or should they fail to assume a normative one. This hypothesis would include both the male and female cases I have reviewed here but must wait for another paper for fuller exploration. That said, it does appear that to the extent that prejudicial power relations are inscribed within a person, dreams are likely to produce interpellation dramas that are even more vivid, and certainly more personal, than that of Althusser's hailing policeman.

## Notes

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1. On the dream as a metadiscursive category, see Crapanzano 2003.
2. For a complete description of these methods, see Mageo 2011a.
3. In another dream, Alice and her brother are throwing knives at a dartboard and Alice accidentally throws one into his eye; as in the *Rebellious Girl* dream, she injures her brother. Freud might interpret this theme as penis envy. I propose her motivation is identity envy.
4. Like Alice, Holt and Thompson (2004) call this U.S. masculinity the "rebel."
5. On the culture-bound nature of this distinction see Shweder et al. 1990.
6. I do not mean to suggest that U.S. girls refrain from aggressive interaction. Goodwin (2006) finds openly aggressive verbal and nonverbal behavior among White, Latina, and African American girls of middle and lower socioeconomic status.
7. I also found a feminine superego in the dreams of a young man with a Korean mother, George. In his dream, his mom sees him hanging out with his "best buddies" and summons him upstairs to learn a lesson on a refrigerator blackboard (2011a:99–103). For more on contemporary Korean moms' devotion to the children's education, see Jung 2008 and Chua 2011.

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