

MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE

One of Freud's great contributions to our knowledge was his demonstration of the origins of the contents of our dreams, both night-dreams and day-dreams, in our *unconscious*. The *unconscious* is where the *instinctual* drives that have the dominant control over our behavior live. We are not *consciously* unaware of these *instinctual*/primal drives but they determine what we think, what we do, what we feel, and what we say: virtually every aspect of our lives. This interaction between our *unconscious* and *conscious* lives is key to understanding our psyche, in its good times and its troubled times.

Whenever one speaks of their aspirations for their lives, their hopes for the future, one concept that often comes up is a "dream house." The commonplace occurrence in our psyche of the wish to live in a "dream house" makes it an excellent example for a demonstration of the interaction between the *instinctually* driven and *unconscious* activities in our psyche and the life of our *conscious* experiences. This interactive process is of special importance since our *conscious* emotional experience reflects the psyche's struggle to find a way to give expression to these *unconscious* wishes and desires. It is the extent of our success in *sublimating* these needs that determines in part our psychological well being.

Back in the 1960s, Robert Ardrey, with his book *The Territorial Imperative*, introduced to the public the idea that animals and humans both have the *instinctual* need to mark and defend their territory. In animals this drive has been well documented and accepted as one of those traits that the process of evolution programmed in the genetic code as a pattern of behavior necessary for the survival of the species.

We have *sublimated* this *instinctual* drive into a variety of highly intellectualized human endeavors. From the fence around our house, “No Trespassing” signs, fighting to defend our country, and even a teenagers poster on the walls of their rooms to mark their own territory, we humans still act based on animal *instincts*. Many of our human social institutions are based upon our need to have a territory, a place we call our own, where we can keep those things and people precious to ourselves safe from others.

Another instinctual drive of equal importance to our daily lives is the one that created the behaviors immortalized in a song from the 1950s called “Leader of the Pack.” We all want to be “top dog” and to be somebody. In the animal kingdom this instinct is described as a dominance hierarchy, with each individual wanting to achieve as high a place in the hierarchy as possible, but only one can become the “top dog.” Humans have sublimated this drive into a vast array of highly intellectualized excuses to act-out our dominance needs, from the CEO, General, first chair violinist, and corner office with its windows that all show our “top dog” status. After all, the only reason to have a watch is to tell time, but how many of us settle for a dime-store time piece that tells time just fine. A car is to get us from A to B comfortably, safely, and reliably, but how many of us settle for just that. We all want to show off our status in the hierarchy through the quality of our possessions.

If Freud is correct, and the stuff of our dreams is the nighttime and mostly unconscious version of these *instinctual drives* intruding into our *conscious* experience, then a dream-house makes a great deal of sense. The term “dream house” is a symbol of the expression into our conscious daily lives of two of the most fundamental *instinctual*

drives controlling our psyche, our need to mark a territory as our own and a need to show that we are the leader of the pack—in some way superior to others.

The most important part of this whole issue (whether for animals or humans), ones ability to achieve the goals of these *instinctual drives* is that their successful *sublimation* into our daily activities is key to our mental health. Animal behaviorists who study animals have repeatedly described the down and *depressed* demeanor of an animal leader who has been dethroned or an animal frustrated in its attempt to move up the animal's corporate ladder and is "put in its place," a loser in battle for dominance.

We humans talk about self-esteem and feeling good about oneself as the cornerstone of our mental health. No one enjoys "losing face." What better way to feel good about yourself than to live in your dream house, a territorial and dominance battle won. An understanding of this need, our desperate attempts to *sublimate* to their fullest expression the drives of our *unconscious* into our *conscious* lives, is an essential part of self-insight into why we think and do the things that we do.

Sure, a small few may throw brickbats at the excess of some of today's large homes and a magazine recently described Newport Coast as the center of the universe for the "nouveau riche."* However, if it is within your means to comfortably make your dreams come true, more mental health power to you.

*The concept of *nouveau riche* played an important role in the early days, easily thirty-plus years ago, of the development of my ideas on the nature of the human psyche. Money is money, it is accepted in exchange for goods no matter if you inherited it or just made it this morning. People are of good character, educated, cultured, with refined tastes etc. regardless of being self-made or born with a silverspoon. Yet with the coming

of the post World War II economic boom, there was a great expansion of those with substantial wealth. The folks who prior to that time had taken upon themselves a sense of superiority due to their wealth were now threatened by hordes of pretenders to their thrones. The use of the concept of *nouveau riche* is an excellent example of the inventiveness of our psyche to create concepts in which some will fully wrap their sense of self in order to retain their sense of dominance over others, no matter how ridiculous an objective analysis of the concept makes it appear.