

Module 4: Sleeping and Dreaming
Topic 1 Content: Why Do We Dream?

Introduction

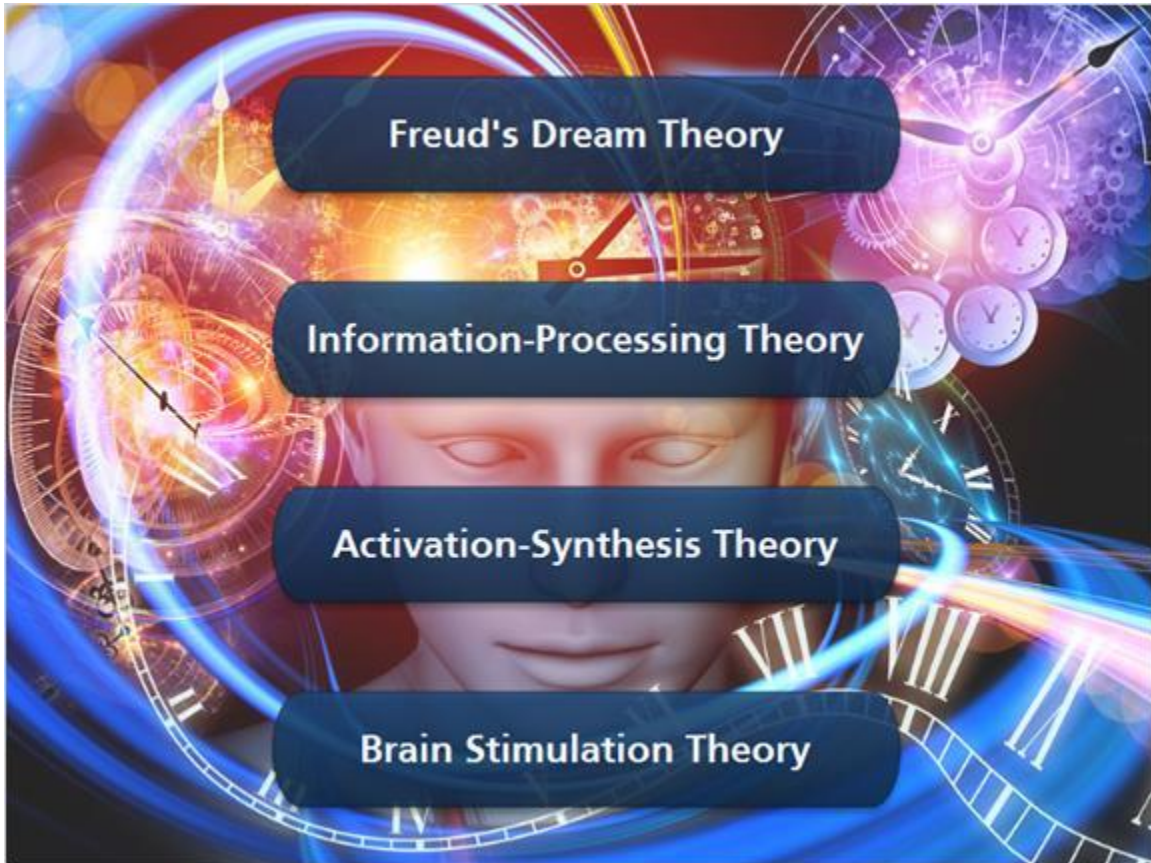


Research has not found a conclusive answer to the question, *Why do we dream?* However, several theories have arisen to help identify some possibilities. Discover some noteworthy theories about dreaming, many of which result from research on the effects of REM sleep deprivation. Click the **NEXT** button to begin. Then click the names of each theory to learn more.

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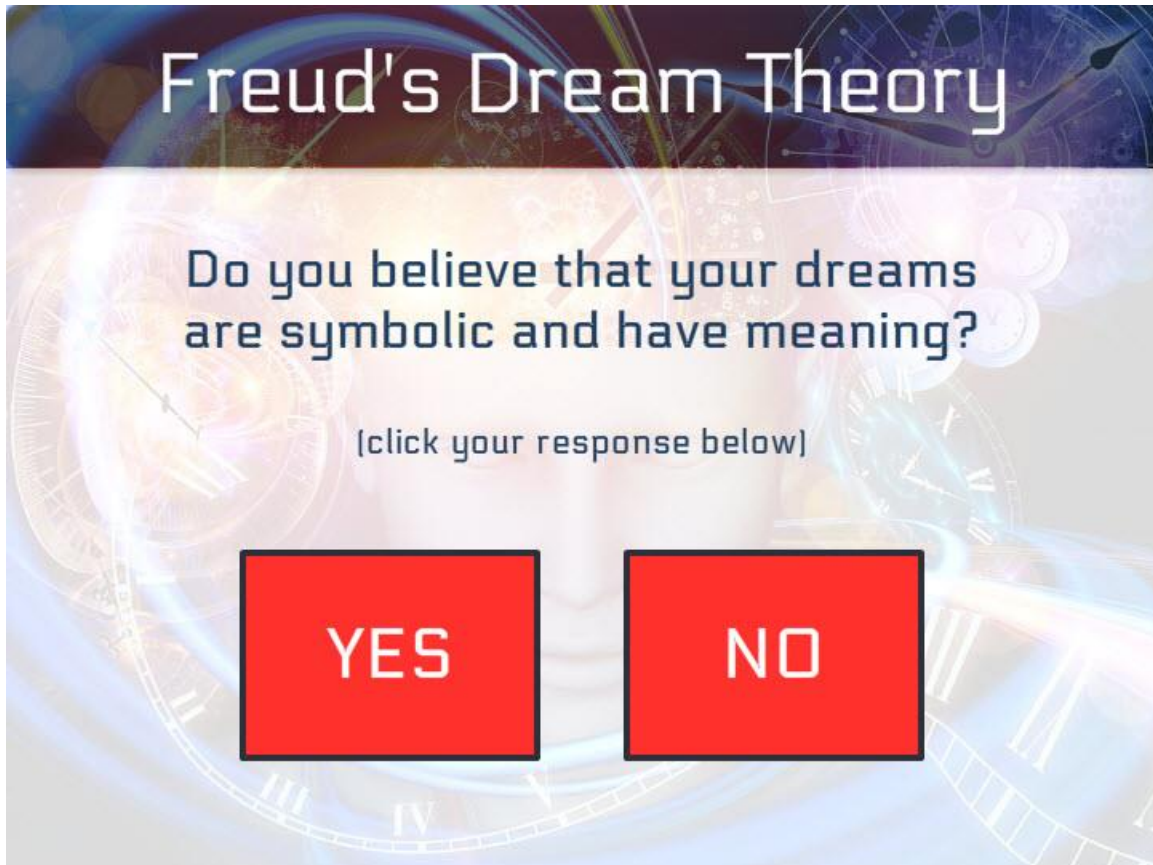
Menu



Buttons:
Freud's Dream Theory;
Information-Processing Theory;
Activation-Synthesis Theory; and
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Freud's Dream Theory



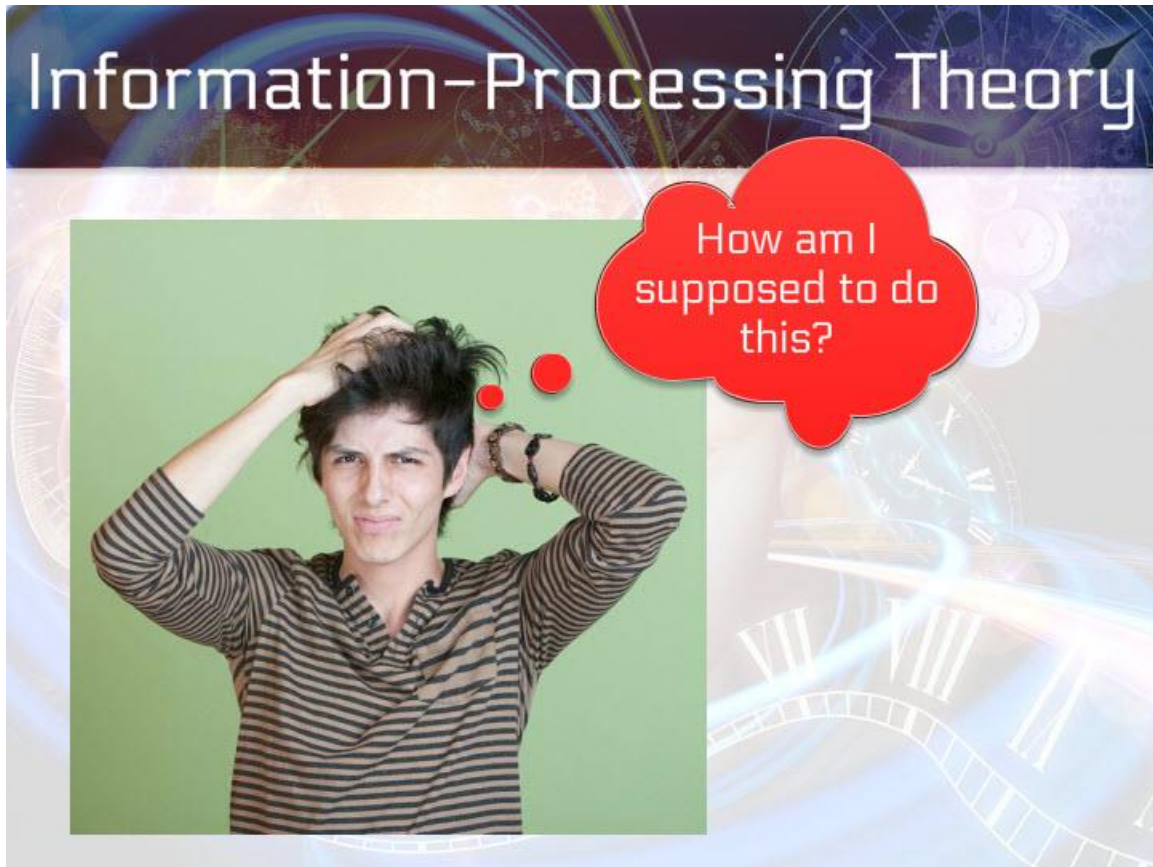
Do you believe that your dreams are symbolic and have meaning?

If you said, yes, then you would agree with Sigmund Freud, the founder of Psychoanalysis. In fact, Freud once called dreams the “royal road to the unconscious mind.” Freud began keeping a dream journal as a young boy and later placed great emphasis on them as he developed his theories. He believed that dreams provide a safe place for expression of inner conflicts and unconscious desires. Freud theorized that dreams were made up of symbols that revealed someone's unconscious wishes. Freud's ideas were based on his personal ideas and beliefs, and not the result of research.

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Information-Processing Theory



If you have not slept well the night before, what happens when you try to learn a new task?

Studies on learning reveal that sleep deprivation causes a decrease in the memory of a new learned task. For example, in one study participants were woken up before entering REM sleep, and scored worse on memory tasks than participants who slept without interruption. Various studies suggest that sleep is important to consolidating memories from the day, whereby information enters the hippocampus and is then processed during sleep.

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Activation-Synthesis Theory

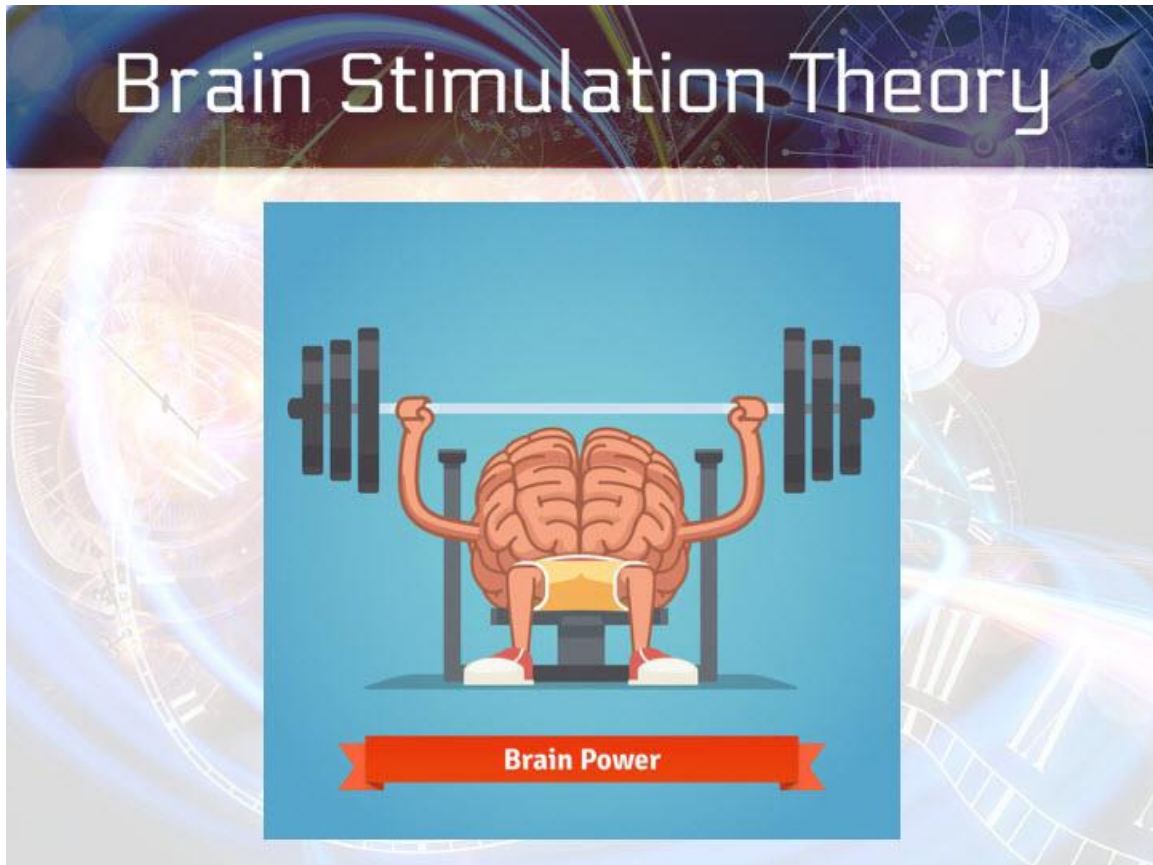


Do your dreams often place people from different eras and places of your life together, leaving you to wonder, for example “Why in my dream was my best friend playing basketball with my fourth grade teacher?”

In Activation-Synthesis, theorists believe dreams are the brain’s attempt to connect random images and thoughts that fire during REM sleep. They then become strung together in an attempt by the brain to make sense of random information. This results in your dreams having strange and bewildering storylines.

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Brain Stimulation Theory



Brain Stimulation researchers believe sleep is like exercise for your brain. This suggests that sleep serves a physiological or biological purpose. If true, this theory might explain why infants spend much of their time in REM sleep.