

ACTIVATION SYNTHESIS THEORY

Outline the theory

The Activation Synthesis Theory suggests that dreams occur when the mind tries to make sense (**synthesis**) of the brain activity happening during sleep (**activation**). (1)

They believe that dreams have **no real meaning**.(1)

Signals come from **pons** in the **brainstem** and from the **neurons** that move the eyes, this activates the **limbic system** and travels to the **occipital lobe**. (1)

These spikes send a surge of stimulation through the brain that activates the **cerebral cortex** & the higher brain tries to give meaning to what is happening.(1)

The effort to give these sudden signals meaning is what leads us to dream. The brain draws upon its **memories** to provide synthesis (a meaning that makes sense). (1)

For example, the spikes might be similar to those produced whilst running – when sleeping a person might synthesise those signals and dream of running.(1)

Evaluate the theory

The theory is too reductionist as critics say it is wrong to reduce dreaming down to simple neuronal processes (1)

For example, dreams are highly complex and bizarre, and packed full of meaning and this theory explains dreams too simplistically (1)

There is evidence that dreams occur in non-REM stages of sleep, even if is reduced and not as vivid (1)

Our ability to recall dreams in REM sleep better may be because we are more likely to wake from this state (1)

There is evidence that there is some continuity in people's dreams, which challenges this theory as it goes against the ideas of the randomness of dreams (1)

For example, some people have recurring dreams, dreams with similar themes or pick up dreams after wake and falling back asleep (1)