

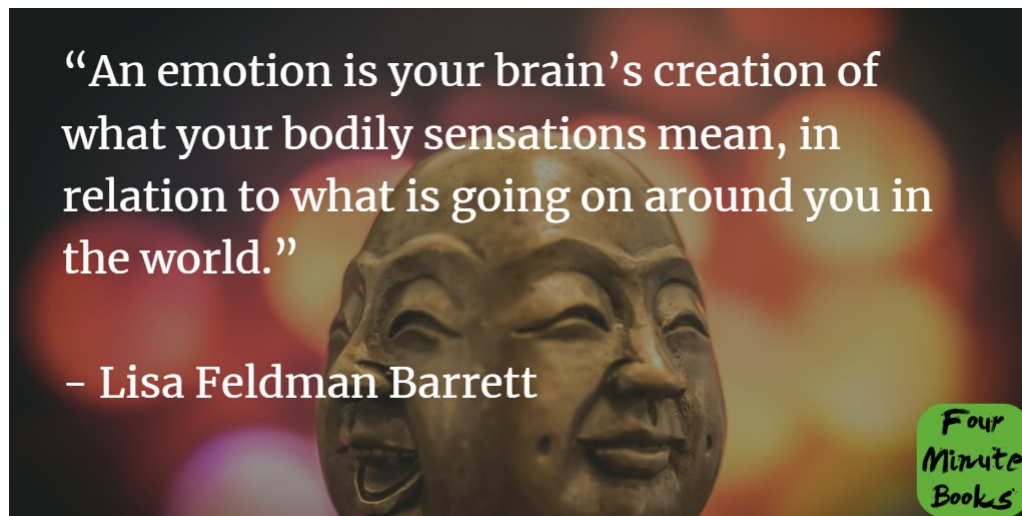
How Emotions Are Made Summary



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1-Sentence-Summary: *[How Emotions Are Made](#) explores the often misconstrued world of human emotions and the cutting-edge science behind how they're formed.*

Favorite quote from the author:



When we were young, emotions seemed pretty simple. We dropped our ice cream cone, we were sad. We got to go to the park, we were happy. And so on. But as we got older our emotions became increasingly more complex and confusing. And it doesn't help that there are tons of widely believed myths out there about emotions. Here's one you might believe that's wrong: the world has universal facial expressions to express emotion, like smiling for joy. And here's another: emotions come from the limbic, or "[reptilian](#)" [brain](#) and we must use our "[rational](#)" [brain](#) to control them.

It's a bit crazy how many of us believe these and many other myths about emotion. But it's not really our fault. These myths persist because "[emotional intelligence](#)" industries, health professionals, and scientists often are not up-to-date with the current research. If you're ready to get on the right course, look no further.

In the book [How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain](#), author and distinguished professor of psychology Lisa Feldman Barrett sets out to clear the air. This TED speaker will tell you what the research really says. And in the process, she challenges pretty much all you thought you knew about human emotions. This transformative book will tell you the true story behind your feelings.

Here are 3 powerful lessons this book teaches about emotions:

1. The classical view of emotions dominates today, though science does not support it.
2. We spontaneously create emotions in the moment based on sensory input and predictions made by the brain.
3. Our concept of emotion comes from our culture and beliefs about emotion.

Are you ready to dig deep and understand your feelings a little better? Let's learn!

Lesson 1: We still believe in a classical view of emotions that science doesn't support anymore.

In our society, we often think of emotions as something you can't control, almost like a reflex. This classical view is the idea that emotions are more or less irrational reflexes leftover from our evolution. We even teach it in textbooks and see it all around us in the media. Further, there's a notion that each emotion comes from a distinct part of the brain. This [essentialist](#) look on emotion also assumes that everyone experiences, expresses, and interprets emotions in the same way.

But think about it, do you always express anger in the same way? Of course not. The classical view doesn't work because we can express every emotion in multiple ways. Sadness isn't just one distinct feeling. Find a thesaurus and you'll see the myriad of different variations, all of which have a slightly different feeling. **This is because each emotional response is specific to the situation, rather than us experiencing the same few recurring emotions.**

[Experiments in emotion](#) show that single emotions don't originate in a specific region of the brain. In the author's own research, she looked at brain scans during various emotions. Barrett saw that the "emotion" region of the brain is active even during perceptions and thoughts that aren't emotional. She found that though societies may have expressive patterns, there isn't a universal response in the brain to each emotion. Yet, as a society, we still perpetuate the classical view. We waste money in trying to find ways to identify emotions.

Lesson 2: The brain makes emotions on the spot based on sensory input and predictions.

So if the classical view has it all wrong, what should we believe? The author advocates for the *theory of constructed emotion*. This is that we create emotions spontaneously and concurrently in more than one area of the brain. Furthermore, emotions are based on the individual. We form our feelings from a combination of unique sensory input and the brain's best predictions.

The theory is that the brain doesn't just spontaneously create emotions per the situation. Rather, the source of emotions is in each person's individual experiences. The brain makes predictions and anticipates sensory inputs such as vision or taste. Sensory inputs either affirm the mind's predictions as correct or the brain learns and changes wrong predictions.

This is why we experience a myriad of anger responses. Sometimes we may shout, others we might stay quiet. Each response has its own neural pathway and bodily movements. The brain uses prior experience and sensory input to predict which reaction will be best for the specific situation.

The author compares this to [Darwin's theory of evolution](#), that each animal varies subtly depending on their environment. **Similarly, our emotions are not innate or fixed but are constructed by our experience.**

Lesson 3: Our experience of emotion is largely based on culture and our beliefs about it.

Not only do people not experience emotions the same way, but culture also shapes our concept of emotions. In the Tahitian language, they don't have any words to describe sadness. Rather, they use a

word meaning something along the lines of “the fatigue that comes with the flu.”

Our reality depends on the concepts we have to describe what’s around us, and these depend on our culture. So our idea of what emotions are is a convention of the [culture](#) we live in. This means that once we know the concept of an emotion, we can experience that emotion.

Smiling is a relatively recent concept. Interestingly, the Ancient Romans didn’t even have a word to describe it. The author believes it was not associated with being happy as it is now. Humans probably didn’t “invent” it until the Middle Ages. It’s likely there was some other gesture in Roman culture to indicate happiness, but we don’t know. Our concept of what emotions are is highly dependent on the culture we are a part of.

How Emotions Are Made Review

[*How Emotions Are Made*](#) is a refreshing new take on the true source of our feelings. Although some of the concepts in the book were unfamiliar to me, I enjoyed the fascinating takeaways. I think we need more research on these ideas, but I would highly recommend this book!

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Who would I recommend the How Emotions Are Made summary to?

The 20-year-old college student who wants to study psychology, the 39-year-old who would like to understand his emotions better to improve his life, and anyone who wants the truth about what emotions are and how they form.