

## If you think you understand how feelings are conveyed, think again.

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Are you beginning to feel overwhelmed by Zoom meetings? They are fine for conveying information, but are somehow flat. Video chats and conferences are missing some of the essence, the joys and the frustrations, of why we like to work, go to meetings and socialize. There are no smells. Sound is hollow and sometimes garbled. You can only see people's faces and shoulders. We had an intuitive sense that something, probably emotion, was missing.

A colleague recommended the book *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* by Lisa Feldman Barrett. Maybe this book will help us understand what's missing in Zoom meetings. The book is so comprehensive and full of new research that we got a lot more than we bargained for.

### • Evolution of Theories about Emotions



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Barrett persuasively deconstructs many aspects of commonly-held beliefs of how emotions are generated and expressed and the ability of others to clearly understand the emotions of others. There is no universal understanding of what it means to be sad, afraid or anxious. Depending on the background of the person describing the emotion and the context of the reaction, one person might describe feeling "anxious" and a second person might describe the same combination of biological and neurological changes as feeling "sad". And when you remove the context (word choice and situation) from photographs of expressions, over 60 percent misread the emotion expressed by the face in the photograph.

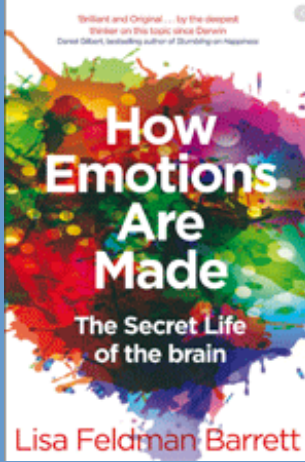
### • Emotional Constructivism



Emotions are "constructed" based on our individual experiences. We experience a collection of physical changes, such as heart rate and hormonal changes, and we name the experience. Each named emotion is actually a "category" of emotion and the experience of the emotional category varies, both among individuals and for the same individual over time. Our bodily changes are a "prediction" of the named emotion, not a reaction.

### • Challenges Translating Feeling into Words

Many factors contribute to the way we name and describe our emotions including socioeconomic background, spiritual philosophy and limited vocabulary. According to Barrett, other languages commonly have emotion words whose associated concepts have no equivalent in English. For example, Russian has two distinct words for what Americans call "anger", Germans have three distinct "anger" words and Mandarin has five.



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Barrett concludes with encouraging approaches to improving our emotional state and to helping our children better express their emotions. "Like most important paradigm shifts in science, this one has the potential to transform our health, our laws and who we are. To forge a new reality."

Sincerely,

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