

# Building Emotions

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Emotions like anger, sadness, and fear have traditionally been thought of as innate, discrete entities, each with its own biological core: An event (seeing a snake) triggers a particular hardwired emotion (fear) and its corresponding behavioral and physiological responses (an adrenaline surge, screaming, running away). As Lisa Feldman Barrett has found, however, this view is not well supported by the scientific literature, and so she has developed a model that is more in line with the data. The Conceptual Act Model conceives of emotions not as the basic building blocks of the mind, but as complex perceptions, built from four basic systems – core affect, conceptualization, executive control, and language. Different emotions (e.g., the unpleasant fear of threat, the pleasant fear on a rollercoaster) are produced by combining these systems in different ways, the way that subatomic particles create atoms and molecules. Barrett is now focused on empirically validating this model using psychological and neuroscience techniques and achieving a deeper understanding of how the brain integrates our core affective and conceptual systems to form emotional constructions. She is a recipient of the US National Institutes of Health Director's Pioneer Award and a member of the Royal Society of Canada.