

From Fruit Fly To Stink Eye: Searching For Anger's Animal Roots

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For comedian Lewis Black, anger is a job.

Black is famous for his [rants](#) about stuff he finds annoying or unfair or just plain infuriating.

Onstage, he often looks ready for a fight. He leans forward. He shouts. He stabs the air with an index finger, or a middle finger.

To a scientist, Black looks a lot like a belligerent dog, or an irritated gerbil.

“Practically every sexually reproducing, multicellular animal shows aggressive behavior,” says [David Anderson](#), a professor of biology at Caltech and co-author of the book *The Neuroscience of Emotion*. “Fruit flies show aggression.”

When I relay that last bit to Black, he’s skeptical. “Really?” he says. “Come on.”

There’s an ongoing debate among scientists about whether that’s true. Psychologist [Lisa Feldman Barrett](#) of Northeastern University is among the researchers who contend that human emotions including anger are “constructed” rather than hard-wired in the brain.