

How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain by Lisa Feldman Barrett

Post by “Godfrey” of April 15, 2021 at 8:30 PM

What does this mean for the pursuit of pleasure? LFB explains that this information can be used to design a “recipe for living,” by working with your body budget and your concepts. People with a balanced body budget are apt to have better health, sharper mental abilities for longer, and a more meaningful and fulfilling life. (To me this sounds very Epicurean: pleasure equates to health, displeasure [or pain] to disease.)

Some ingredients of the recipe:

- Keep your body budget in good shape. *“...your interoceptive network labors day and night, issuing predictions to maintain a healthy budget, and this process is the origin of your affective feelings (pleasantness, unpleasantness, arousal, and calmness). If you want to feel good, then your brain’s predictions about your heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, temperature, hormones, metabolism, and so on, must be calibrated to your body’s actual needs. If they aren’t, and your body budget gets out of whack, then you’re going to feel crappy no matter what self-help tips you follow.”*

- The foundation for regulating your predictions and body budget begins with the basics: healthy eating, exercising, getting enough sleep.

- To build on that, improve your physical comfort and your physical surroundings. Get a massage, spend time in nature and natural light. Regular lunch dates with a friend, taking turns treating each other has benefits in terms of giving, gratitude and friendship. Get a pet. Research your hobbies to see if they’re beneficial for stress.

- Improve your emotional intelligence: increase your “emotional granularity.” Becoming more specific in identifying emotions improves your brain’s ability to construct more specific and useful emotion concepts in any given situation. Take trips, read books, watch movies, try new foods, experience different perspectives. Learn new words as these contribute to your store of concepts. Invent new emotion concepts for specific situations and learn emotion concepts from other languages.

- Track your positive experiences; keep a gratitude journal. Reinforcing positive concepts makes them easier for your brain to re-create.

- Learn to deconstruct your affective feelings into their basic physical sensations. Avoid letting those sensations color how you see the world. (Separate “pain” and “suffering”) *“When you feel bad, treat yourself like you have a virus, rather than assuming that your unpleasant feelings*

mean something personal.”

- Recategorize your physical feelings from negative to positive. For instance from harmful anxiety to helpful anticipation; or categorize discomfort as helpful as when exercising: “pain is weakness leaving the body.”
- Try mindfulness meditation.
- Cultivate and experience awe.