

cognition,” noting that they “agitate and disturb” the soul and render judgment “confused and obscure”. But they can be controlled through rationality, he suggested: “To excite courage in oneself and remove fear, it is not sufficient to have the will to do so, but we must also apply ourselves to consider the reasons.”³

Using reason to temper the emotions is not just an exercise for philosophers. Many of the bloggers in the *We Feel Fine* database use their blogs to introduce rationality to their emotions. “I feel good about my state of mind,” writes one anonymous blogger in her April 19th, 2009, post. She had recently had an upsetting encounter with a girl who was trying to break up her relationship, but, she said, “I am close to being over that crazy girl and all that shit she caused. I have been very direct and calm rather than let anger and rage get the best of me. When I feel upset I just take a minute to decide if it’s rational and reasonable as opposed to irrational and of psycho bitch status.” And Justin Guber, on his June 9th, 2009, post, writes: “Last night I could feel those strange, weird, irrational feelings surface, and I started typing away and things felt a bit better after that.”⁴

On September 13th, 1848, Phineas Gage, a 25-year-old railroad foreman, was impaled in the head with an iron rod in a construction accident outside Cavendish, Vermont. The 13-foot, 3.5-pound rod entered the side of his face, passed behind the left eye, and exited out the top of his head, landing about 80 feet away. Astonishingly, Gage was walking and talking within a few minutes, and sat upright in the ox cart that he rode in to see the town doctors, John Harlow and Edward Williams.

Williams wrote about the encounter: “Mr. Gage, during the time I was examining this wound, was relating the manner in which he was injured to the bystanders; he talked so rationally and was so willing to answer questions, that I directed my inquiries to him in preference to the men who were with him at the time of the accident... Mr. G. then related to me some of the circumstances, as he has since done; and I can safely say that neither at that time nor on any subsequent occasion, save once, did I consider him to be other than perfectly rational.”⁵

Physically, Gage recovered tremendously well. He lost vision in his left eye, but he maintained all other physical abilities; he could walk, talk, and do complex physical tasks with ease. Further, he was still clearly intelligent. But there was a strange effect on his personality after the physical recovery: he seemed to have become a man-child. His doctor, John Harlow, mentioned that he became “fitful, irreverent, indulging at times in the grossest profanity which was not previously his custom, manifesting but little deference for his fellows, impatient of restraint or advice when it conflicts with his desires, at times pertinaciously obstinate, yet capricious and vacillating, devising many plans of future operation, which are no sooner arranged than they are abandoned.”⁶ His friends noted that “Gage was no longer Gage.” His bosses, who before the accident had called him “the most efficient and capable” man in the railroad gang, refused to give him back his old job. He spent the rest of his life wandering between various jobs on horse farms, in the circus, and as a stagecoach driver in South America, seeming to have lost his ability to make reasonable decisions, his forethought, and his respect for social convention.

Almost a century and a half later, the neurologist Antonio Damasio encountered a patient whom he called “a modern Phineas Gage.” The patient, whom he referred to as Elliot, was in his 30s and had undergone a radical personality change after an operation to remove a brain tumor on the surface of his frontal lobes. Elliot’s intelligence, his ability to move, and his ability to use language were not harmed by the operation. But, like Phineas Gage, Elliot seemed to have lost the ability to make decisions and plan for the future. Since the operation, the formerly stable Elliot had started several ill-conceived business ventures, gotten himself bankrupt, and had two divorces. “The tragedy of this otherwise healthy and intelligent man was that he was neither stupid nor ignorant, and yet he acted often as if he were,” said Damasio. “The machinery for his decision making was so flawed that he could no longer be an effective social being.”⁷

Damasio struggled to figure out why Elliot had lost the ability to plan and make decisions. After all, his reason stayed entirely intact. Elliot scored above average on a battery of tests to determine the state of his rational mind—for long-term memory, short-term memory, perceptual ability, new learning, language, the ability to do arithmetic, the ability to make estimates based on incomplete knowledge, and logical competence. “After all these tests,” wrote Damasio, “Elliot emerged as a man with a normal intellect who was unable to decide properly, especially when the decision involved personal and social matters. Could it be that reasoning and decision making in the personal and social domain were different from reasoning and thinking in domains concerning objects, space, numbers, and words?”⁸

It was at this point that Damasio gave Elliot a test that showed one additional post-operation change. Elliot had lost the ability to feel emotion. The case of Elliot led Damasio to the conclusion that the age-old dichotomy between emotions and reason is false. Emotions are crucial to reason, especially reasoning about social and personal issues. And while too much emotion can obstruct reason, according to Damasio, reduction in emotion can be an equally important source of irrational behavior. “The cold-bloodedness of Elliot’s reasoning,” writes Damasio, “prevented him from assigning different values to different options, and made his decision-making landscape hopelessly flat.”⁹ In a complex world with so many factors affecting our decisions, the heart needs to play a prominent role.

This chapter explores 50 common emotions through the lens of the *We Feel Fine* database. It explores the nature, the demographics, and the statistics around each of these emotions. In an interconnected world where emotions are so essential, this chapter provides one way to get to know our feelings more deeply.



From left: Carolyn Scotchmer at home; Carolyn in her suitcase; Carolyn waking up in Egypt’s Sahara—“I wish we could bottle moments like this and save them for later, to be taken out and enjoyed at those times when we forget ourselves.”

Carolyn Scotchmer did follow her heart and take that flight on February 5th, 2007, and moved to Egypt as was her original plan. After living in Cairo for a couple of months without a job, she ended up with the tour leader job she had wanted. In her May 24th, 2007, blog post, she wrote: “I can’t believe this is actually happening! I know it won’t be perfect, but I am so very excited to try this.”¹⁰ Her July 25th, 2007, blog post was entitled *Ana Mapsutta*, Arabic for “I’m happy.”¹¹ ♥

1. Carolyn Scotchmer. <http://ca.blog.360.yahoo.com/blog-6.JcFdoyerSpM9r2ysE3oO3yDBeMWAg4>

2. Carolyn Scotchmer. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cscotchmer/353999270/>

3. Descartes, René. *The Passions of the Soul*. 1649.

4. Justin Guber. <http://guber.terapad.com/?fa=contentNews.newsDetails&from=list&newsID=100226>

5–9. Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, (New York: Penguin, 1994).

10, 11. Carolyn Scotchmer. See 1.