Evaluating the Victorian Emotional Style: Causes and Consequences

Major features of Victorian emotional culture have been well described in recent years. Despite persistent and erroneous oversimplifications about blanket repressiveness and hostility to spontaneity, in fact the picture painted in the previous chapter blends a host of familiar portraits.¹ Victorian interest in emotional intensity combined with greater strictures concerning sexuality and bodily control, with emotion actually offering some relief from the more rigorous standards applied to other areas.

The causes of the Victorian style are, however, less well known, partly because the emotional culture has not previously been addressed in its entirety. Furthermore, although we will see that some of the specific consequences have been traced, analysis of effects can be improved by looking at the impact of the whole culture rather than individual parts such as love or gender norms.

Cause-effect evaluation of the Victorian style is essential, for without it, the purely descriptive summary provided in the previous chapter may prove deceptive. Despite widespread and substantial concordance in the cultural prescriptions to the middle class, emotional standards must be considered mere window dressing if they did not respond to real needs in Victorian society; pinpointing causation is vital. Even more obviously, if the emotional norms had no demonstrable consequences aside from filling up advice literature and moralistic fiction, they could well be
dismissed as meaningless. In fact, however, despite incomplete evidence on private beliefs and behaviors, it is possible to trace a number of results that issued from the widely preached culture and to conclude that, like the culture itself, these results were persistent. Finally, cause-effect evaluation is essential in preparing for analysis of subsequent change; for change could occur only as causation shifted, and the impact of causal shifts had to be formulated in contest with previous cultural impacts.

_Causation_

Basic causes of emotional standards have been discussed less often than the standards themselves, both in historical work and to a substantial extent in sociology. Anthropologists, who deal extensively with emotional culture, pay even less attention to causation since, with rare exceptions, they pick up well-established patterns (or assume that they do) and do not emphasize change. For them, prior culture causes present culture, with other causes stretching back in the mists of time. Yet causal analysis is vital in dealing with emotions as social or cultural constructs, for we need to know what factors prompted particular patterns to emerge. Constructionist theory has emphasized the importance of changing social functions in reshaping emotional life, an approach that invites exactly the kind of causation assessment historians seek; but practicing constructionists have spent more time discussing their propositions in the abstract than providing concrete case studies.² Their approach has been brought to bear on twentieth-century change, and I will turn to it in due course, but middle-level generalizations, based on more than recent developments, are hard to come by. As a result, important debate among constructionists, about what kind of functionalism underlies emotional standards, has remained largely implicit. Constructionists would generally agree that emotions serve particularly to maintain the moral order and the social status quo, but this may beg the more precise question of which particular moral and social factors are involved. James Averill defines these factors as social and cultural, but practicing constructionists like Arlie Hochschild construe functionalism more narrowly, emphasizing primarily economic and organizational factors.³ Yet the anthropologists who have contributed to constructionist theory emphasize cultural functions as well. There are important issues here,
which I will address in applying functionalist explanations both to Victorianism and to subsequent twentieth-century change; but there are no precise models to guide our inquiry.

Causation is a tricky concept in historical discussion, particularly in dealing with an already-slippery descriptive category like emotional culture. Explaining Victorian culture is a far more challenging task than assigning causes for the War of Jenkin's Ear. Historians have no laboratory basis for testing replicability. They cannot present causation findings in the same manner as scientists, who do have this capacity. Yet, granting the imprecision and openness to further debate, historical change can be identified and it can be subjected to probabilistic evaluation, yielding a fair sense of the major factors involved.

One further issue requires some preliminary comment: the relationship between the causes of standards applied to individual emotions and the causes that generate a larger emotional style involves overlap but not complete identity. For example, the Victorian emphasis on parental love for children built on cultural trends that had been taking shape for some time, but there were also more specific reasons for it. The American middle class was busily cutting its birth rate from the late eighteenth century onward. Smaller family size often encourages a more intense relationship between parents and children and also, when it is first developing, a rather anxious concern to justify novel demographic behavior. Arguing in terms of great love and extensive maternal obligations helped Victorian parents ease their minds about having fewer children, on average, than their own parents had expected. While emphasis on love for children also fit, of course, in the larger Victorian style and indeed played a major role in some of its other ramifications, its specific origins must be acknowledged. It is also important to recognize that events may carry impact on some emotional standards without particularly altering others. For example, the Civil War obviously helped heighten earlier emphasis on channeled anger and courageous encounters with fear, but it had little impact on standards of love. Again, particular factors can be identified without contradicting the larger causal analysis, but they do add complexity. Explaining the Victorian style itself constitutes the most important analytical task, but it does not exhaust the process of evaluating factors relevant to more specific ingredients.

Two other illustrations highlight specific contexts applicable to indi-
individual emotions. Victorian grief, which served a central position in the larger culture, stemmed in part from the continuing high child mortality rates (all the more keenly felt with the birth rate steadily declining) in a culture that now saw children as more precious, child mortality as less inevitable. This specific formula for intense grief bore little relationship to channeled anger or several of the other Victorian staples.

Finally, Victorian romantic love ideals stemmed in part—possibly in large part—from the tension-filled combination middle-class couples attempted between extensive emotional exchange and pronounced restrictions on premarital sexuality. Courting couples were given considerable freedom for mutual contact in the United States—far more than outdated Victorian imagery had suggested. They were encouraged to think about love, and of course their culture had already prepared them, well before courtship, to expect some decisive emotional charge. Young men, for example, thought about women and love long before their economic circumstances permitted them to go courting. But they were not supposed to have sexual intercourse even as they built an intense relationship, and while a few couples crossed this barrier, most did not. It is hardly fanciful to see the emphasis on overwhelming but ethereal passion as in part a compensation for sexual limitations and an aid in enforcing restraint among couples who firmly believed that premature sex would sully their true love. Sexual constraint may indeed have informed other facets of the Victorian emotional style, providing a physical basis for the need to find channels for emotional intensity, but it applied most directly to the love connection. It is obvious that larger emotional cultures like the Victorian style result in part from the accumulation of smaller changes that relate to more specific parts of the emotional spectrum.

Accumulation, however, is not the only explanatory approach. Just as individual factors involved in particular emotional reactions informed the Victorian style as a whole, so the style had roots of its own that helped shape particular emotional reactions. Interestingly, despite the recent flurry of attention to Victorian emotionality, we have only incomplete glimpses of the larger causation. Just as the style itself has not previously been synthesized, so the causes of the style have not been directly addressed.

Victorian emotional culture contrasted with eighteenth-century styles in several key respects, particularly in the decades of maturity after the
1840s. Indulgence of grief was novel, for while individuals grieved in the eighteenth century, the public interest in this emotion was limited. The mature Victorian definition of romantic love, while it built on prior trends, went well beyond eighteenth-century precedents. The idea of channeled anger meshed neither with traditional indulgence in certain kinds of anger—in defense of hierarchy or religious orthodoxy, for example—nor with growing eighteenth-century concern about keeping anger in bounds. Attacks on disciplinary uses of fear emerged specifically in the early nineteenth century, and in this case were quite consciously directed against prior standards. The same holds true for some of the new uses of guilt. The Victorian emotional style was not, then, simply a carryover from prior standards or even from some of the newer cultural trends, though it involved the latter. Thus it is necessary to isolate the causes of the Victorian emotional style, for such analysis will in turn facilitate exploration of the reasons for yet another, more profound, post-Victorian set of shifts.

The simplest basic explanation of overall Victorian culture would focus on combining an understanding of emotionological trends that had been part of the transformation of mentalities throughout Western society from the late seventeenth century onward with attention to the impact of industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth-century United States. According to such a reading, the Victorian emotional style was not a fundamental departure from eighteenth-century trends, themselves rather new. We have already seen that in highlighting explicit concern about anger, in attacking traditional disciplinary uses of fear, and in emphasizing various kinds of love, Victorianism amplified currents already present in American culture a century before. Victorianism thus built upon the reorientation of family functions toward greater emotionality and the attempt to introduce greater restraint in manners; it had no need to create. But while not fundamentally innovative, it did introduce its own flavor—the idea of motherlove, for example, while an outgrowth of the familial emphasis, was a distinctive Victorian product—and this is where the new functional demands imposed by the growth of industry and the city made their mark.

The origins of the preindustrial cultural transformation are themselves not entirely clear. Several historians have cited the role of growing commercialization in prompting new concern about family emotional rewards as public life, in many communities, became increasingly com-
petitive. Protestantism, as it transmuted into a wider belief system in the seventeenth century, unquestionably encouraged greater focus on family ties, emotional ties included. English writers pushed this theme hard and had obvious impact on attitudes across the Atlantic as well. Sources for the increasingly rigorous definition of civilized manners are not as easily pinned down. European upper classes grew increasingly suspicious of popular crudeness under the impact of Renaissance styles, which provided them a clear alternative to the prevailing version of mass culture. Growing prosperity brought a taste for refinement of habits. Capitalism also exacerbated divisions between propertied and unpropertied classes, which in turn generated an interest in habits of emotional restraint that would allow the former to distinguish themselves while conveniently blaming the latter for their own miseries. None of this bore fruit as quickly in the American colonies as in Europe, but, with the added effect of European cultural imitation, it began to have an impact by the later eighteenth century. Thus, well in advance of Victorianism per se, American emotional norms had been shifting, and these changes prepared the response to the challenges of a new economy.

By the 1830s the impact of an increasingly commercial economy was becoming clear. Victorian emotionology reacted, as we have seen, by seeking to enhance the special emotional role of the family; here was part of the functional charge behind the redefinition of motherlove. In the slightly longer term, the increasing absence of husbands and fathers, as work separated from the home, added fuel to the fire, and emotional standards had to be intensified simply to protect the established value of family life. Concern about the taints of commerce, present even among people who embraced commercial opportunities, provided yet another function for family-enhancing intensity and an emotional style that would clearly separate private from public activity.

But this was only an initial functional reaction in emotional culture. By the late 1840s, people began to realize that the same industrial world that required the family as emotional haven also required new emotional motivations for competitive work. (The lag behind actual economic change was interesting, as it meshed with other delayed reactions, for example, in schooling styles; but it was not acute.) The resultant response explains why Victorianism introduced its most distinctive emotional emphases in arguing for channeled anger and courageous encounters with fear. Military interests played a role, but the vision of emotions
necessary to succeed in new entrepreneurial and professional roles was preeminent. Family values were preserved—and the virtual sanctification of motherlove preserved this goal even as other purposes were embraced—but the emotional range expanded as understanding of functional necessity broadened. Victorian emotional standards were meant to enshrine family while also providing the spur to achievement in public life.

Early industrialization and growing cities generated other functional concerns as well, which further shaped the Victorian style. Boundaries of social class became more vivid, even if American democratic values muted some of the conflicts that developed in the European version of industrialization. A recent article has shown how increased concern for cleanliness—a form of bodily discipline potentially related to emotional constraints—was in part a response to the need to formalize class divisions. Just as the middle class separated itself through the use of soap, so it prided itself on emotional restraints and subtleties whose absence marked other social groups as inferior. Channeled anger thus differed from the emotional propensity to brawl and certainly from real or imagined lower-class anger released within the family. Comments on fear routinely distinguished between what middle-class folks could aspire to and the baser emotions of the hoi polloi. Thus Dick, in an Oliver Optic story, spews out class pride when he contrasts his sort of courage with the actions of a host of deserters:

I can pity without blaming them, for it was a fearful ordeal for men such as you describe. As I heard my father say . . . , it requires a moral force behind the physical to enable a soldier to stand up before the enemy, facing death and mangling wounds, without flinching. We have always found that the most ignorant and ruffianly men make the most unreliable soldiers. As father said, it is the soul, rather than the body that makes the true soldier.

Similarly, intense, properly spiritual love could serve as a differentiator. When late-nineteenth-century divorce law came to enshrine this quality through the concept of mental cruelty, provable through the absence of appropriate affection as well as blatant nastiness, the middle class was correspondingly privileged. Divorcing working-class couples could not point to absence of love as an excuse, for their natures precluded the finer sentiments in the first place. Mental cruelty grounds of this sort were denied them until after 1900.

Emotional culture had begun to take on qualities of class identifica-
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tion even earlier, at least in the minds of middle- and upper-class proponents, as in late-eighteenth-century Virginia.\textsuperscript{14} It became part of a larger dispute over respectability throughout much of the nineteenth century. And while respectability claims focused in part on workers' and immigrants' lack of civilized restraints, they also highlighted some subtle intensities that were open only to people of refinement.

Class boundaries aside, urban and commercial life required rules that would assist in the identification of strangers. As familiar community monitoring proved increasingly inadequate, Victorian culture responded to the need to provide cues that would help people distinguish the trustworthy from the unreliable.\textsuperscript{15} Identification of correct responses was a result of this need.

Finally, and even more obviously, Victorian culture served gender purposes, and new functional demands also impacted this arena. Emotional arguments helped justify confinement of women to the home, which was seen by men and many women as a functional necessity given changes in the location of work. Beliefs about motherlove as well as female lack of motivating anger did not cause gender division, but they certainly helped support it. Men welcomed special emotional badges, like their aptitude for channeled anger and courage, not only because they put women in their place but also because they bolstered male qualities at a time when certain aspects of industrialization created masculine insecurities. With property ownership and traditional skills now threatened, with family role complicated by new work demands, it was comforting, perhaps truly functional, to have an explicit, if demanding, emotional identity.\textsuperscript{16} Emotional masculinity in this sense complemented increasing reliance on men's role as economic provider, which replaced a more traditional and less anxious gender definition. Here, too, function was served.

Growing industrialization, in sum, created new needs for family enhancement, for personal motivation, for justifications for class boundaries, and for gender roles. The Victorian emotional style responded faithfully, particularly in its fuller version after the 1840s.

Yet the functionalist approach should not be pressed too far, for the emotional adjustments to industrialization were based on cultural preparation. For example, the value of intense family ties had to be established before they could be further emphasized. Functional logic, here at least, was prepared by beliefs, which is one reason why Victori-
anism did not fully break away from emotional patterns set up the century before.

Furthermore, three kinds of cultural shifts during the nineteenth century itself added to the imperatives of industrial work and urban social stratification in promoting the full-blown Victorian emotional style. The first involves implications from emotionological change itself: until interrupted by other factors, shifts in emotional culture tend to cause additional modifications in the same direction. Thus an emphasis on motherlove contributed directly to the heightened intensity attributed to romantic love. Hypertrophied maternal love increased the need for strong adult passion to aid products of emotionally intense upbringing in freeing themselves from maternal ties; love of a new sort must counter the love into which both boys and girls had, at least according to Victorian standards, been socialized. This aid in emotional weaning, particularly important for girls, was functional in a broad sense, helping to form the emotional underpinnings for new families, but it would have been far less necessary with a cooler familial background. Not surprisingly, Victorian fiction picked up elements of this motif in stressing the emotional anguish that young women might encounter in breaking, through ardent courtship, the bonds that had tied them to parents and to siblings.¹⁷

New emotional rules that urged more intense love, along with those that proscribed anger and fear in the discipline of children, obviously expanded the realm of guilt. While the culture urged socialization toward guilt as part of childrearing, adults readily expanded the connection—which heightened their own emotional response to guilt and further legitimated efforts to instill guilt in their offspring. By the later nineteenth century many parents reported guilt when they inadvertently shouted at or frightened their children. The sense of being morally monitored against spontaneous impulse both contributed to and complicated the task of living up to some of the Victorian norms.

A second strand of cultural causation stemmed from a source outside emotionology: changing conceptions of the body made emotions far more separate from somatic function than they had been in traditional conceptions or would be again in the twentieth century. Prior to the nineteenth century, dominant beliefs, medical and popular alike, attached anger, joy, and sadness to bodily functions. Hearts, for example, could shake, tremble, expand, grow cold. Because emotions were
embodied, they had clear somatic qualities: people were gripped by rage (which could, it was held, stop menstruation), hot blood was the essence of anger, fear had cold sweats. Emotions, in other words, had physical stuff. But during the eighteenth century, historians increasingly realize, the humoral conception of the body, in which fluids and emotions alike could pulse, gave way to a more mechanistic picture. And in the body-machine, emotions were harder to pin down, the symptoms harder to convey. Of course physical symptoms could still be invoked, but now only metaphorically. And although women's emotional makeup was tied to the body in medical literature through discussions of how uterine development weakened the nervous system (and the brain) and so enforced a domestic emotional role, in popularized advice women's emotions, like men's, were discussed largely as independent entities. Popular stories could refer to the impact of emotion in causing blushing or sudden paleness, and in some stories, dire illness could follow from emotional experiences like love or anger, but in the United States, accident rather than illness seems more commonly to have befallen certain kinds of emotional victims in fiction.

Despite some evidence to the contrary, it is safe to say that a traditional and automatic connection between emotional experience and physical sensation was challenged by the new, mechanistic idea of the body. Cultural adjustments resulted. Emotions in a sense became more abstract, and we are only now coming to grips with the consequences of this basic change in outlook. Victorians were unaware of their involvement, but they reflected it. Their recurrent tendency to see certain emotions as animal-like reflected a desire to achieve distance from the physical. Certainly their delight in ethereal emotional encounters—such as true spiritual love or the moral courage that could face down fear—reflected a desire to find a new basis for emotional intensity outside the corporal shell. Changing ideas of the body did not clearly cause basic adjustments in emotionology, but they contributed to the desire for regulation and to the particular Victorian version of soulful (not bodily) intensity. This same adaptation helps explain why Victorians, bent on disciplining the body through demanding clothing, posture requirements, and sexual constraints, did not see the relationship between these structures and their fascination with emotional fervor. Emotions came now from the spirit; they need not be constrained just because the body was regulated. Similarly, twentieth-century observers tend not to
perceive the Victorian distinction between emotion and the body because they are accustomed to a more complete relationship between the two (though not, one hastens to add, a traditional, humoral relationship).  

Finally, and in relation to the spiritualizing of key emotions, Victorian emotional style depended heavily on rapid changes in religious culture and in turn contributed to these changes. Here we see most clearly the inadequacy of defining functional requirements only in terms of economic structure and urbanization. A richer mixture of factors prevailed.

Religious change intertwined with the Victorian version of emotional culture in two ways. First, several changes in mainstream Protestantism supported Victorian optimism about the consequences of vigorous emotion and were in turn supported by this optimism. The concept of a benign God stood behind motherlove, helping to explain the common association between the maternal image and prayer. The idea that God is benign also affected presentations of anger, further reducing any claim that wrath could be used to enforce hierarchy though not, ultimately, undercutting the notion of righteous anger against evil. God’s benignity also reduced the credit given to fear, for a more rosy-hued religion no longer saw an association between this emotion and true piety. Terrorized children, indeed, would not be able to discern God’s sweet mercy. One of the key arguments in early-nineteenth-century Protestantism focused on precisely this point, with the partisans of religion as an emotionally positive experience triumphing clearly, even in such previous bastions of dour Calvinism as Presbyterian Pittsburgh. Solace for intense grief related to the declining attention paid to hellfire and the unprecedented notion of heaven as a divinely organized reunion of loved ones.

In general, as several historians of middle-class religion have pointed out, American Protestantism shifted increasingly toward providing a positive emotional experience as its commitment to rigorous theology declined. The resulting assumptions undergirded common beliefs about the viability of courage in the face of fear and the bittersweet experience of grief while also encouraging restraint on some traditional uses of emotion such as fear in childrearing, now regarded as dangerous. Variant religious strands dissented from the norm, particularly in the case of the Evangelicals, who maintained a more traditional approach to anger and fear, seeking a more anxious piety and generating unacknowledged anger. Mainstream Protestantism, however, shared the direc-
lations of emotional culture, supporting the combination of control and intensity.

Emotional intensity derived also, however, from the very process of weaning from traditional Protestant doctrine. Many middle-class Americans questioned their own religious commitment, aware that the theology of their forebears was being watered down; some, no doubt, simply became less religiously active given the growing hold of science and the bustle of the urban, industrial world. Thus emotional intensity could be sought as an equivalent to a religious experience that many Americans realized was slipping away. Motherlove, as Jan Lewis has pointed out, took on Christlike overtones: it was consuming, it expressed itself in self-sacrifice, it served as a beacon through life even when mother herself had passed from the scene. Indeed, many popular stories about male redemption featured an errant son, rescued from wicked ways by the inspiration of his mother’s love, returning to find his mother dead and vowing to devote his recovered purity to her memory; only the crucifix was missing. Ideals of romantic love picked up the same theme: in intense, spiritualized passion, couples hoped to find some of the same balm to the soul that religion had once, as they dimly perceived, provided. A few worried that their love contradicted the primacy of faith in God, but more concluded that true love was itself a religious experience. Byron Caldwell Smith put it this way in letters to his Katherine in the mid-1870s: “I feel somehow that the Holy power which sustains and moves the ancient universe . . . reveals itself to me as love. . . . To love you . . . and to sink my life in the Divine life through you, seem to me the supreme end of my existence. . . . Love is a cult and our love shall be our religion. . . . To each other we shall reveal only the divine attributes of tenderness and patience.” Karen Lystra has plausibly suggested that many young men, apathetic toward conventional religion, imbibed the commitment to intense love as a direct surrogate during the second half of the nineteenth century. And the words they used in love letters, soaring beyond the more cautious romantic spirituality of the advice manuals, point precisely in this direction. But men were not alone in this regard, despite women’s greater religiosity. Angelina Grimke worried about love and religion in her letters to Theodore Weld: “Am I putting thee in the place of Jesus? I am alarmed and confounded by my feelings. . . . I feel at times as if I cannot live without thee. . . . Am I sinning or would the Lord our Father have it so?” She answered in the affirmative,
arguing that "our Father has enjoined us together, he has given us to each other" as both she and Theodore convinced themselves that their love was effectively a religious duty. Angelina again: "True love . . . is the seeking of the spirit after spiritual communion, . . . the union of heart and mind and soul." 22

Victorian emotional culture stemmed in part, then, from an unusual moment in middle-class religion, when effective doctrinal changes created an environment in which God could be seen as supporting positive emotions but also in which many individuals came to regard intense, earthly love as a spiritual experience in itself as they made a transition away from more conventional religious commitments. Other cultural currents, notably social Darwinism, also supported the dominant emotionology after it had been established, providing it some new vocabulary and a scientific aura; but the link with religious adjustments remained more crucial.

The causes of Victorian emotional style were thus varied, which is no surprise. Despite the temptation to seek a single main ingredient in a functionalist interpretation of emotionological change, historical reality suggests that a larger emotional culture requires a number of overlapping factors for its genesis and dissemination. The Victorian style built clearly on prior cultural change, combining a host of specific factors, such as the new need for greater sexual abstinence in the interest of birth control, that impelled particular emotional formulations as part of the larger framework. It adapted emotional trends to the apparent needs of an industrial work environment and the tensions of social class relations in the growing cities. But it also incorporated important cultural shifts, including a new and puzzling distance between emotion and the body and two kinds of religious imperative that reflected a distinctive combination of confidence and concern. No one of these ingredients suffices to explain the Victorian mixture. Correspondingly, as we will see, when this skein began to unravel, the process responded to changes in most of the supporting elements as both social and cultural functions shifted ground.

**Impacts: The Public Sphere**

Describing an emotional culture offers the challenge of identifying common elements in discussions of particular emotions and in varied kinds
of popular media. Explaining how this culture arose and what needs it seems to have filled forms the next step in analysis, challenging in its own right. These first two steps are meaningless, however, unless a third can be completed as well: indicating that the emotional culture had genuine resonance, affecting the way people believed and behaved.

Victorian emotionology had impact. This is certain despite the impossibility of ever demonstrating with full precision exactly how many people merely mouthed certain beliefs or exactly how they carried belief into action. More middle-class parents continued deliberately to use fear in childrearing than Victorian standards recommended, but a growing number accepted these standards at least in part, either changing disciplinary behavior or regretting anachronistic impulses or both; but how many fell into which camp cannot be determined. We do not know how many young, middle-class men actually experienced the transcendence of Victorian love or how many sustained the passion after marriage (when even the prescriptive literature suggested some lapse from perfection). Yet without claiming exactitude, it is possible to demonstrate impact. Victorian emotional culture, distinctive in itself, helped shape a distinctive emotional reality.

The best means of sorting through the impact of an emotional culture is to proceed through three layers, the first of which is, frankly, the easiest. If an emotional culture does not affect public arrangements, then it is scarcely worth talking about. People responsible for translating emotional standards into laws and organized activities inevitably reflect the values preached around them, whether they internalize these values in their own emotional lives or not. The fact that this first impact is obvious—public culture and organizational behavior inevitably coincide to a degree—should not obscure its importance. Victorian experience was shaped in significant ways by changes that responded to or reflected the new emotional values. Even if no private echoes of these values could be found—which is not the case—the salience of Victorian emotionology for "real life" would be amply demonstrated—along with, admittedly, a strong dose of hypocrisy. As will be shown, the first layer of cultural impact, at the level of institutional response, displays clearly the Victorian impulse not simply toward repression of undesirable emotional impulses but also toward the promotion of essential intensity.

In 1904 Andrew Carnegie set up a trust for the Carnegie Hero Fund
to provide moneys for people who had been injured performing heroic acts, or for survivors of people killed in such acts:

We live in a heroic age. Not seldom are we thrilled by deeds of heroism where men or women are injured or lose their lives in attempting to preserve or rescue their fellows; such the heroes of civilization. The heroes of barbarism maimed or killed theirs.24

Carnegie’s fund followed on a common newspaper genre that had developed by the 1890s, featuring stories of ordinary people who, as one journalist put it, “were suddenly confronted with the question of whether or not they would risk death to save the lives of others” and describing “the manner in which they met, without preparation or forethought, that supreme moment.” Feature stories and the special fund for heroes obviously institutionalized Victorian concepts of facing and conquering fear. They institutionalized the stuff of boys’ stories, emphasizing the ability to experience intense emotion and channel it toward socially useful ends. They highlighted the importance of spontaneity and impulse against any Victorian temptation to stodgy caution. The purity of the emotional experience was primary.25

The Carnegie Fund was not a transformative organization in America, though thanks to the wonders of capitalist investment it survives to this day. But along with the public expressions of belief in courageous mastery of fear written into boy scout literature, newspaper stories, and other genres, the fund did concretely express the extent to which Victorian emotional values could be translated into action. Some Victorians, clearly, were willing to put money where their emotional commitments lay.

Victorian emotionology translated abundantly into sports. There are all sorts of reasons for the rise of sports in the nineteenth-century United States, but among them, and particularly important in the distinctively American enthusiasm for introducing sports into school programs and other sites of youth socialization, was the profound belief that sports helped translate emotional goals into the character-building process. Sports like football or boxing in particular gave young men an opportunity to retain the spark of anger but direct it to particular, appropriate targets; and the same sports offered opportunities for the conquest of fear. The prescriptive literature of the late nineteenth century made abundant connections between sports interests and proper training in
handling the dangerous emotions, and sports advocates did the same in touting boxing lessons for middle-class boys or high school football teams. While sports were meant to civilize working-class boys, whose aggressiveness needed restraint, they were no less important in preventing middle-class feminization. Women's sports, correspondingly, were recommended more ambivalently and for more exclusively physical benefits—the relevant emotional lessons were missing.26

Changes in the law explicitly echoed the Victorian shifts in emotional culture. The incorporation of jealous rage into a crime-of-passion defense in selected murder trials has already been noted. By the 1890s, however, most states were rejecting the idea of passion-induced insanity, denouncing it, as in the case of the North Carolina Supreme Court, as an encouragement to lawlessness and bloodshed. However, juries, particularly in the South, maintained the tradition, and some states like Texas passed justifiable homicide statutes confirming the right to kill for jealousy when a husband discovered the act of adultery, "provided the killing takes place before the parties to the act have separated."27 (The assumption of accuracy in shooting, so that the wife might be spared, was a tribute to the Texan spirit.) Southern culture, then, refused to resolve this tension between restraint and passion.28

Penology reflected the growing hostility to anger-based vengeance in a number of respects. The decline of corporal punishment and its confinement to private rather than public places mirrored growing embarrassment at vengeful motives. The rise of the prison movement and experiments with presumably guilt-inducing isolation provided an emotional basis for treating criminals. Obviously, a host of other motives went into the shift in punishment, and the hopes pinned to incarceration were soon muddied by the realities of prison life and the impurity of social motives. But an emotional shift against shame and tainted anger and toward the role of guilt in rehabilitation continued to find some expression. Later nineteenth-century movements that acknowledged appropriate anger against criminals, as in vigilante movements, reflected the complexities of the middle-class outlook, which had never entirely converted to early Victorian promptings about human innocence, but they also reflected the new acceptance of the idea of channeling anger toward the service of justice.29

Love also met the law, contributing to the evolution of divorce provisions and breach-of-promise suits. From the mid–nineteenth century on-
ward, American law increasingly acknowledged a version of torts targeted at alienation of affections.\textsuperscript{30} Such a suit could be directed against an individual who purposefully alienated the affections of another’s spouse. The suits obviously expressed proprietary attitudes toward marriage (male and female alike), but they also emphasized the mental anguish caused by loss of a spouse’s or a fiancé’s love. There was no particular reference to material inconvenience, unlike earlier suits against enticement; the focus was on love and the pain of its disappearance. (Interestingly, this kind of action, common in American courts until the 1930s, did not develop in England despite the many similarities in other legal precedents.) Breach-of-promise actions, though less distinctively American, also increased in the later nineteenth century, based again on the enormity of love, even in courtship, and the bitter loss entailed in its disruption.

Divorce law recognized love through the back door of mental cruelty provisions.\textsuperscript{31} Allowances for divorce in cases of physical cruelty developed only haltingly in various American states in the early nineteenth century; even proof of substantial bodily harm did not always suffice. Further, several courts ordered juries to ignore the question of whether a marriage had “that tenderness and affection which should characterize the matrimonial relation.”\textsuperscript{32} But the increasing emphasis on positive emotional bonds in marriage, along with beliefs in women’s frailty such that even words could sting, gradually widened the mental cruelty concept from a landmark Pennsylvania decision in 1849 onward. Insults could cause as much suffering as bodily pain, for, as the Massachusetts Supreme Court put it in 1867, a “deeply wounded sensibility and wretchedness of mind can hardly fail to affect the health.”\textsuperscript{33} Even the need to claim damage to physical health gradually loosened, so that wounding the “mental feelings” of the other spouse might suffice, as in a path-breaking Kansas Supreme Court decision of 1883. This court connected this trend clearly to the new emotional ideals, noting that “the tendency of modern thought is to elevate the marriage relation and place it upon a higher plane, and to consider it as a mental and spiritual relation, as well as a physical relation.”\textsuperscript{34} A California court repeated this sentiment in 1890, adding that marriage must now be seen “as a union affecting the mental and spiritual life of the parties to it,” exhibit- ing “mutual sentiments of love and respect.”\textsuperscript{35} Once launched, of course, the mental cruelty clause outstripped all competitors as grounds
for divorce in states that allowed it, but its popularity testifies to its vagueness rather than to mass adhesion to Victorian love ideals. The point is the thinking that underlay the nineteenth-century court decisions: a good marriage now carried such positive emotional valence that cruelty could be found in mere withholding of affection.

Love of other sorts found institutional expressions that reveal what middle-class people actually thought, not just what public agencies decreed. The monetary value of children soared at the end of the nineteenth century, as expressed in the cost of insurance policies and adoption alike. Just as their economic utility was disappearing, belief in the emotional significance of children inflated their market worth.

Psychohistorians pointed out a decade ago that one obvious expression of Victorian emphasis on intense love, and delight in appropriate manifestations of deep feeling, was the introduction of the honeymoon as a ritual following middle-class marriage. The honeymoon was designed to allow a couple to explore mutual feelings as well as sexual interests, and ideally helped translate the emotional intensity of courtship into more permanent bonds. Here was a significant change in the de facto institution of marriage, fully in keeping with, and presumably supportive of, the Victorian valuation of love.36

Grief, finally, had its outlets as well. Death had rituals, inherited from the past, involving family and community participation in the act of dying whenever possible. Rituals after death more clearly changed in the nineteenth century to accommodate heightened emotion. Victorian funeral procedures, unlike those before or since, were intended both to remove the fear of death and to allow open expression of grief through ritual. Increasing use of cosmetics on corpses, and ultimately the rise of professional undertakers and embalmers who took over the handling of death from bereaved families, expressed mainly the desire to allay fear and to direct emotions away from decaying flesh to the bittersweet grief at a loved one’s loss. The practice of wearing mourning clothing spread. Funerals became more elaborate, cemeteries and tombstones more ornate and evocative. Scholars have legitimately argued over whether the paraphernalia of middle-class Victorian funerals expressed simply growing wealth and status rivalry, or real grief, and the sensible conclusion has been that both were involved.37 Families really did need rituals that would allow them to show their grief. Where child death was involved, funeral monuments of unprecedented size combined with haunting epi-
taphs to convey the sorrow and love that sent the child to heaven. Gravestone euphemisms about death as sleep, or as going home, expressed the grief-induced need to see death as something less than final. Love, anger, grief, fear, jealousy, and, somewhat ambivalently, guilt—all had repercussions in public arrangements designed to express intensity as well as regulate its targets. Law and leisure, not to mention burial arrangements or penology, were significantly altered as a result of emotional values, as jurists, school authorities, and other officials faithfully acted under the guidelines of Victorian emotionology. Public expression of the new emotional culture peaked between about 1870 and 1910, suggesting a not surprising lag between the first expression of the culture and its capacity a generation later to affect major institutions.

Private Beliefs and Emotional Experience

That Victorian leaders liked to claim adherence to new emotional standards is no surprise. The new policies that resulted were significant, but they beg basic questions about the extent of real belief. Did Victorians internalize the new standards—not uniformly or completely, to be sure, but sufficiently to make a difference in their own emotional lives?

The answer is yes, though again there can be no claim of precise measurement. Many Victorians clearly enjoyed the possibility of analyzing their emotional state, though there is evidence as well that the demanding rules of the culture made this process more than a bit bewildering. Henry Adams described a woman’s process in his 1880 novel, Democracy:

Madeleine dissected her own feelings and was always wondering whether they were real or not; she had a habit of taking off her mental clothing, as she might take off a dress, and looking at it as though it belonged to someone else, and as though sensations were manufactured like clothes.

While women were most vocal about their emotional inventories, men too, as we will see, frequently offered comments, particularly in the throes of love or highly charged friendship. The evaluation process reflected the importance of the emotional culture in many private lives.

Several historians have already developed a convincing case concerning the internalization of restrictions on anger on the part of some middle-class women. Barred from expressing their real emotions, or even
admitting unladylike sentiments to themselves, some women converted
anger into psychosomatic illness, with such manifestations as hysterical
paralysis. Intense familial love could have its pathological side as well.
Smothered by parental affection that they could neither deny nor fail to
reciprocate, some girls began to develop anorexia nervosa as a means
out of the emotional trap. Here, Victorian standards showed their
repressive edge and their reality, however distorted, in the experience of a
minority of middle-class women.40

Certainly there is widespread evidence of women's concern about
living up to the emotional ideal by working sedulously against impulses
of anger or jealousy. Lucilla McCorkle, a southern minister's wife, urged
the following duties on herself in her private journal: "Self-denial—in
food & clothing & keeping the tongue. early [sic] rising—industry—
economy system—cheerfulness & sobriety—keeping down & quelling
the spirit of malevolence, fault finding—covetousness or rather jealous-
ous," adding that she feared she suffered from "that disease." Many
women recalled specific attempts to keep anger under control when they
were girls: "As I grew up I learned to keep intact a second self . . . who
walked in tranquil beauty . . . [who] maintained her place unruffled
when the other self was annoyed, dismayed." Elizabeth Parsons Chann-
ing noted in a diary entry in 1874: "Irritable. Ashamed of myself when
I am so alive to the desirableness of a sweet temper." Or Lydia Sigour-
ney, anxious about feeling unpleasant the day before: "I'll try to carry a
sunbeam in my heart today." Many women claimed in private diaries to
feel no anger against their spouses, though some would single out a
particular issue—such as policies toward slaves—that allowed some
indignation to be expressed. Many reported both the goal of repressing
anger and the real difficulties encountered en route, including the comp-
lication of guilt when anger was discerned, even privately. As Charlotte
Gilman put it: "The task of self-government was not easy. To repress a
harsh answer, to confess a fault, and to stop (right or wrong) in the
midst of self-defence, in gentle submission, sometimes requires a struggle
like life and death." Many women reported, in sum, a temperament
hardly as magically anger free as some advice writers ascribed to femi-
ninity, but a very definite effort in that direction. A few even reported
gleeful triumphs in which errant husbands were cast down through their
own unjustified rage while the wife stood calmly by. As Mrs. Abigail
Bailey put it in her memoirs, "I felt obligated to bear my faithful testi-
mony to him against his wickedness; which I repeatedly did.” Here of course was the suggestion of very real anger, but carefully manipulated both to fit the Victorian norms and to use those very norms to confound the offending spouse.41

Women continued to work toward appropriate anger control throughout the nineteenth century. Winifred Babcock, admitting fury when her boyfriend dumped her, quickly returned to the party line in her memoirs: “But rage! What has it ever done to heal even the slightest hurt or wound. Oh I could tramp up and down . . . and wring my hands . . . but alas! would that bring me any comfort?” Adults, particularly men, increasingly applied teasing to anger in young girls, who registered the idea that they were being laughed at. While this suggests a slight loosening of the strictest rules concerning girls and anger consistent with a generally more permissive approach in end-of-the-century childrearing, girls nonetheless learned that grownup dignity and displays of temper were incompatible. A middle-class Pittsburgh girl's memoir notes admiration at an oath by a peer—“Oh, the dickens”—while quickly adding that “since even the mildest oaths were discouraged at home, I never dared to use such a vigorous expletive.” And there were mothers who managed to provide role models of apparently complete mastery over temper. Whatever the realities of the case, their daughters could discern no chink in mother’s emotional perfection, and under her tutelage they also learned not to quarrel with any frequency or bitterness. Mother was simply never angry.42

Whether blessed with sunny dispositions or not, Victorian women showed other signs of contact with the goals of controlling the dangerous emotions. Vocal concern about dealings with servants was a staple of nineteenth-century domestic life. Among other things, these concerns expressed a very real anxiety that it was impossible in practice to preserve the calm demeanor that the emotional culture required. Many servants were simply too trying, too willing to resort to anger in confrontations with their mistresses. The domestic side of Victorian emotionology urged “equable and cheerful temper and tones in the housekeeper” as part of the larger atmosphere that should inform family life. Servants were vital to this atmosphere but were often criticized for improper emotional signals to the children in their charge. In fact, many housewives found it difficult to “refrain from angry tones” in dealing with servants, and their resultant guilt often worsened the atmosphere
still further. Inability to live up to stated goals contributed to the tension in the mistress-servant relationship throughout the century, and to the decline of live-in service toward the century’s end.\textsuperscript{43}

Finally, girls imbibed the messages about restraint of anger well into the early twentieth century. Even if they displayed a temper later as adults, they concealed it in childhood, in contrast to boys, whose adult personality was in this regard much easier to discern.\textsuperscript{44}

On the repressive side, in sum, many women were deeply affected by the Victorian norms, fighting for control when the standards proved difficult, often conveying considerable success, sometimes suffering psychosomatic ailments because of the strain involved.

In actuality as in culture, however, repression was not the whole story. Men and women alike expressed deep commitment to the ideals of intensity in love and grief. They spoke about their fervor, wrote of it in letters, and gave it a prominent place in many diaries.

Expressions of love could start early. A child’s letter from 1899:

My dearest Mother,
Words cannot express how I miss you.
[then some chitchat]
(I love you with all my heart with all my soul and all my body.)
[more chitchat]
Your most devoted daughter,
Sweetest Mother,

And from a recollection years later: “We all loved Mother with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our bodies, and when she went away we missed her more than tongue could tell. In later years, she said that she was afraid she had let us love her too much, that she sometimes thought we had put her in place of God. If we did, we might easily have had a less worthy idea of God.”\textsuperscript{45}

Mothers could respond in kind. Although women’s magazines late in the nineteenth century began trumpeting a crisis between mothers and daughters, in which the former could no longer approve of the lifestyle changes of youth and/or the latter had lost the affectionate respect due their elders, actual middle-class mothers and daughters shared a deep emotional bond, with apparently few exceptions. When their daughters left for work or college, their mothers wrote them with ardent support, visited often, and in some instances actually stayed with them for a time. Disputes occurred, to be sure, but they were usually surrounded with
reassuring love. As one wrote, "Your life must not be stunted by us [the parents]... Our love can make any leaps of time and distance." Reciprocating, even the "new" young women who were building careers referred to their mothers as "the anchor" of their lives. Both the depth of this feeling and the willingness to express it in ardent terms reflected real correspondence with the emotional culture of child- and mother-love, even at a time when middle-class women's lives were changing noticeably.

The love theme pervaded courtship, again leading to expressions, from men as well as women, fully in keeping with the most soaring versions of Victorian culture. Byron Caldwell Smith, pressing Katherine Stephens in letters between 1874 and 1876, urged, "Oh write, write I am perishing to see on paper the words—I love you." Describing the "great passion that fills me," his "great life-passion," he distinguished his love from mere romance, assuring her of "true" love and constancy. "It [true love] is to love with all one's soul what is pure, what is high, what is eternal." "A tender true heart that loves unselfishly, and seeks and understands a love which is not the mere surprise of the senses... but why should I go on to describe what I love to her I love." And of course the religious connection was ever present: "I feel somehow that the Holy power which sustains and moves the ancient universe... reveals itself to me as love." "To love you... and to sink my life in the Divine life through you, seem to me the supreme end of my existence." Women could respond in kind, as Angelina Grimke did to Theodore Weld: "Yes my heart continuously cleaves to you, deep of my nature is moved to meet the reaching agonies of your soul after me." "Why does not the love of my own dear sister... satisfy... Why do I feel in my inmost soul that you, you only, can fill up the deep void that is there?" And Theodore answered flight with flight: "How many times have I felt my heart... reaching out in every agony after you and cleaving to you, feeling that we are no more twain but one flesh."47

From at least the 1830s until 1900 thousands of middle-class couples, during their courtship years and sometimes afterward when separation necessitated letter writing, tried to describe the deep, spiritual love that filled them. The themes were almost commonplace. Granting of course that the letters still available today may not be fully representative of courtship sentiments, studies of middle-class youth reveal a virtually unquestioned assumption that intense, spiritual love would be the basis
for engagement and marriage. Autobiographies and other commentaries echo these sentiments, while the Mosher survey, addressing upper-middle-class women at the end of the century, reveals similar, if somewhat less ethereal, beliefs in the centrality of abiding love in marriage. A central tenet of Victorian emotional culture, in sum, corresponded to the real emotional aspirations of much of the middle class and to the felt experience of a sizeable number within it. Childhood experience (including deep love for siblings as well as for mothers), encounters with the standards of love through fiction and advice books, and the promptings of religious feeling and sexual deferment all combined to create this relationship between belief and reality.

Furthermore, the quest for deep emotional fulfillment in love also spilled over into friendship and many lifelong relations among sisters. The searing language used in letters between women friends has been frequently noted as a Victorian characteristic; it obviously transferred into friendship much of the intensity with which the culture surrounded love in general. "Dear darling Sarah! How I love you and how happy I have been! You are the joy of my life. . . . I cannot tell you how much happiness you gave me, nor how constantly it is all in my thoughts. . . . My darling how I long for the time when I shall see you." Marriage did not necessarily interrupt these outpourings, in some cases, no doubt, because the emotional expectations brought to wedlock were not fulfilled. References to kissing, eternal love, and devotion pepper the letters of women to each other. "I wanted so to put my arms round my girl of all the girls in the world and tell her . . . I love her as wives do love their husbands, as friends who have taken each other for life—and I believe in her as I believe in my God." Religiouslike qualities helped women identify their emotions, as Mary Grew wrote: "Love is spiritual, only passion is sexual." Young men developed similar passions in the period of life during their early twenties when they had separated from parents but were not yet positioned to launch courtship. In letters and journals they described themselves as "fervent lovers" and wrote of their "deep and burning affection." Like the women, they commented on their physical contacts with each other and dreamed of a life of mutual intimacy. When the time came to separate, usually when one friend married, the emotionality of friendship came to the surface again: "[O]ur hearts were full of that true friendship which could not find utterance by words, we laid our heads
upon each other's bosom and wept, it may be unmanly to weep, but I care not, the spirit was touched."  

Male intimacy almost always ended with marriage, and most men, even in their passionate youth, knew that this would be so. Women, in contrast, might preserve the passion or might use it to generate intense resentment against the marital threat. Thus in a letter of congratulation to a newly wed couple, one friend addressed the husband: "Do you know sir, that until you came along I believe that she loved me almost as girls love their lovers. I know I loved her so. Don't you wonder that I can stand the sight of you?" Here, real experience not only gave substance to the fervent love preached by Victorian culture but also to the common theme of separation emotions that sustained so many short stories dealing with sisters or friends adjusting to the marriage of one of their number.  

As with love in its principal forms, so, logically enough, with grief: the Victorians who expressed themselves in letters, diaries, and often in ritual commonly expected, articulated, and felt the sharpness that grief was supposed to generate. The intensity resulted above all from the attachments of love, but it was heightened by emotionological approval of grief itself, such that its presence was expected, its absence a potential occasion for guilt. Grief applied most poignantly to death but also to departures and other separations. Nellie Wetherbee recorded in her diary as she left her family to head west, "I only cried as the steamer sailed away—bitter, bitter tears." The death of children produced almost overwhelming emotion, as an 1897 diary reported: "Jacob is dead. Tears blind my eyes as I write... now he is at rest, my little darling Jacob. Hope to meet you in heaven. God help me to bear my sorrow." Here, clearly, not only the pain of grief but also the conscious handling of grief with references to reunion and divine support reflect the currency of the larger Victorian culture. Men as well as women expressed their sorrow. A Civil War soldier leaves his family in 1863, crying for days before the final departure, then musing in his diary both on his great love and on the "cruelty" of the separation. A minister, coincidentally in the same year, asks Jesus to "support me under this crushing blow"—his brother's death. Another man, recording in 1845 the death of a brother-in-law, ended his entry: "Oh! What sorrow burst in upon us at the melancholy news of his death... All is sorrow and weeping." Even nostalgic recollection brought grief, as when Sarah Huntington recalled
a loss of two years earlier: "Reading these letters revived all the exclusiveness and intenseness of my love for him I once called husband."53

Some facets of grief varied, to be sure. Different personalities responded differently to death. Death could still call up diary entries dwelling on the transience of life and the uncertainties of God's judgment. Some diaries report that intense grief followed death for a month or so, then tapered off; others record a fresh renewal of grief well over a year after a death or separation. In the main, however, the obligation to record grief and the felt intensity of grief as a direct reaction to love rather than to fears of death reflected real-life experiences of the culture's emotional standards. Deep loss, hopes for reunion in the afterlife, bittersweet recollections of the ongoing love—all were commonplace in the private reportage.

Of course grief intensities also varied with the level of acquaintance and the kind of death. Deaths that were lingering, providing the chance to prepare, sometimes caused less grief than sudden departures; the concept of a "good death" may have cushioned grief in the former instances. Where sheer pain dominated, as in the unexpected death of a child, the bittersweet theme might be absent entirely. But efforts to see beauty in death, to emphasize the sharing of grief by friends as well as the consolation of a better life in heaven, expressed some of the qualities urged in the more general commentary on this emotion. Christian resignation entered into the formula, along with frequent references to the "happier world" beyond and the beauty of the dead body (a clearly Victorian theme expressed for example in death kits for children's dolls), but so did hopes for reunion—a child "spends this Sunday in Heaven with all her departed relatives," wrote a Schenectady Protestant—and a sense of propriety in the love shared, through grief, in the family circle and beyond.54

Prescriptions against unacceptable expressions of dangerous emotions, particularly by women, were thus matched by even more open references to fervent love and grief. The final ingredient of the Victorian amalgam, successful channeling of fear and anger, received less frequent comment, but here too there was real experience.

Courage and controlled anger showed most openly in what Anthony Rotundo has called Victorian middle-class boy culture. Groups of boys, fiercely independent of their mothers, developed a host of games to test aggressiveness and courage. They teamed up to throw stones at each
other. They developed hazing rituals to test their ability to withstand fear—a habit that was institutionalized by the 1830s in male fraternities and lodges, where hazing challenges were extended into young adulthood. These activities and the emotional values that underlay them contrasted magnificently with the maternally dominated domestic sphere, which was precisely their purpose. Yet they also corresponded, in tenor if not in cruel specifics, to the advice being offered about male ability to use and channel dangerous emotions. A game of “soak-about” involved boys hitting one of their number in a vulnerable spot with a hard ball—a test of the ability to endure fear and pain. “Dares” were endemic—“the deeper the water, the thinner the ice, the longer the run, the hotter the blaze, the more certain [was] the challenge.” Again, Victorian courage found a daily puerile expression. The taunts of “cry-baby” and “sissy” awaited any who could not pass the tests. Anger was tested as well, as boys preferred to settle “a personal grievance at once, even if the explanation is made with fists.” And while cultural pundits clucked about boys’ wildness, they, too, approved of hearty play that would assure, as “Mrs. Manners” put it, that no male child turned into a “girl-boy.” This boy culture began to be curtailed somewhat by the 1880s, as length of schooling extended and new, adult-run institutions like scouting introduced more supervision and regulation into boys’ lives. But even these institutions, as we have seen, maintained an emotionology that valued and tested courage in the face of fear and the ability to summon up channeled anger. The culture had real impact on the ways Victorian boys lived.

Adult men manifested their adherence to the dominant emotionology as well. Men may have been fearful in the face of business innovations and intense competition, as one author has recently argued, but the commitment to express courageous joy in facing down the odds was high. This was one reason why many businessmen and professional people were open to the doctrines of social Darwinism, which provided a scientific basis for the values of male conquest of fear or of anger-fueled rivalry. Middle-class soldiers in the Civil War, like Oliver Wendell Holmes, delighted, as we have seen, in writing about their reactions to battle in terms of heroic boys’ stories, expressing wonder at their coolness under fire. Adherence to the ideal of channeled anger showed in at least two settings. Male politicians and reformers routinely used angry invective and anger-inspired moral fervor in debate, with no sense of
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inappropriateness or need for subsequent apology. They, like the larger culture, shared the view that anger in a just cause was useful; calm, rational presentations would not alone suffice. Businessmen showed their anger too. A foreman angrily replied to complaining workers in Chicago, "Quit if you want to. You are welcome to quit." Worker protest brought anger into the open, with employers frequently "raging like tigers," as one employee put it around 1900.57

Documentation of male commitment to utilizing the dangerous emotions is hardly voluminous, and of course, quite apart from the question of individuals' adherence to cultural standards, personalities varied. References to fear and justifiable anger were frequent, however, suggesting genuine correspondence between the dominant emotionology and the ways in which many men perceived their own emotional responses. Not surprisingly, the same atmosphere produced frequent real-life conflicts between emotional standards at work and those desired at home. Many a man, like the harassed coal company manager described in a Pittsburgh memoir, came home irritable, repairing to his library (and its bottles) in silence—not living up fully to the domestic ideals so much as carving out a certain solitude in their midst. Precisely because the dangerous emotions were tried at work, the cultural tension applied to manhood in principle could prove difficult in the daily experience.58

Emotional reality is a complex entity, and its historical documentation is maddeningly elusive. In contrast to the institutional expressions of emotional culture, personal experience admits of tentative generalizations at best. Available diaries and letters provide strong evidence that the standards for intense love and grief were internalized, but obviously most people's emotions, even within the middle class, went unrecorded. Whether the experience of love, guilt, or grief (or, for men, anger or courage) differed from experiences in the past cannot be decisively determined. Individuals' descriptions of experience did change, but emotions are more than verbal reports. They also involve behaviors and physiological changes, and the latter, in particular, do not permit historical measurement.59 Furthermore, individual variation around norms is impossible to track. We know, in contemporary society, that some individuals are more anger prone than others, and experiments show that anger-prone people respond differently to the same stimuli. Such personality variation surely occurred in the past as well. Nevertheless, cultural norms may affect the available range of personality types, as well as the
way individuals present their personalities. Norms clearly affect the verbal presentation and self-evaluation aspects of emotional experience, even if other reaches remain unclear.

Thus, Victorian emotional culture did shape real emotional life, though it did not describe it perfectly or completely. The way people loved or grieved or encountered fear was defined in part by what they were taught; and to an extent, both emotional experience and emotionology were shaped by the same functional and broader cultural factors. Exactly how much the distinctiveness of the culture is reflected in a similar experiential distinctiveness is not clear. Basic physiology, personality variations, or even the time lag between the generation of new standards and widespread assimilation may have limited the cultural hold on emotional reality. A tension between lived emotional experience and beliefs is a common aspect of emotional life, which means that the beliefs are important but not always determinant; and this was surely as true in relation to the demanding standards of the Victorian decades as it is in a rather different emotional culture today. Nevertheless, from illnesses encouraged by emotional constraints to expectations formed in search of love, the Victorian encounter with intensity expanded beyond the covers of the advice books and popular romances. Many people lived the culture in substantial measure.

Emotional Interactions

A third area in which reality and perception intertwined also reflected Victorian emotionology. In addition to its impact on public institutions and individual experience, emotional culture also colored the way middle-class people reacted to the emotions of others. This final realm is just being opened up in sociology and social psychology, as researchers turn from a preoccupation with the emotional impulses of individuals to an inquiry into broader emotional functions. In this new view, emotions are primarily designed to affect relationships, and thus they must be tested not only in terms of the signals an individual sends or wishes to send but also in terms of the likely responses. Grief, for example, though perhaps initially designed as a way of restoring the lost loved one, ultimately serves the function of encouraging emotional support from others to ease the griever through the loss; it builds compensatory relationships. Yet this purpose is served only if the relevant others accept the grief
signal. For Victorian emotionology this raises a question: Were people ready to accept the intensities of others, even as they wrote certain intensities into sports programs or sought to describe their own emotional lives in culturally appropriate terms?

Here, too, the answer is affirmative, though a host of research opportunities remain. Victorians clearly expected to deal with intense emotional expressions from other people so long as the settings were appropriate—just as they expected suitable restraint, as part of proper etiquette, in other settings. Public reactions to the crime-of-passion trials, for example, suggested a widespread belief by both genders that extreme jealousy was a valid emotional response in certain equally extreme instances, even when accompanied by violence. The defendants who won their pleas received considerable outpourings of popular support at the close of trials and in subsequent letters. On a more ordinary basis, despite cultural disapproval of jealousy, many Victorians seem to have accepted jealous responses from a suitor or partner and to have been willing to adjust behavior accordingly. Thus husbands were urged not, in their wives’ presence, to “enthusiastically praise the sterling qualities of other women,” while wives should not “invidiously eulogize the seemingly incomparable character of other men.” Men often concealed behavior that might cause jealousy—which was an indirect recognition of its potential intensity—while wives were urged to do the same. Love letters, while sometimes attempting to assure that possessiveness did not taint the spiritual qualities desired, sometimes also admitted jealousy at least circuitously. “Do not think I assume the right to control your actions; but I love you too fondly to share our smiles with another.”

And the appropriate reaction from a lover was adjustment, with promises not to give reason for jealousy in the future. Response here was complex, for jealousy was not to be accorded too much status. Yet there was little attempt in practice to deny the emotion’s validity (except by some of the experimenters in utopian communities). While jealousy could be acknowledged, this was not an emotion to be flaunted.

Responses to emotion changed demonstrably in certain instances. During the eighteenth century upper-class southern men had professed considerable indifference to women’s anxieties about childbirth. After 1800, however, they changed their tune, admitting real validity to women’s fears, sharing some of their anxieties, and even cooperating in reducing conceptions in order to limit the risks. There were many rea-
sons for this behavior, including of course the increasing belief in female frailty, which made admission of fear and weakness seem more appropriate. But enhanced emotional attachment and even anticipated grief joined in as men empathized more fully with women in this area in part because of their own awareness of potential emotional loss. Emotional reaction to expressions of concern thus changed far more than did the women’s fears that evoked it.61

Expectations toward guilt also changed. As we have seen, the standard use of guilt in childrearing involved isolating the offender from the family network until guilt had done its work and could be suitably expressed in sincere apology. Then the incident could be officially forgotten and relationships restored. Parents taught, then, that indications of guilt were vital cues in preserving or recovering social contacts, and these lessons were carried into later life. Functional guilt surely operated in the eighteenth century as well, but a greater reliance on shame produced different expectations, as community disapproval might be meted out in any event. Again, responses to intense expression shifted.62

Intense expressions of love were obviously regarded as acceptable by many of their recipients. This process may well have begun in childhood as boys and girls learned the normalcy of fervent maternal affection. Certainly love letters suggest scant hesitation to express soulful depths. The only apparent concerns about expression of love were the fears that passion might not be reciprocated or that it might somehow complicate appropriate religious duties. No evidence suggests that lovers attempted to defuse the intensities of their partners, and even rejections of affection treated the emotion itself, if not its particular target, as appropriately fervent.

Nor did most same-sex friends hesitate to receive expressions of passion from their partners. Most exchanges seem to have involved mutual expressions of deep emotion with no warnings against excess. Expressions of friendly love were naturally more muted when there was uncertainty about whether the love was reciprocated, or in the rare case when parties worried that their fervor might be misconstrued as sexual. A breakup of a friendship might also occasion disparities between the continued passion of one friend and the new indifference of the other, as on the occasion of a marriage. But even in these cases the appropriateness of passion itself was not questioned; it was simply less welcome due to altered circumstances. Because most male friendships dissolved on
marriage, men rarely questioned expressions of intensity: these were fine while the friendship thrived, and they stopped when it was over. Only in the case of some women friends, particularly when one partner married, was there any significant implication that the suitability of emotional fervor was at all in doubt. Thus, Mary Hallock Foote wrote her friend: “Imagine yourself kissed a dozen times my darling. Perhaps it is well for you that we are far apart. You might find my thanks so expressed rather overpowering.” And later: “You know dear Helena, I really was in love with you. It was a passion such as I had never known until I saw you. I don’t think it was the noblest way to love you.” Some of these hesitations may have related to sexual desires or manifestations, complications that cropped up in expressions of heterosexual love as well; but some may have captured an otherwise unusual doubt about intensity itself, as it would be perceived by the other or might be judged by outsiders.

Many other settings, besides those involving love, showed acceptance of deep emotion. Boys obviously expected channeled anger from others and expected to see others react to, and conquer, fear. Their derision was reserved for those who shunned intensity, not for those who revealed it.

Grief was also accepted. Its function of building supporting relationships to cushion loss seem normally to have worked. Many adults drew close on the death of a child as they accepted each other’s grief and the terms in which it could be consoled. Grieving diarists commented on the “sympathy of friends” and the importance of shared ritual. Etiquette books emphasized appropriate rituals for expressing grief and channeling reactions to it, but they too acknowledged the validity of the emotion and the need of supportive friends and relatives to respond to it. Writers on manners deplored any disruptive potential in conversation, to be sure. A few, in this vein, urged that signs of mourning be ignored in dealings with mere acquaintances. This advice, particularly common in the first half of the century, recognized emotional intensity—“any allusion to the subject of his grief [is] very painful to him”—but recommended an aloof reaction. More common was the recommendation that good manners obliged people of good breeding to call on a bereaved family and then to take the cue from the family’s own tone. If the family was attempting to put up a brave front, one should keep the conversation distracting; but “if they speak of their misfortune,” one should “join them” by speaking well of the dead and showing active, saddened
sympathy. Almost all manners authors felt compelled to address grief as a significant part of public interactions.

Of course, as in previous centuries, grief might go on too long in certain individual cases and require assistance from doctor or minister. But emphasis was placed on the enhancement to spiritual love that might be derived from emotional sharing, not on the dangers of excess. It is possible indeed that Victorian culture encouraged acknowledgment of grief over an unusually long span, as in the case of the father who noted long after the death of a child, "There are some wounds which are never healed—which break out afresh and trouble the afflicted heart. . . . I find but little abatement of that yearning and longing for his dear face."

References to grief in letters and diaries are notable for their open expressions of the intensity of grief, but they are equally as notable for their uniform assumption of emotional harmony as families and friends grouped to help each other articulate and cope with grief. Mourners frequently recorded the importance of family and community support. A father, grieving for a dead son, recalled the "substantial and visible tokens of sympathy from our numerous friends and neighbors." Along with religion, this support made grief endurable. "The sympathy of friends is valuable but vain is all that man can do if the love of God be wanting. . . . We feel confident that it is well with our dear boy and that our loss is his gain." The growing cultural response to grief, as well as individual acceptance of cultural norms, underlay what Philippe Ariès has termed a nineteenth-century transition from fear of death of self to fear of death of others.64

Sadness, in contrast, became perhaps more problematic than it had been before. A distaste for sadness had increased in the eighteenth century, at least as suggested in diaries, and by the nineteenth century this was enhanced by a masculine aversion to tears. The passive qualities of sadness, its lack of motivational intensity, may account for the decreased willingness to respond to this emotion. Against life's minor tribulations, a cheerful countenance and a willingness to take effective remedial action won the readiest response. Sadness, if it must exist, should be private and undemanding of others.65

The most elusive of the culturally sanctioned emotional intensities involved anger. Victorians hedged intense anger with cautions in any event: it should not apply to women, and even in men it should be directed only at justifiable targets. Quite apart from such complexities,
the fact that expressions of anger normally arouse anger in response (except where pronounced social inferiority compels concealment) prevents any facile statements about response. Victorians by no means enjoyed being the targets of others’ anger, even when they believed in principle that intense anger could serve good purposes. Thus factory owners, confronted with angry workers, could refer to “troublemakers” and “big mouths” as if the emotion behind protest formed part of the problem. Even here, however, there was no elaborate effort to argue that workers’ anger showed bad character or personality deficiency. The arguments referred more to violation of hierarchy than to a rejection of anger. In settings of greater equality, angry exchanges might be perversely enjoyable. Japanese visitors to the U.S. Congress commented on the emotional ferocity of political attacks and their odd compatibility with subsequent cooperation. Even adult women, after 1860, might win public approval for expressions of angry outrage in a morally sanctioned cause like temperance.

Revealingly, etiquette codes, which were far more inclined toward restraint than other prescriptive materials, themselves waffled on the issue of anger. The manners books stressed the importance of restraint and decorum as part of good breeding. No wanton anger could be indulged. At times this preoccupation with restraint went so far as to suggest that no occasion warranted a quarrel, that tranquillity made flight preferable to loss of control. Thus The Mentor warned, “To get angry with an inferior is degrading; with an equal, dangerous; with a superior, ridiculous.” But most etiquette advice for men actually suggested that in certain circumstances anger might be displayed and therefore socially accepted. Thus inferiors should be treated calmly, but if they must be disciplined, anger might be added “sufficiently far to make the reprimand more severe.” An angry attack from an inferior should be ignored, and if it came from one decidedly inferior, or from a woman, it should be handled by calling the police. But if anger stemmed from a near equal, or if it involved violence, or “when it places you in an awkward position in presence of equals,” it could appropriately be acknowledged and answered in kind. Anger remained dangerous. But if it issued from a social superior it might have to be swallowed. And if it occurred in a situation of some social equality, among men, it might legitimately open an angry exchange. Anger, in sum, did not automatically disqualify; it could be accepted by others either through submis-
siveness (the lot, the manners books implied, of many gentle women) or by inducing a quarrel, sometimes even a violent quarrel. In this latter case intensity could beget intensity in a process that both parties might find legitimate and (though this must be glimpsed between the lines of the manners books) perhaps even enjoyable—an emotional recollection of boyhood tests.

Victorians, in sum, were frequently willing not simply to express emotional fervor on their own but to receive it from others as well. In some respects their reactions differed from those of the eighteenth century, just as the emotional norms themselves had altered. Intense love was no problem so long as both parties shared the attraction. Grief, with its bittersweet pain, was meant to evoke sympathetic response, as of course were sincere signs of guilt. Only the milder, more cloring emotions, like sadness, may have evoked increasingly annoyed responses in nineteenth-century relationships. The dangerous emotions, like jealousy and, particularly, anger, though sometimes producing rejections or evasions, could themselves elicit active response; they did not automatically place the emote r on the defensive. Evidence about emotional response is, to be sure, sketchy, particularly when one moves beyond the emotions most involved in family relationships—love, grief, even jealousy. Yet there are indications that Victorians accepted the implications of their culture not only in their perceptions and expressions of their own emotions but also in many of their reactions to intensity in others.

Conclusion

Victorian emotionology was distinctive in many respects, and it produced behaviors that were distinctive as well. The tenor of address to lovers and friends, dotted with "My Beloveds" and "My Adoreds," rings odd to the modern ear. So does the idea of responding to anger with anger as part of proper etiquette (albeit severely hedged). Emotional paragons who could express deep love and persuade their children that they were never angry seem almost too good to be true—yet in the nineteenth century, some of these were thought to exist. Culture by no means perfectly described real emotional experience or responses to others, but some correspondence with professed values clearly existed. The causes of the culture itself affected actual emotional perceptions, and the culture, widely disseminated from childhood onward and essen-
tially undisputed within the mainstream middle class, also helped mold these real emotional reactions. The same holds true for public institutions.

Thus the major themes of the culture—the effort to combine selective restraint with insistence on real intensity—threaded through emotional life itself. Friendships, love, uses and expectations of guilt, responses to anger, and responses to bereavement all showed the distinctive marks, even though our ability to gauge all the ingredients is limited. The intensity component of the culture affected self-perceptions and the responses anticipated from others, which is why it translated into lived experience.

Intensity is itself elusive. Because its mark on Victorian life was so important and because its hold was soon to be challenged, it deserves definition as well as repeated reference. Interestingly, contemporary emotions researchers have just begun attempts to define and measure emotional intensity. In one taxonomy of emotional fervor, several evaluation criteria have been proposed, including speed of emotional arousal, level of peak emotional experience, and duration. These criteria do not necessarily move in the same direction. Levels of intensity vary according to certain factors that, if stated very generally, apply to all imaginable societies and time periods, to wit: proximity of the individual or event that triggers emotion; nature and immediacy of the trigger; and social similarity of the individuals emotionally interacting, with greater perceived similarity heightening arousal, peak, and/or duration. 68

Victorian culture and aspects of Victorian experience conducd to unusual emotional intensity as defined by several of these criteria, though of course Victorians did not address the subject in explicit fashion. The word “intenseness” does crop up, as we have seen, but with no scientific rigor attached. Emotional rules certainly encouraged high peaks and considerable duration where love or grief was concerned, early arousal and high peaks in cases of deserved guilt. Encounters with fear could involve arousal and peak intensities as well. Early arousal to anger was not recommended in this more complex of the Victorian intensities, but when the target warranted, peak and duration could both be extensive. Emphasis on the importance of family members and friends urged recognition of immediacy and proximity and of course generated a sense of social similarity even across gender lines, at least where love or grief was involved. There are, in sum, reasons to believe that a general
map of emotional intensity highlights the ways in which Victorians promoted and accepted fervor. The special commitment to intensity is also explained by the causes underlying Victorian emotionology, including not only the need to cement family bonds in an uncertain environment but also the effort to find an equivalent for religious emotion and motivation.

Intensity, and resulting appraisals of one's own and others' emotional reactions, is a historical variable. All societies, of course, produce emotional experiences of varied intensity and personalities susceptible to varying emotional loads. Thus, although Victorian culture and many of its institutional and private manifestations facilitated emotional engagement, it did not make all middle-class people alike and indeed, it deliberately separated the genders according to the types of intensity available to each. It did not prompt uniformly intense reactions and explicitly discouraged certain kinds of emotions while recommending a number of careful controls. But even as Victorians accepted constraints in many aspects of life, they welcomed, even depended upon, emotional depth. From boyhood challenge to adult grief, they assumed strong passions.