American Cool

Stearns, Peter N.

Published by NYU Press

Stearns, Peter N.
American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/15741.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/15741

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=493956
Beginning clearly in the 1920s, with hints a bit earlier, middle-class advice literature began to move away from the Victorian standards. Writers seemed sometimes aware of their innovation, sometimes oblivious, yet even in the latter case the change in tone became quite clear.

We deliberately move in this section to a synthesis of the major changes in American emotional standards, as they took shape from about 1920 to the 1950s, before turning to the essential task of explaining why the changes occurred—the theme of chapter 7. Obviously both types of analysis interrelate, but the nature of change must be identified before its causation can be assessed.

The basic direction of change will hardly come as a surprise, except insofar as we have come to think of twentieth-century Americans according to simplistic labels of emotional liberation. Amid a host of specific shifts and undoubted complexities, twentieth-century emotional culture moved away from approval of emotional intensity, even as standards in other areas, like costume and personal manners and sexuality, quite clearly loosened. Just as Victorians had, everything considered, been most tolerant of emotional fervor, so twentieth-century American culture became most repressive precisely in this area, relaxing greatly, by contrast, the standards for many forms of bodily expression.

This shift in emotional direction means that emotions already admitted as potentially dangerous in the Victorian lexicon now became com-
pletely unacceptable. Fear and anger had no positive function in the new schema; rather than being directed, they were to be avoided as fully as possible. The same shift meant that emotions previously regarded as good, like love, were now surrounded by new warnings and restrictions and on the whole downplayed, though not attacked in all possible manifestations. The shift meant, finally, that certain emotions the Victorians had cherished, like grief, were now regarded more negatively, almost as negatively as anger and fear. The twentieth century, in sum, preserved an emotional dichotomy but now defined it in terms of good versus bad rather than good versus dangerous-but-useful. The new culture shifted specific emotions into what was effectively the bad category, defined in terms of personal discomfort and demands on response from others. Most surprisingly, even with emotions still regarded as good, Victorian flights of fancy were now curbed amid an increasingly uniform sense that no emotional tug should pull too hard.

The changing winds concerning the "bad" emotions are easiest to discern, as not only anger and fear but also jealousy came in for new disapproval and new strategic management in the 1920s. Here then is an appropriate starting point for tracing the replacement of Victorianism, though again it is only that—other emotions were also involved. The increasing tendency to designate emotions as bad, or negative—a tendency that has continued in the social science literature as well as in most popularizations to this day—itself marks an innovation. Victorian pundits had regarded emotions like anger as bad in certain circumstances—when manifested by women, for example, or when expressed by men in ways that threatened the peace of the family. But the bad-good distinction was too simplistic for the Victorians. Almost any emotion could be made useful, and the extent to which it caused discomfort was not the central criterion. Indeed, appropriate use of emotion often allowed the individual to rise above discomfort, most obviously where fear was concerned. Twentieth-century negative labels applied most readily to emotions that the Victorians would have granted were dangerous—a connection between the two emotionologies is undeniable—but considerable shifting occurred, constructing a new kind of pleasure-pain index. This shifting was itself part of the new caution where emotions were concerned.
Hints of Change

While most advice literature maintained a Victorian emotionology into the 1920s, some fissures began to emerge late in the nineteenth century. Between 1900 and 1920 the advice-literature genre shrank somewhat, as measured by the sheer volume of new titles. With the exception of one interesting summary attempt by William Forbush in 1919, which largely recapitulated Victorian formulas but with a few apparently un-self-conscious hesitations, no widely popular titles relevant to emotional standards appeared between 1906 and the 1920s, either in the marital or in the childrearing categories. In the 1920s, however, a new surge occurred, including the establishment of Parents’ Magazine as well as a host of popularized manuals in which a strongly innovative tone emerged.

Apparently, then, Victorianism remained sufficiently widely accepted to obviate the need for any flood of popular prescriptions in the years before 1920. In the popularized literature that did appear, growing concern about children’s physical health tended to displace emotional standards as a dominant topic, as in the government’s best-selling manual, Infant Care. Only a few scattered sources suggested that Victorianism was being reconsidered. The hints are worth noting not because they established a new emotional culture but because they suggested themes that, disseminated and intensified, would dominate the new rush of advice in the 1920s.

Fear was the most obvious area for some implicit revisionism. Boys’ stories in the 1890s began to acknowledge that fear in battle might be understandable—though still primarily for the untutored lower classes. Felix Adler’s 1901 revision of his 1893 manual maintained an essentially Victorian stance—his childrearing manual was in fact the last widely sold, barely diluted Victorian statement in this genre—but spent a bit more time than usual warning against needless early childhood anxieties such as frightening fairy stories. Adler urged “moral courage” on older children, granting that it could not prevent fear but could overcome physical cowardice. In 1904 Mrs. Theodore Birney resolutely repeated Victorian formulas about channeling anger as part of building boys’ character, but she sounded a different note concerning fear. Devoting considerably more space to early childhood fears than Victorian-style manual writers had done, Birney detailed the unaccountable fears pres-
ent in early childhood. In this rendering infants could be terrified by
darkness or animals even if their parents had generated no tensions at
all. Fear now seemed to originate within a child—gone was an aspect of
emotional innocence. The result, equally clearly, was a new and vital
task for parents. They must not dismiss childish fears, and to punish
them was particularly dangerous, being likely to "harden" fears into a
durable emotional flaw. Birney did not fully follow up on her new
approach, for later in the discussion she reverted to stories of brave
deeds that would instill courage, but there was no question that she had
begun to break with the Victorian pattern.

William Forbush’s 1919 manual offered the same amalgam of old
and new, expressing great concern about the fears of children between
two and six. Correspondingly, parents now were told that it was not
enough to avoid scaring children; they must also conceal any fears of
their own lest they be subtly communicated. Fear was on the way to
becoming a new kind of emotional issue. Again, full innovation lay in
the future, for Forbush, like Birney, reverted to Victorian type, urging
activities like camping or boxing to toughen up a fearful child. "We can
strengthen a child who is . . . afraid of a fight etc. by experiences . . . that
will prepare him imaginatively to face other perils, even though their
exact character may be unknown." Along with this Victorian advice,
however, Forbush cautioned against outright confrontation with the
frightening object; parents should help a child afraid of water or fire-
works avoid these perils. Avoidance of emotional trauma was beginning
to overcome courage as the primary childrearing goal, even for that
staple of Victorian heroism, the boy.3

Jealousy was also beginning to draw novel attention, though in this
instance, because the emotion had already been disapproved, the change
involved increased concern, not basic reevaluation. Here Felix Adler
pointed the way in his first, 1893 edition (the most widely read childrearing
pamphlet to appear for two decades). Adler talked about inequalities
among brothers and sisters that would result in "ugly feelings in the
hearts of the less fortunate" if parents were not carefully evenhanded.
No longer, as in previous manuals, could basic childish goodness and
brotherly or sisterly affection be relied upon. Adler displayed a Victorian
fondness for preachments, urging children to "be more eager to secure
the rights of your brother than your own," but children could not really
be relied upon in this area. Thus parents had another new task: they
must get to the root of children’s quarrels, for neglect could promote an “incipient hatred” among siblings, despite the fact that love should infuse family life.4 Adler’s treatment of what would soon be known as sibling rivalry was brief and somewhat offhand, for he continued to emphasize childish innocence and offered no elaborate tactical recommendations for besieged parents. But he was the first to point to yet another redefinition of children’s nature, to yet another dangerous potential.

Early symptoms of a transition from nineteenth-century emotionology to a more cautious approach to childhood emotions flowed from several factors. Psychological research—even some of it conducted by staunch Victorians like G. Stanley Hall—provided new information about childish emotions. Hall’s long study of fear, for example, provided graphic evidence of how many children were afflicted with night terrors.5 Formal sibling research still lay in the future, but a new sense of children’s emotional vulnerability stemmed from widely publicized scientific findings. At the same time, popularizers began to rely less on the authority of moral common sense and more on that of science. Thus, for example, whereas Adler was a partisan of arguments derived from morality and intrinsic good character, Hall’s student Alice Birney referred to research findings, albeit in passing, in staking out her new claims concerning fear. New scientific claims and novel invocations of science in the emotional realm would solidify only in the 1920s, by which point other factors increased adult receptivity to innovative emotionology, but the straws in the wind before this juncture were hardly random.

Beyond the specifics, which applied particularly to childhood and a tentative new breed of childrearing expert, a wider shift in cultural mood was beginning to develop. As specific Victorian formulas began to change, the larger balance between physical/sexual restraint and permissible emotional intensity came under new scrutiny. Not long after 1920 Judge Ben Lindsay, a self-styled marriage pioneer, offered an early statement of the upcoming major effort to restrict emotions that Victorians had either found selectively useful or unpleasant but petty: “Anger, hatred, jealousy and the like are far more destructive of human happiness than any amount of sexual irregularity.” Lindsay then focused on jealousy, which he argued was changing but not fast enough; a “capital crime against marriage,” jealousy constituted a custom that, in giving “two free persons the ownership of each other is a device of the devil.”
Briefly, Lindsay evoked what would be an even larger twentieth-century truth: that not only jealousy but also other powerful emotions like anger had lost all utility and could be linked with more clear-cut faults like malice with no apparent distinction. American emotionology was beginning to generate a new list of targets, simpler but more pressing than the Victorian combination of risk and relish.\(^6\)

**Fear**

As popularizers like Birney had already suggested, fear was one of the first problematic Victorian emotions to undergo reevaluation. Childrearing manuals from the 1920s onward generated standard formulas about avoidance and control that built on but expanded Victorian values. Nineteenth-century emotionology had already attacked traditional uses of fear in childrearing, and the new breed of experts also condemned deliberate attempts to frighten children and urged similar revisions of conventional fairy stories that might produce undesirable emotional strain. Yet the new warnings against fear ranged far more broadly. The nature of the problem expanded, and a host of new strategies developed in response. Most notably the goal of courage, though never explicitly renounced, tended to disappear from view.

Standard childrearing manuals of the 1920s and 1930s displayed heightened, generalized anxieties about fear in several ways. Attacks on parents for conveying their own fears mounted steadily. “What help is there for this little boy [a child terrified of water]? As long as his mother cannot overcome her own fear, there is little hope of her doing anything for James. It would be like trying to prevent malaria while leaving the house full of the wrong kind of mosquitoes.”\(^7\) This concern obviously added greatly to the emotional tasks of parenthood. It also introduced important tensions between the standards urged for children and those applicable to adults. Children were to be shielded from fear, including their parents’ fears, but adults must mask their own. Presumably, with improved parenting the tensions would be reduced in subsequent generations, for properly raised children would not have the terrors that afflicted some of their parents (mothers being particularly singled out, as we will see). For the time being, however, adults must feign composure. Revealingly, they were not directly asked to be courageous. Concealment, not moral conquest, seemed to be the prescribed goal. To this
extent, the innovations being urged in the treatment of children pro-
moted a new approach to adult fear as well.

A second innovation involved greatly increased detail about the na-
ture of fear, which now commanded a full section in most childrearing
manuals, plus article after article in the new *Parents' Magazine* (es-
blished in 1927). "Fear is essentially an unpleasant and sometimes even
painful emotion marked by the threat of some vague or imminent dan-
ger." While this new, scientifically precise vocabulary granted some
"protective value" to fear in keeping children from danger, the emphasis
rested squarely on how disagreeable it was to be afraid. Here was
another indication of how focus was shifting away from the potential
usefulness of risky emotions toward the discomfort they arouse. Physical
sensations were delineated. "During fears, the mouth becomes dry, due
to the fact that the glands in the mouth stop secreting; digestion stops as
does the movement of the intestines. A substance is discharged into the
blood which increases muscular energy and does away with effects of
fatigue"—all this is a chapter on "children's fears" in a book on young
children. While some physical components of fear were acknowledged
as galvanizing, emphasis rested on the unpleasantness of fear. Above all,
as a *Parents' Magazine* article emphasized, fear inhibited thought. Here
was the key point. Children should be taught to think things through,
and fear prevented this process, so fear was bad. "Strong emotion inter-
feres with the functioning of reasoning power; it is impossible—espe-
cially for a young child—to recognize the absence of danger when his
intelligence is inactive because of fear." "Too intense fear, like too
intense anger, interferes with biologically adequate behavior." Fear as
an instinct became oddly counterproductive in this formulation (a far
cry from the evolutionists' recognition of fear's utility in the nineteenth
century), while moral courage became irrelevant as well. Avoidance, not
conquest, must be the chief aim.

The third innovation involved a focus on very young children and a
new emphasis on the durability of emotional styles formed early on.
Aside from the strict injunctions against using scare tactics, Victorian
emotionology had downplayed the importance of early socialization for
fear; childish innocence was secure enough to obviate any need for
detail. Victorian comment focused on later childhood and youth, when,
for boys at least, courage could come into play in meeting, challenging,
and resolving fear and emerging all the better for the process. Twentieth-
century popularizers, on the other hand, felt that only the first years were crucial; from the 1920s onward parental literature on adolescents simply omitted significant comment on fear. The new wisdom stressed the early formation of fear “in response to loss of support, sudden pain, or a sudden loud noise.” More important still, it typically also stressed the lasting results of these early reactions. While properly raised children could learn to avoid fear (“to forestall future occasions for it”), fear could also “become a habit of the person, preventing his accomplishments.” Even the severe but purely physical sensations of fear might last “for some time after,” but it was the emotional scarring that went deep. John B. Watson put the case starkly in his chapter on children’s fears:

At three years of age the child’s whole emotional life plan has been laid down, his emotional disposition set. At that age the parents have already determined for him whether he is to grow into a happy person, wholesome and good-natured, whether he is to be a whining, complaining neurotic, an anger driven, vindictive, over-bearing slave driver, or one whose every move in life is definitely controlled by fear.

While most popularizers were not strict Watsonians, granting some importance, for example, to heredity as well as environment, the Watsonian emphasis on infancy seems to have struck a particularly important chord concerning the new perceptions of fear, as evidenced by the currency of Watsonian thoughts on this subject in Parents’ Magazine through the later 1930s. Even before Watson, William Forbush had articulated the new wisdom: inadequate management of childhood anxieties could permanently distort a personality, leading to lifelong unhappiness and behavioral problems, including delinquency and crime, when wayward souls used violence to mask their inner terror. “An untold dread may become a veritable poison in the mind, bringing its evil to fullness years later.” 9

Thus there were three basic changes in the presentation of fear: a new urgency for parents, an increasing stress on discomfort and loss of control, and a singling out of infancy. Together these ingredients produced the fourth major shift in the popular childrearing advice: a new insistence on avoidance and support. Whereas Victorians had assumed that restrictions on deliberate scare tactics sufficed in dealings with younger children, twentieth-century emotional culture required far more elaborate strategies. Manipulation became crucial, for “children do
not appear to ‘get used to’ things which they fear.” Fear increases with contact, which meant that the whole apparatus of courageous encounter became not just irrelevant but downright counterproductive. “In fact, it [forced encounter] may cause the fear to spread to other situations similar to the one in which the first [fear] occurred.” “The important thing in dealing with a child’s fear is not to force sudden contact with the dreaded object or situation. Instead, grownups should at first shield the baby from whatever frightens him and be casual about the matter. The shielding must be inconspicuous, with no comment whatsoever.”

From Forbus h onward, popular manuals devoted considerable attention to the new strategic requirements. Parental calm remained central; parents must set the example of reason triumphing over emotional intensity. They should help children evade their fears. Words like “mastery” and even “courage” were still used, but the emphasis lay elsewhere. Talk became important, as parents should patiently listen to children’s admissions of fear. Concession was essential: whenever a child evinced fear, it was time to retreat, to allow avoidance of confrontation. Remediation would come (and then only gradually) not through noble, heroic stories or stiff-upper-lip injunctions, but through guile. The child who feared the dark should be elaborately reassured, given a night light, or lured with candy into a darkened room. Parents were advised to place candy near the door the first night, a bit farther in the next time around, and so on until appetite and experience combined to submerge the initial dread. By the 1920s, as emotional prescriptions began to be combined with purely medical advice, popular manuals, including those issued by the Children’s Bureau, repeated details of these stratagems in virtually every edition.

The popularizers recognized that the new advice required substantial adult reeducation. Adults still needed to be told not to frighten children with threats and bogeymen, but now they also needed to learn not to display their own fears (especially mothers, a clear concession to nineteenth-century claims about female emotional frailty), and they must be taught to renounce the impulse to exhort fearful children, an impulse particularly rooted in Victorian emotionology. Given children’s newfound and extraordinary sensitivity, there was no moral challenge left in fear—only emotional risk and pain. As a leading 1920s manualist, D. H. Thom, argued, for even seemingly neutral new experiences parents
should be prepared for potential fear rather than rely on assumptions of courage.12

Presumably the long-term result of careful parental strategies would be a personality capable of coping with fear. In this very broad sense, the new emotionology shared goals with the nineteenth century. But whereas capability once meant courage, now it might mean sedulous avoidance or anxious discussions with others. In this transformation fear became even more awesome than it had been. The new discussions of children ignored gradations of fear in favor of emphasis on the extreme, incapacitating terror. At the same time, however, fear lost its moral stigma. It became a potentially overwhelming emotional problem the resolution of which, however, brought no particular credit. Admission of fear was no longer a moral weakness, which meant that its management, rather than a triumphant emotional conquest, became relatively trivial as well.

The rising concern about children's fears and the risks they entailed continued through the 1930s in leading manuals written by popular authorities like Winnifred de Kok and Sidonie Gruenberg. The authors emphasized the importance of reconsidering an array of traditional parental approaches beyond the lazy and damaging use of fear in discipline. Children's fears should be coddled and heeded rather than scorned or ridiculed, for as attacks on fear became ever more straightforward, the strategic responses increased in complexity. The nineteenth-century practice of urging fearful boys to buck up—as in T. S. Arthur's injunction—was now completely rejected. "When a child evinces fear, the one danger to avoid is repression. As long as the fear is brought into the open and discussed, little harm can be done." Parents were advised to talk it out and to attach pleasant experience to the object of fear, leading young children to replace fear with anticipation. Fear became one of a string of "bad" emotions that must be ventilated to be defused, lest repressive dismissal or misguided efforts to overcome through moral intensity drive the feeling deeper, to fester and corrupt. Revealingly, examples of frightened children disproportionately emphasized boys. No one claimed that boys were particularly afraid. Rather, the new conventional wisdom stood in such opposition to Victorian assumptions that it was particularly effective to use the Victorian candidates for courage as object lessons in the need for parental coddling and sanctioned ventilation. Always, warnings against insistence on courage un-
dersoned the distance from the nineteenth century. As Gruenberg, an indefatigable manual and encyclopedia writer, urged, "There is always the danger that the fear resulting from such methods will reach the 'overwhelming' stage and leave its mark for a long time."^13

Two successive theoretical approaches to fear operated within the new cultural context. Neither created the context, which developed more amorphously in the advice literature of the early 1900s, but both extended this context and offered firmer explanations for fear than the average manualist could muster, as well as a clearer rationale for the resultant strategies.

Watsonian behaviorism, as we have seen, provided a presumably scientific method for approaching children’s fears that fit the growing concern of childrearing experts and many expertise-consuming parents during the late 1920s and the 1930s—chronologically after, it must be noted, the concern itself began to be manifested and the basic new strategies devised. According to Watson, interestingly echoing Victorian assumptions, by nature children had virtually no fears at all. Watson claimed that a series of experiments had revealed no instinctive fears of the dark, of fire, or of snakes; only noise and falling produced innate reactions of fear. All other fears, such as fear of animals, derived from associations with one of the two innate fears. This discovery led to a series of admonitions to parents, who must limit loud noise, close windows during storms, and buy houses set well back from the (now increasing) sounds of the road. It also reinforced the idea of reeducating children who were afraid by associating the feared object with pleasurable sensations to produce behavioral modification. This was a difficult, demanding, and time-consuming task, but it involved no moral grappling with powerful elemental emotions. Watson was interested in producing not a courageous personality, but rather a personality that knew how to avoid and manage, with successful adult management including finding material compensation in adult equivalents of candy in the darkened room or treats offered in the presence of an intimidating stranger.^14

Watson’s vision stressed the complexity of the child’s environment while also providing parents with the Victorian reassurance that no problems were innate. This combination helped move parents through a transition in which worry about fear could be combined with real hopes for successful manipulation. The fact that courageous character and confrontation with intense emotion now gave way to clever tactics
seemed to pass unnoticed. Watson was himself interviewed on controlling children’s fears in an early issue of Parents’ Magazine, and Watsonian protégés continued to hold forth through the 1930s. The message also remained consistent: “The main job of the parent should be to prevent fears, since some fears are extremely difficult to cure.” Caution, here, had supplanted courage as the alternative to fear. Courage was dismissed not only because confrontation increased children’s fears but also because it might promote foolhardy antics that simply added to fear’s effects of “making it impossible for one to think clearly.” Passionless good sense and a controlled environment were the new preconditions of sound behavior and a properly restrained emotional life.15

By the 1940s, as fear gained new attention in association with World War II, Watsonianism yielded to a selective kind of Freudianism in American childrearing literature. This approach maintained earlier arguments about strategically minimizing fear and manipulating its treatment, but it undermined the blithe Watsonian assumptions about lack of natural fear. Now, fears lay deep in the psyche, and no amount of parental caution could prevent their emergence in some form. Avoidance should still be stressed wherever possible, but the premium placed on letting children articulate their fears went up. Adult support and affectionate reassurance became even more important than before.

The first full articulation of this second-phase, mid-twentieth-century approach to dealing with fear came in Dr. Benjamin Spock’s initial manual of 1945. As in turn-of-the-century comment by people like Hall and Birney, before the Watsonian deviation, children’s fears were presented as unpredictable and varied. Now, however, they required careful adult response. Parents must sit up with the sleepless child in whom fear had taken root. “Don’t be in a hurry to sneak away before he is asleep. . . . This campaign may take weeks, but it should work in the end.” Parents were advised to delay travel plans when children around two years of age seem anxious; to be very careful about going off to work; not to push toilet training to the point of causing fear; and to assure an anxious child that their love would withstand any number of soiled diapers. Adult calm became all the more precious, even with older children who evinced fear, because “the child is scared enough of his own mental creations.” Lavishing affection was essential. “This is the time for extra hugs and comforting reminders that you love him very much and will always protect him.” Crude strategies like candy bribes
were downplayed as the fear sources became more diffuse, though play-acting was recommended.\textsuperscript{16}

The selectively Freudian revisions of Watsonian simplicities spread widely in the 1950s, appearing in the most common childrearing manuals and the relevant segments of \textit{Parents' Magazine}. The range of this emotion was now vast: “The fact is that a child can get to be afraid of almost anything.” Adult assistance was absolutely essential, for children had no emotional resources to deal with fear unaided: “Unless some grown-up helps them, each frightening experience leaves them weakened for the next assault.” While early infancy remained crucial, parental support now extended into later years, as in accompanying a frightened first grader to school for weeks or even months. Security against emotional threat was crucial. Children would still be afraid, but the occasions would be “reduced to a minimum.” The replacement of mere strategy with abundant reassurance did not, however, reawaken an interest in courage. The goal remained use of parental presence to deflect emotional intensity. Adult stage managing, replacing the Victorian delight in a virile confrontation with fear, extended still farther. Spock, to be sure, used the word “courage,” but he meant by it a process of carefully guided adjustment and dilution, not a moral challenge.\textsuperscript{17}

Amid the important, though limited, gyrations of expertise, parental interest in popularized advice on fear management gained ground steadily from the 1920s onward. Worried parents began to refer fearful children to therapists or to the increasingly available resource of guidance clinics, both of which recourses are noted in early issues of \textit{Parents' Magazine}. An inquiry during the 1940s into the problems parents perceived with children, though not as precise as one might wish in retrospect, uncovered great concern about childhood fears. Fears loomed large in the overall category of emotional problems, which category in turn loomed large among all issues treated in the study. Problems were rated highest among younger children and focused on reactions to darkness, water, animals, germs, and death, as well as generalized fearfulness. Parents did not point to any particularly admirable instances of courage among children, and the concept was almost never cited. Parental perceptions, in other words, particularly among the suburban middle class, paralleled the kinds of signals that had been provided in the larger emotional culture for over two decades.\textsuperscript{18}

Parents also had their own comments to make, suggesting that popu-
larizations not only created new emotional values but also reflected them. Letters to Parents' Magazine appeared regularly from the late 1920s into the 1950s, detailing concerns about children's fears and successful (initially, largely behaviorist) strategies for coping. In 1929 the magazine posed a problem to its readers based on a five-year-old's night fears. A bevy of mothers responded, dutifully warning against maids who told bogeyman stories, fearsome images of a punitive God, and, on the positive side, recommending carefully planted benign images and the after-all-small-enough expense of a night light. The respondents admitted the temptation to impose discipline but sedulously warned against yielding to it. The contest, of course, was a sponsored event, and its demonstration of parental response may be limited. More interesting, though still self-selected, was the spate of spontaneous submissions from parents from the late 1930s through the subsequent decade in which children's fears of dogs, darkness, and other threats were detailed and compensatory strategies based on explaining the source of fear and distracting with treats were recounted. The goal was always removal of a particular fear, not (overtly at least) development of a courageous personality or a desire to introduce moral challenge. By the 1940s, if not before, middle-class parents had widely assimilated the idea that childhood fear was a substantial problem and were eager to offer tactics that would allow their children to cope without requiring direct, courageous confrontation.¹⁹

A similar tone emerged in responses of older children to survey questionnaires about fear, although again the interests of the eliciting researchers may well have influenced the result. The 1956 assessment by Arnold Gesell and his colleagues yielded no preteens dreaming of facing stampeding horses or calculating the bravery needed to turn aside an enemy attack. Rather, they described a group of older children eager to demonstrate that they had surmounted the characteristic fears of earlier years. The narrowed equation of fear with childish terror had clearly triumphed over the earlier, Victorian use of fear in stimulating heroic response to danger. Fear and childishness were more likely pairings than fear and moral challenge, which meant that avoidance rather than ongoing mastery held center stage. Thus ten-year-olds pointed proudly to the waning of a previous fear of dogs or darkness. A few imaginative children admitted potential fears about spending a night in an old castle alone or encountering a lion, which evoked Victorianlike calls on cour-
age. By age eleven, however, even these occasional fancies had passed, and children preferred not to discuss fear at all or to redefine it in such a way as to apply the term to anxieties about being liked by peers. Claims of courageous intensity did not crop up. By age fifteen, fear had become entirely a matter of reminiscence about childhood frights or initial sports anxieties. Maturity meant claiming to do without fear, not claiming emotional resources necessary to grapple with it directly.20

Thus, within two decades of the inception of a new approach toward fear in the prescriptive literature, both teenagers and parents seem to have adjusted their own perceptions. This does not prove that the experience of fear itself changed, or that courage declined, but it does suggest a real shift in emotional self-presentation, particularly on the part of boys and parents dealing with boys.

Growing emphasis on the avoidance of fear affected two other cultural manifestations, one as early as the 1920s, the other more clearly during World War II. By the 1920s children's fiction had lost most of the moralistic qualities of its Victorian counterpart, a development that had begun a few decades earlier. Entertainment, even escapism, triumphed over idealized middle-class virtue. Yet it was revealing that, while some themes of courage persisted as part of fictional excitement—creeping into girls' stories now with nurse and detective heroines—a new kind of hero increasingly predominated. Stories and radio shows, like "Jack Armstrong, All-American Boy," presented one dangerous setting after another, and an imaginative audience might well project fear and wonder how it could be handled. Yet the heroes themselves, in marked contrast to their Victorian analogues, usually claimed no process of encountering and mastering fear. They were not so much courageous as emotionless, building on the tough-guy models that had begun to enter boys' stories, adult dime novels, and Westerns in the nineteenth century.21 Rather than grappling with fear, or even considering fear in retrospect, the new breed of Tarzans and, later, Supermen, had no emotions to deal with one way or another. Their coolness was as remarkable as their ability to fly or withstand bullets or communicate with apes. Adventure and courage were dissociated as excitement was divorced from the larger process of considering fear. It was almost as if the superheroes, the new models of masculinity, had been reared in an ideal Watsonian setting in which the emotions had been entirely inhibited. The increasing popularity of youth science fiction extended the
trend of depicting incredible adventure minus emotional load. Fantasy
life, in sum, shifted from idealizing the control of fear to celebrating
its absence.22 Even real-boy heroes, like Frank Dixon’s Hardy boys,
participated in this new trend. Called upon to fly a blimp with no prior
experience, Frank and Joe are briefly “tense with excitement,” but that
is it. After being shot at, they might remark “I thought we were dead
ducks” without talking about how they had surprised themselves with
their emotional bravery. Lesser colleagues, like chubby Chet, might
admit fear, but such acknowledgments were made only in passing, with
none of the savor of Victorian evaluations of emotional experience. Boy
heroes themselves accomplished far greater wonders than ever before,
but they were not described as courageous because they had no compli-
cating emotions to surmount.23

Again, children’s fiction continued to present some older imagery, and
stories for young children were increasingly purged of scary references of
any sort, as in Disney reformulations of classic fairy tales. The audience
most explicitly affected by the rise of the new supraemotional Superman,
however, was precisely the group that had been most exposed to the
distinctive emotional challenges of Victorian fare: older boys. Though
parents and experts railed against much of the new reading, particularly
the comic books, because of its horrific context, in fact the fare meshed
with the new emotionology in its presentation—or rather, its omis-
sion—of fear itself.

The second cultural manifestation of the new standards for fear in-
volved the American military and the advice, even the vocabulary, it
offered to soldiers and the general public concerning fear. Through
World War I, military authorities had emphasized physical trauma in
explaining the psychological hardships of war. Military heroism was of
course widely praised, and soldiers who had not measured up were
either condemned as cowards or excused on grounds of “shell shock” or
concussion. During World War II, however, there was an increasing
use of terms like “war neurosis” or “battle fatigue,” which covered a
constitutional inability to cope with fear as a darker side of the military
experience. Manuals for soldiers, correspondingly, moved away from
injunctions of heroism. An infantry pamphlet for the Fifth Army in Italy
thus noted: “Don’t be too scared. Everybody is afraid, but you can learn
to control your fear. . . . Being too scared is harmful to you.” The gap
between this pragmatism, which suggests an adaptation of parental
advice to manage emotion while admitting its unpleasant existence, and the more courage-filled presentations of Civil War soldiers is obvious. Military rhetoric did not change entirely, and stories of individual heroism remained staples of public relations campaigns, but it did shift toward downplaying transcendent courage and allowing open admissions of fear in one of the adult settings where the emotion simply could not be avoided. Civilian personnel authorities also moved away from deliberate uses of fear in interviews on the grounds that it incapacitated interviewees rather than revealing strength of character.24

As the military example suggests, the twentieth-century effort to avoid or manage fear had to become more complex as attention moved from childhood to other areas. Earlier emphases on courage continued to affect not only military life but also sports values, where qualities of emotional toughness and intensity built on Victorian premises. Such complexity will return in even greater force when we assess the consequences of twentieth-century attitudes toward fear. However, despite complicating continuities with Victorianism, it is still the case that the culture changed with respect to fear and that new popularized formulas fanned out from childrearing into other perceptions and other institutional statements. Both fear and the appropriate approaches to it were redefined, yielding a new and more open level of distaste and a search for methods of management to replace courageous emotional encounter. In the process, Victorian scenarios, and even words like “courage” and “sissy,” began to assume a certain quaintness, as if our ancestors could not really have known what the whole emotional experience was about.

**Jealousy**

As with fear, a major new attack on jealousy among children developed in the 1920s and extended into the 1950s. The specifics of this cultural shift differed considerably from those regarding fear. First, whereas concern about children’s fear followed in part from new scientific data, the furor about sibling jealousy preceded scientific studies—though such studies emerged to confirm the new common wisdom during the late 1920s and the 1930s in a series of sibling experiments that demonstrated how much most children suffered from jealous pangs.25 Second, no large theory like Watsonianism ever captured the jealousy campaign, though behaviorism and (to a very modest degree) popularized Freudianism had
some bearing; instead, the movement against jealousy was more fully defined by vigorous but unsystematic popularizers. Finally, the initial focus on young children—also apparent in the new approach to boys’ fear—yielded more fully in the case of jealousy to a followup among adults. By the 1950s and for the ensuing two decades, explicit advice on adult jealousy dominated the relevant popular outlets, building on but greatly extending the early-socialization campaign. The shift in fear culture also affected adult culture, as we have seen, but more diffusely.

Jealousy had been officially reproved in Victorian culture; there had been no special, approved encounter with jealousy as there had been for male courage in the face of fear. Thus, whereas the twentieth-century reevaluation of fear had involved some formal redefinition along with expanded treatment, the new anxiety about jealousy involved few official new rules, only a greatly heightened attention level. The new culture involved a great deal more talk and breast beating about jealousy than in the Victorian decades because more rigorous treatment forced more frequent personal evaluations. And whereas with fear twentieth-century culture led to more open admissions of emotional distress, most admissions of jealousy were quickly followed by disclaimer or apology.

Despite these variations, the campaigns to modify fear and to prevent jealousy shared a host of ingredients, besides the initial focus on early childhood and the use of apparently scientific findings. In both cases expansion of concern amounted to a virtual invention of new problems not dealt with explicitly in Victorian culture. The explosion of attention to “siblingitis,” as children’s jealousy came to be termed, thus rivaled dramatic new discoveries of fears about animals or darkness. In both instances, childhood suddenly became emotionally far more complicated than before, requiring new strategic guidance from adults. Tactics overlapped, particularly in recommendations of reassurance, tolerance for verbal venting of emotion, and distractions through candy or toys—a children’s consumerism. The resulting attention also increasingly muted Victorian gender rules. Just as fear increasingly became a problem for children, not an occasion for boys to demonstrate emotional resources girls did not have, so jealousy, though still disproportionately attributed to girls into the 1930s, increasingly became genderless as well: males and females shared the task of ridding themselves of jealousy and neither had a natural disadvantage in measuring up.

Above all, jealousy, like fear, came to be seen as a deep emotional
threat, capable of overwhelming reason and good taste alike. Its cancerous potential had to be identified early and specifically combated. Here was a second negative emotion now viewed in terms of its great power to fester and consume a personality to the point of complete adult dysfunction. The remedy involved sedulous training in avoidance or trivial ventilation. Emotional maturity, for fear and jealousy alike, meant an ability to disclaim and sidestep. While the official Victorian verdict on jealousy was confirmed, implicit Victorian leniency toward this emotion was lost in this process, and the central importance of avoiding the contagion of emotional intensity was driven home far more explicitly than before.

Victorian culture had not only avoided extensive discussions of jealousy; it had also assumed that adults could convert the intensity of jealousy into the development of character—and that while the process might be painful, they could accomplish this on their own. (The exception, murderous jealous rage, was clearly an anomaly in this pattern.) The most common fictional jealousy theme involved a woman jealous of a sister, cousin, or (more rarely) friend who was in love, sometimes with a man the woman herself secretly loved. Jealousy and guilt wrestled for a time, but in the end good character won out. Quite frequently, the woman became better friends with the envied sister or cousin as a result. While this process did not have the explicit gilding attached to courageous triumphs over fear, there was some similarity; in both instances, intensity was converted to self-improvement and a net gain.

In the decades after 1920 this scenario disappeared. Jealousy was simply misery—a deep, grinding distortion that the individual might well be unable to control. Dorothy Baruch, in recommending that jealous children be allowed to tear dolls apart, talked of "getting the poison out." Many advice writers, dealing with child and adult jealousy alike, referred to the imminent loss of control. John Montgomery, describing jealousy as a "strong and disturbing emotion," went on to insist that parental assistance was essential for children: "If he does not have the right kind of help, his personality may be damaged. Unfriendly, disagreeable, selfish, self-conscious adults often show these traits because of unsolved jealousy problems in their childhood." Dr. Spock, a bit more mellowly, confirmed this reaction: "Jealousy is a strong emotion, even in grownups, but it is particularly disturbing to the young child"—and again, an unpleasant adult personality "can often be traced back to the
habits created in the small child by the arrival of a baby brother or sister." Hence the advice to parents: "To prevent it or to minimize it is worth a lot of effort." As for adults themselves: "Jealousy has an insatiable appetite and will possess you if you don't come to grips with it." "Jealousy . . . is a continual compulsion." "The emotion of jealousy limits our freedom, time, energy and attention from our daily tasks. It deprives one of a sense of control and autonomy in our lives." "Obsessive" and "primitive" were two other adjectives frequently used in describing the emotion's dire effects. 28 By the same token, management of jealousy was essential simply to permit decent interactions. The process of management involved damage prevention, not the ennobling experience imagined in Victorian stories. The depth of jealousy's potential harm, beginning in early childhood, the management needed to avoid or escape its intense snares, and the preoccupation with permanent personality flaws and loss of control—these were the themes that transformed jealousy from an emotion that could produce some passing difficulty to a major instance in which control must be imposed over potentially consuming intensity.

One of the first salvos in the new war on children's jealousy—the first stage of what turned out to be a two-pronged campaign—came in a government publication on childrearing by D. H. Thom published in 1925: "Few emotions are experienced by man which from a social point of view are more important than jealousy . . . . The jealous person becomes an object of dislike. Often he develops the idea that he is unjustly treated or persecuted, and all too frequently this idea causes uncontrolled resentment and disastrous results." Therefore parents must attend carefully to jealousy in their children. In 1926 a Child Study Association of America pamphlet similarly identified the inevitability and the evil of jealousy, noting that the emotion is "so intense that little but harm can come from rousing it . . . . Even in its higher form of rivalry and emulation great caution must be used." A child who was too competitive probably suffered from a dangerous level of jealousy: "there is no limit to the depths to which he may sink." This kind of warning was soon followed by a full set of relevant tactics. Under the heading "Nobody likes a jealous person. A jealous person is never happy," the Children's Bureau in 1930 offered a full set of instructions on how to cushion the arrival of a new baby—the most likely trigger for onset of the vile emotion. "Tony was happy again. Now he loves his baby
brother. He is not jealous anymore.” With these thoughts, a veritable flood of standardized advice began to dominate major sections of popularized childrearing literature. Only briefly did a countercurrent surface in the prescriptive advice, arguing that children’s jealousy might serve a useful purpose in encouraging competition and emulation.29

Children’s jealousy was now held to be inevitable, as popularizers interpreted the series of sibling studies revealing that a majority of children overtly expressed significant jealousy and, through quarrels and possessiveness, behaved accordingly. In a catch-22 argument, popularizers argued that those who did not show it were probably suffering from it particularly severely: “A child whose jealousy is not easy to recognize . . . has greater need for help.” The evils of sibling jealousy were twofold. First, jealousy posed a real danger to other children; behind a three-year-old’s resentment of a newborn lurked a potentially murderous impulse. For the safety of infants, and obviously for family harmony and decent relationships among siblings growing up, children’s emotional nature must be corrected. In the second place, jealousy unchecked would generate an adult personality that simply could not function properly, not only in family relationships but also in business, where habits of cooperation were essential. Childish jealousy “indelibly stamps personality and distorts character”; “we have only to read the daily paper to see the results of ungoverned jealousy in adult life.”30

The new wisdom insisted that children could not handle the jealousy problem by themselves, though it offered the hope that parental tactics could reassure children and teach them that love could be shared without personal loss or harm. As de Kok noted in 1939, “If we succeed in getting him to accept the situation happily, we have done much towards making him grow into an adult who looks upon all love as a sharing with others, not as a possession which must be calculated and selfishly held against all comers.”31 Yet the recommended strategies were more complex and various than the blissful goals implied.

Ventilation was of course central. Children should be taught to identify and label jealousy and freely to express it as a means of relieving the inner tension without damaging themselves in the short term or others in the long term. No guilt should be attached, for this might make matters worse by adding one emotional intensity to another. Children should make no direct gains through expressing jealousy, but they should receive lots of parental coddling. “I know how you feel, dear.
Come on over and I’ll give you a hug and we’ll see if that doesn’t help." Through admission and subsequent reassurance, jealousy could be defanged, rendered passive and thus incapable of motivating undesirable behavior.32

Other tactics stressed avoidance, particularly as popularizers warmed to their task after some initial vagueness in the 1920s. The litany became increasingly standardized: Tell children that a baby is coming so the way is prepared. Don’t force children to share rooms if at all possible. Give each child separate furnishings, toys, and clothing; this is money well spent. Tell grandparents and other intruders to make a greater fuss over the older child than over a new baby who wouldn’t know the difference anyway. Conceal breast feeding and other provocative acts involving the baby. In sum, parents were advised to anticipate jealousy by reinforcing individualism and providing privately owned material distractions.33

As with the simultaneous campaign against outdated approaches to childish fear, the war against sibling jealousy raged before an appreciative audience. Parents in the interwar decades, whose own parents had somehow suffered through their own childhoods with no elaborate advice or up-to-date terms like “sibling rivalry,” clearly shared the discovery of immense emotional problems with the experts. Guidance authorities reported widespread parental concern over jealousy in their young children. Letters from parents to family magazines showed the same patterns from the late 1920s into the 1950s. As one woman noted in 1955, jealousy was “by far the most troublesome, the gravest issue I’ve met so far in my career as mother.” In a mid-1940s poll of 544 families, 53 percent reported significant problems of jealousy among siblings, rating this the third most important issue in dealing with children and the most serious of all concerns about children’s personality and temperament. Among suburban parents, sibling problems stood second in the overall list, compared to an eighth-place ranking for the urban poor and fourteenth place for urban blacks. Parents also increasingly reported adoption of the recommended strategies of reassurance and distracting purchases, and some of them put a good bit of time and money into their efforts. In another indication of the cultural success of the new standards, teenagers increasingly identified jealousy with immaturity and liked to downplay their jealousies, particularly where siblings were concerned.34

Some of the missionary fervor began to drop from the childrearing
literature by the 1960s. Reversions to older formulas remained possible, as in a 1977 manual's claims that "nothing so greedily consumes a child's inner emotional reserves than feelings of jealousy," but in general experts reduced their dire warnings about permanent character damage and began to admit that the problem varied significantly from one set of siblings to another. Recommended tactics for dealing with jealousy also persisted beyond the 1960s; indeed, one of the reasons why the urgency notched down in the prescriptive literature was that most parents now knew the strategies by heart, having been raised on them. Thus, while the decades between about 1925 and 1960 constituted the high point in the juvenile division of the antijealousy campaign, basic goals and concerns persisted even beyond.³⁵

Furthermore, by the 1950s the attack on jealous intensity in children extended to adults. This effort was based on the assumptions that had been developed about jealousy in childhood, and it had been anticipated by widely publicized statements originating in the 1920s. Antijealousy arguments for adults in the 1920s issued primarily from avant-garde marriage reformers in Britain and the United States. Judge Ben Lindsay publicized the doctrines most widely, summoning up his experience as a divorce court judge. Jealousy was a contradiction of true love, which should be selfless and unpossessive. It led to compulsive behaviors and even crimes, while forming an unhealthy basis for marriage itself. "Any custom that gives two free persons the ownership of each other is a device of the devil," Lindsay argued, claiming that 90 percent of divorces stemmed from strains caused by jealousy.³⁶ This line of argument was more open than nineteenth-century discussion, particularly in its frank attack on sexual possessiveness, and it was more widely publicized. But it maintained some essential Victorian thinking, particularly in its reliance on arguments about the ideal nature of true love.

The 1920s burst of frankness led to important attacks on jealousy by some feminists and, relatedly, new analysis by various social scientists. Social psychologists began to attack jealousy as harmful to the personality and counterproductive in relationships. Margaret Mead, in the 1930s, opined that jealousy is "undesirable, a festering spot in every personality so affected." Kingsley Davis, in 1936, offered a more extensive anthropological view, showing how jealous mistrust poisoned "the harmony of perfect intimacy."³⁷

In the 1930s these strains against jealousy began to enter popularized
marriage advice literature as well as the now-dwindling genre of advice to teenagers. Readers were told that jealousy was a blemish and a cause of disruption—that it was “irrational and completely unwarranted.” Further, accusations of immaturity were now added to the mix; an inability to control the emotion, or a need to display it openly, was a sign of improper childhood experience. Now that parental guidelines were so well established, the jealous surge could be dismissed as a sign that, somehow, one’s childhood had not been correctly managed. Not just love ideals but also the demands of appropriate adulthood compelled redress and shamed the jealous individual. As a 1945 booklet aimed at high school girls argued, in what had become by then the standard message: “Jealousy is probably the most common of all the unhelpful attitudes. . . . Why do we act this way? The reason is that we haven’t outgrown the selfishness of early childhood. . . . We must grow up.”

The insistence on immaturity was a striking theme that tended to preclude other kinds of thinking about jealousy. Legitimate reasons or purposes for jealousy were hard to come by when readers were constantly told that their impulses were childish. Even the intensity concern was held at a remove, for the infantilism argument trivialized the darker passions jealousy might involve. Attacks on jealousy in adults did not need to address these passions, or any other issues aside from childishness. They could rely on assumptions developed in the discussions of the previous decades that had thoroughly explored the power of jealousy in childhood and beyond, so that the accusation of childishness was now an adequate deterrent. “The jealous lover is a child hugging his toy so closely that no one else can see it. Jealousy is almost always a mark of immaturity and insecurity. As we grow confident of love and of our loved one, we are not jealous . . . we need not cling in desperation.”

As the antijealousy campaign became a standard ingredient in marriage manuals, themselves a rapidly growing medium for popularized expertise between the 1930s and the 1950s, damage to love was conjoined with blasts against immaturity. “Jealousy kills love. It is a symptom of weakness and of selfishness. Wanting a suitor, or a wife, or a husband to pay exclusive attention to one has nothing in common with real devotion.” Sentiments of this sort, which held that jealousy conducted toward absolute monopoly of a partner’s interests, assumed that jealousy had an all-or-nothing quality. Thus the antijealousy campaign
indirectly picked up the anti-intensity theme. The idea of a moderate jealousy or an acceptance of intense jealousy devoted to basic fidelity rather than exclusiveness had dropped from view. One famous advice writer, Paul Popenoe, moved against the tide in arguing that jealousy was a vital support for monogamy (so long as it was expressed "on an adult level"—Popenoe admitted that jealousy could easily transgress proper bounds, becoming "a childish and destructive habit"). With this interesting exception, the marriage literature united in condemnation: "Jealousy is a terrible emotion, one of the extreme forms of psychological cruelty." While jealousy indicated problems in a relationship, it pointed even more clearly to deficiencies—insecurities or even a hidden desire for infidelity—on the part of the jealous individual. Advice writers mastered the put-down on immaturity, stating that even infidelity should be manageable: "We are upset to varying degrees, but usually not so deeply as we think."40 Intensity, once more, need not apply.

The attacks on jealousy fed into the culture of the 1960s as both feminists and advocates of open marriages and other experiments continued the salvos against emotional possessiveness. Some partisans of these movements shifted ground slightly by arguing that jealousy was itself unnatural, a learned emotion, and that a proper person should be jealousy-free. Others, however, acknowledged the problems of deficient childrearing and the need for rigorous adult self-control as sexual experimentation became increasingly common and overt. One open-marriage manual instructed a spouse on what to say when a partner called to report that he was spending the night away: "Fine, I'm glad things are going so well. Enjoy yourself and I look forward to hearing about it tomorrow." In the 1970s a jealousy workshop movement briefly flourished in some American cities, run by practitioners like Larry Constantine and Robert and Margaret Blood; the idea was to train people to get used to their partners' sexual involvements with others. Designed for those "who are strongly motivated to outgrow jealousy," the workshops defined success as acceptance of full marital freedom. Jealousy would not be concealed or denied; it simply would not exist as partners would learn to praise the advantages of their mutual excursions. In the words of one exemplar: "I really appreciate the fact that after you've been with Ann you seem more accepting of me and the children."41

The language of the movement against adult jealousy was widely accepted within the middle class. During the 1960s and 1970s many
partners reported their ardent efforts to live up to jealousy-free standards and their embarrassment when the emotion refused to disappear. “I think it comes from possessiveness and I’m trying to grow away from that.” Or, if individuals were unable to deny some pain when a partner was unfaithful, they tried to minimize their emotion. Thus the muted remarks by people who found a mate in bed with someone else: “Somewhat disconcerting”; “It was kind of rough”; “I was sort of put down.” The sloppily qualifying language in these remarks—“kind of,” “sort of”—related to broader language changes that, as we will see in a later chapter, reflected the more general turn away from admission of emotional intensity. Even before the sexual revolution decades, American men professed widespread disapproval of jealousy and complained loudly about their wives’ anachronistic jealous nagging. Thus a survey of California husbands in the 1930s listed jealousy-induced nagging as their eighteenth most pressing grievance against wives (far ahead of worries about wifely infidelity, which placed forty-fifth). While women were more ambivalent about jealousy than men professed to be (and even many men admitted jealous responses in certain situations, particularly during dating), agreement about the evil of jealousy increased steadily. By the 1960s a major social psychology study demonstrated that the vast majority of middle-class Americans believed that jealousy was a sign not of love, but rather of immaturity and dangerous insecurity.42 Decades of cultural conditioning had paid off in a new and impressively uniform set of criteria by which jealousy could be described and condemned.

Anger

The final transformation concerning negative emotions involved anger, where the complex Victorian emphasis on combining control and focused intensity was rejected outright in favor of an effort to manage and avoid. The phases of the redefinitions of anger differed noticeably from those concerning fear and jealousy. The first efforts concentrated on adults in the workplace, and only gradually did the implications spread to new standards for family life, particularly for childrearing. Yet despite distinctive features, both the basic timing and the underlying criteria of the campaign against anger overlapped with the attacks against the other unpleasant emotions. Growing anxiety about anger involved the same
revulsion against disagreeable intensities and potential loss of control that had motivated the concerns about fear and jealousy. With anger, however, the Victorian formula had taken such deep roots in American culture that the need for wholesale transformation emerged somewhat gradually, with changes in one sector not initially resonating in others. By the 1950s, however, a systematic culture was in place that meshed smoothly with the simultaneous campaigns against jealousy and avoidable confrontations with fear.

Novel attention to anger in the workplace began to surface in the 1920s. It had precedent, to be sure. Employers in the nineteenth century had tried to identify “troublemakers” among their labor force as part of an attempt to prevent or crush protest. They could make it abundantly clear that they did not appreciate open anger directed against management. Nineteenth-century work rules, however, concentrated on behavior, not mood, and there was no explicit discussion of anger as a labor issue or of methods to improve emotional restraint. Hotheads, if identified, might be fired, but they were not told to seek counseling. Only in domestic service, where family rules about anger applied, was explicit attention paid to anger in an employment relationship. Here, family manuals routinely insisted on the importance of temper control in the interests of integrating servants into the proper emotional mood of the household. Here also, uniquely, employers—in the form of middle-class housewives—talked about their own battles with anger as part of their ruminations on dealings with staff.43

Elements of the household standard began to shift into work outside the home in the 1920s as the indirect approach to anger on the job began to yield to a host of specific recommendations. To be sure, the Victorian idea of channeling still emerged. As late as 1919, an industrial engineer, claiming that scientific management allowed anger to be constructively directed against things rather than colleagues or supervisors, argued: “Pugnacity is a great driving force. It is a wonderful thing that under Scientific Management this force is aroused not against one’s fellow workers but against one’s work.” On balance, however, it was the scientific management movement, maintained not only by engineers but also by the new breed of industrial psychologists, that first reconsidered the role of anger as part of an effort to make workers more machinelike and the workplace itself a smoothly running engine. Frederick Taylor, for example, thrust onto the factory floor from a conven-
tional middle-class background, talked about his shock at the choleric surliness of many factory workers; this became one of his targets when he talked about inducing a "mental revolution" on the job. Still more significant were the reactions of Elton Mayo and his associates in the famous General Electric Hawthorne plant experiments launched in the 1920s. Mayo's initial goals involved better use of time and avoidance of fatigue, but he was soon drawn into a concern about anger as he discovered a level of "irritability" among workers that he could not ignore. Raised like Taylor in a middle-class home, Mayo was purely and simply disturbed by the angry atmosphere, and he translated his disturbance into a sense that production must suffer from workers' irritability. From this, an emphasis on morale, defined as producing better cheer and less workplace anger, became a major focus of personnel initiatives not only at Hawthorne but also in the growing field of personnel psychology around the nation. Mayo's beliefs that, as he put it, angry outbursts on the job were equivalents of nervous breakdowns in individuals generated a host of experiments to curb anger when expressed and, even better, to prevent it in the first place.

Two other currents joined with industrial engineering in producing the new campaign. Even before Mayo, the growing presence of women workers produced a separate strand of comments about the inappropriateness of workplace anger. Women, after all, were not supposed to be angry or to serve as emotional targets, and the finding that women might cry when exposed to supervisory ire led to new appeals for restraint. It is also probable that encounters with angry working women shocked middle-class observers accustomed to a more docile femininity; no personnel manual stated this directly, but the frequency by the 1930s of female examples in case studies on misplaced anger suggests a potential connection. At the same time a growing literature on salesmanship, capped late in the 1920s by the emergence of Dale Carnegie as the personification of appropriate guidance, created yet another anti-anger strand. Salesmen, as Carnegie and others pointedly argued, should not get angry because this would inhibit sales. Cheerfulness, turning the other cheek, became part of a new-style work personality designed to subordinate personal reactions in the interests of moving goods. No matter how unreasonable the customer, Carnegie argued, the salesman must keep a smile on his face. Describing a confrontation with an insulting customer, Carnegie writes: "By apologizing and sympathizing
with her point of view . . . I had the satisfaction of controlling my
temper, the satisfaction of returning kindness for an insult. I got infi-
mitely more real fun out of making her like me than I ever could have
gotten out of letting her go and take a jump.”

The message was clear, in offices, stores, and factories alike: anger at
work was ugly, counterproductive, and unnecessary: “The angry man
may himself be the chief victim of his emotion. It incapacitates him from
dealing with his problems in a corrective way.” Industrial psychologists,
bent on pleasing employers interested in fuller control over their labor
force and uneasy about the tide of protest that had briefly surged after
World War I, argued that work did not really cause anger but merely
suffered from it. A standard line in the late 1920s and 1930s held that
angry workers were merely “projecting their own maladjustments upon
a conjured monster, the capitalists.” “It is known that complaints, very
often, have nothing to do with the matter complained about.” This
notion translated older but more generalized beliefs about workers as a
badly bred subspecies into a new excuse for devising strategies to manip-
ulate emotional response. Since workers had rotten home lives that
generated an anger to which civilized middle-class folks were superior,
the main effort was to get rid of the anger without cost to the work
process. The central finding was that anger could be readily talked away.
“Sometimes a worker just bursting with rage at the ‘unfairness’ of her
foreman is able to proceed normally with her work after expressing her
feeling . . . and receiving a few words of sympathy or explanation.” This
ventilation took a bit of time and patience, but it cost little; no substan-
tive response was required. Sometimes the supervisor barely had to
sympathize, for if a worker could be asked to repeat the grievance two
or three times, he or she would usually become sheepish and embar-
rassed, and the emotion would recede; often the worker would even
apologize for having come on so strong.

However, in the eyes of the new personnel gurus, it was also im-
portant for management to mend its emotional ways. Along with advice
about how to defuse workers’ wrath, handbooks began to instruct fore-
men, middle managers, and office personnel about the importance of
keeping their own tempers and avoiding provoking a needless confronta-
tion by waspishness. “Bullying begets bullying” was the new cry as a
growing amount of attention turned to the anger habits of the middle
and lower-middle class itself.
Secretaries were told to keep their emotions in check. Whereas nineteenth-century secretarial manuals had focused on trustworthiness and responsibility, from the 1920s onward advice turned to temper control. The good clerk would smilingly confront an angry boss, and anyone with a quick temper was “faced with the problem of remedying these defects.” “The secretary should never forget that in order to please people, he needs to exert himself.”

Foremen received growing attention. Their role in production decisions was curtailed by the rise of industrial engineers, but their responsibilities for preventing worker anger increased apace. Instead of snapping at workers, foremen must learn to listen to complaints “even when they are silly.” They must recognize that “the day of the ‘bully’ and ‘slave-driver’ had gone, and the day of the ‘gentleman’ and ‘leader’ had arrived.” The foreman’s checklist: “Do I correct the mistakes of my workers considerately, and in a manner to indicate that I am more interested in helping them to avoid future mistakes than I am in the opportunity merely to ‘bawl them out’?” The key to the kingdom was self-restraint, for the foreman who let emotion show would simply be asking for trouble from below: “Control your emotions—control your remarks—control your behavior.” Shouting and ridicule were passé. The new standard involved tact and rationality—what by the 1950s was being called, by human relations experts, “consideration.”

In the new wisdom, anger had no place at work. The emotion was a sign of some personality flaw—“some disturbance in the equilibrium of the individual”—or of some irrelevant distraction, particularly in home life. This meant that control was all the more essential lest the work flow be needlessly interrupted. While workers must be manipulated, the chief responsibility for placing reason firmly in command of emotion lay with those who should know better than to be angry in the first place—the growing white-collar and middle-management groups. Maturity was crucial here, as with jealousy. Personnel counselors felt free to tell an angry employee, “You look silly having a temper tantrum at your age.” The key to the new emotional style, for counselors and managers alike, was to be “impersonal, but friendly.”

Attacks on anger, particularly in middle management, readily suggested wider concerns about emotions in the workplace. Rationality became central in the new personnel litany: “Effectiveness decreases as emotionality increases.” Grievances, particularly, must be approached in
low-key fashion, "with as little heat as possible." And the word "cool" began to creep in as a talisman of desirable emotional control: "It is of the utmost importance that the foreman remain cool," as a 1943 personnel relations article put it.51

The work-based campaign against anger quickly transcended rhetoric, for in this case the means were at hand to put money where the mouth was. The spread of industrial relations departments in American business during the 1930s, when 31 percent of all companies maintained such services, and then the further surge during World War II under the sponsorship of the War Industries Board provided an increasing number of experts eager to undertake the task of defusing workplace anger. New personnel journals and a host of textbooks preached the standard messages widely, along with popularized manuals directed toward secretaries and salespeople. Counseling services grew apace, expressly designed to provide emotionally neutral experts who could intervene in angry disputes. A woman janitorial employee in Chicago, caught sleeping on the job, so abused her supervisor that he became afraid to take action. The solution was counseling. The worker poured out her dislike for the job as the counselor listened patiently, waiting for the anger component to subside. Calmed, the custodian agreed that things weren't so bad, and when the counselor also recommended that the foreman show more tact, the issue was closed, with no substantive changes required to remove the emotional component. Not only as intermediaries but also as role models, willing to listen while manifesting no emotion save plastic cheer, counselors helped change the anger standards on the job.52

From personnel expertise and counseling came other changes designed to minimize emotional tension. Counselors often participated in job interviews to estimate (among other things) the candidate's ability to control temper. Interviews themselves shifted. Instead of deliberately provoking anxiety as a means of probing character, they now established superficial bonhomie so that emotion would not distract from the task at hand. Exit interviews were designed not only to find out why an employee quit a job but also to defuse any residual anger associated with grievance. Personnel testing programs were extended from the 1930s onward, not only to evaluate aptitude but also to identify undesirable emotional characteristics. Indeed, Doncaster Humm, author of one of the most widely used screening tests, argued in the early 1940s that such
tests were more useful for assessing workers’ emotions than for evaluating their abilities. According to Humm 80 percent of all problem workers had testable deficiencies in temperament while only 20 percent were assigned to jobs inappropriate for their aptitudes. Similar authorities warned that untested workers might demonstrate “explosive temper and readiness to take offense.”

The second major implementation area, along with counseling and testing, involved explicit retraining programs directed particularly at foremen, which burgeoned between the late 1930s and the 1950s. Foremen were schooled not to press workers too hard, to aid them with problems, and to allow them to air their feelings before any serious anger could become entrenched. Examples from the bad old days, involving shouting and callousness, were contrasted with the new, correct styles of courtesy and tact. Role playing allowed foremen to try out cool responses to angry workers. Told that their main task was now not technical expertise but human relations, foremen were given the message that while workers might get angry (wrongly, but inevitably), they should not. The ideal foreman is now “sensitive to the feelings of others and exercises restraint in expressing his own.”

New personality tests for foremen sometimes combined with retraining, as foremen were asked such questions as “is a disappointment more likely to make you angry than sad?” with sadness clearly preferred. Retraining programs multiplied to embrace literally hundreds of separate operations, reaching tens of thousands of supervisors in manufacturing, insurance, and other areas. A 1944 survey claimed that 80 percent of all foremen either received or sought new human relations training.

While formal retraining subsided after the 1950s, on the assumption that old hands had learned new ways and recruits would know them in the first place if properly screened, subsequent fads reinforced the anger control message. For example, sensitivity training groups, or T-groups in the 1960s, gave higher-level executives more expensive exercises in emotion control and compromise. In their attacks on authoritarian management styles slogans like “the rationality of feelings and attitudes is as crucial as that of the mind” indicated that the purpose of workplace anger control still burned bright. Many campaigns were doubtless superficial, and the whole movement against anger invited a certain amount of public relations window dressing. Nevertheless, not only the professed goals but the sheer range of institutional initiatives revealed a genuine
sense of mission in remaking the emotional context of the modern job.\textsuperscript{56}

For about fifteen years, from the late 1920s when Mayo and his colleagues began to articulate their emotional concerns to the early 1940s, the work-based movement against anger seemed isolated from other areas of emotional culture. Notably, family advice concerning anger did not significantly change. There were three reasons for the odd disjuncture. In the first place, family advice had long warned against domestic anger, so no full revision of standards was necessary in prescriptions directed toward the middle class. Second, because industrial psychology is such a separate field from social work and child development programs, the concerns of the former were not communicated to the latter and thus did not quickly translate into popularized advice directed to the middle class. Third and most important, however, the Victorian interest in channeled anger had lodged so deeply in middle-class culture that it could be rethought only with difficulty. Even as work norms explicitly moved away from the idea of directing anger toward competitiveness, more diffuse middle-class values continued to embrace the belief that a proper boy should be able to direct anger at appropriate targets. As late as 1962 Lloyd Warner claimed that internal contradictions in the anger standards conveyed to American boys constituted, along with sexuality, one of the two leading areas of confusion in American socialization. Here Warner accurately noted how persistent the Victorian approach to anger had been.\textsuperscript{57}

Childrearing advice thus continued to repeat the Victorian anger formulas, even as they revised the discussion of fear and jealousy. Thus in 1931 Ada Hart Arlitt wrote that anger should not be trained out of a child, for "it serves an excellent purpose if it is not carried to the point of temper tantrums." Anger motivates hard work and political reform, so parents, while preventing needless conflicts within the family, should teach children to use anger to achieve righteous purposes. Thus the good parent should tell a child that "big boys do not get angry about that," but should also be ready to say that "every big boy should be angry when smaller children are frightened by bigger ones." Emily Post, writing in 1940, urged cautious use of anger—"Anger is a force which, like a savings account, should be drawn upon prudently"—but went on to repeat the common assumption that anger well used could motivate great deeds and promote acts of chivalry. In 1933 John Anderson urged,
in behaviorist fashion, that anger need not be a big problem—“a child can learn either to throw tantrums or not”—while noting that anger could be valuable in “socially useful” channels as an antidote to passivity, which was a far greater threat.58

This line of argument was clearly at odds with the new work advice, which was pointing directly at home tensions and improper socialization as the sources of the most damaging emotional outbursts at work. As early as 1933 Elton Mayo had pointed to the home problems that led workers to import their resentments to the job and had urged counseling to resolve such issues when the family itself could not cope. By 1945 personnel authorities themselves were blaming bad parenting for anger that might be directed at the counselors, whose skillful emotional disarmament efforts might not be able to overcome past abuse. The tension between the newly demanding standards applied to anger at work and the Victorian standards carried over to discussions of the family was increasingly hard to sustain.59

By the 1940s the new approach to anger control began to spread into the childrearing literature. As early as 1939, in fact, child development psychologists began a revealing substitution of the word “aggression” for “anger” in discussing this emotional area, and by the 1950s “aggression” carried more page references than “anger” in the indexes of popular manuals. “Aggression,” with its connotations of violent behavior and imposition on others, obviously suggested meanings rather different from those embraced by “anger.” It would be hard to imagine a childrearing manual insisting that children’s aggressive impulses be carefully preserved. Even so, the move away from Victorian formulas was hesitant at first. The initial 1945 edition of Dr. Spock’s manual repeated Victorian ideas about channeling anger into useful work in the world, as Spock (already very concerned about jealousy and fear) advised nonchalance in the face of temper tantrums. Some new commentary stressed the depth of anger in children—“Angry emotions are deeply ingrained in human nature”—which suggested new dimensions to the problem but no very clear guidelines. Other innovators attacked older ideas piece-meal. A 1951 manual, for example, demolished the notion that children should be encouraged to control anger by boxing or other exercises that might allow them to pretend they were punishing their enemies, for these approaches exacerbated rather than drained the emotion. Here, in fact, was a renunciation of much of the Victorian approach, though the
From Vigor to Ventilation

author seemed unaware of his innovation: draining, not channeling, had become the key goal, and with it a new set of conventional strategies for dealing with anger in childhood. The same author, Harold Bernard, went on to note that anger almost never led to the solution of problems and that even righteous indignation, though occasionally a boon, required strong rational control; the message was that anger should be avoided. Even pouting was condemned as allowing a child to store anger. Still, however, Victorian throwbacks could emerge as late as 1958, as in Schwartz and Ruggieri’s manual, which contended that the “nondestructive” expression of legitimate anger, as when children stuck up for their rights, was healthy. In such situations parents should be willing to admit they were wrong, and they should in fact worry about children so repressed that they never showed anger at all.60

Nevertheless, the mood was clearly shifting. Schwartz and Ruggieri’s advice was already somewhat anachronistic, for an implicit, meandering debate about anger in socialization had been occurring for almost two decades, with the balance of power steadily shifting toward innovation. Even Schwartz and Ruggieri, despite the Victorian passage cited above (modernized to include the parental obligation to respect children’s rights), hedged anger with a host of new caveats. Angry people had been bottled up from childhood, “only dimly aware of their underlying passion”; incapable of self-control, “they are possessed of a devil.”61 Childhood authorities were in fact widely admitting what personnel experts had long contended: that anger had roots in personality disorders themselves derived from childhood. This was the same message that popularizers had been spreading about fear and jealousy for some time.

Full statements of the new approach emerged as early as 1941. Ruth Fedder then began to apply the unassailable idea of emotional maturity to anger and aggression, arguing that, as with jealousy, maturity meant control. The adult must accept frustration without blaming others; he or she should assume that all problems can be rationally solved. Anger was simply infantile, a sign of insecurity. “For anyone to pout, sulk, rage or indulge in other displays of violent emotion is to confess frustration and inability to face the actual problem.” Aggressiveness simply bred anger in response. Only when rage might lead to effective action, as in fighting social wrongs like slavery (a revealingly extreme and anachronistic example), might the older Victorian ideas retain any validity; it was socially useful, for example, that Abraham Lincoln had been morally
angry. Within a few years Dorothy Baruch and a host of other childrearing experts joined the hue and cry against anger, though a fully consistent stance was not achieved until a decade later (as in Dr. Spock’s subsequent editions, where he treated anger more anxiously). Teenage advice books chimed in as well, condemning excessive competitiveness and urging the importance of controlling anger for the sake of popularity (“Do you try to prevent outbursts of anger and thoughtless remarks?”).62

Anger had become bad, not complex or potentially useful. “Anger shows a definite attempt on the part of the angry person to dominate another. Anger does not lead to growth, learning, or harmony. Anger is rigid, inflexible, unyielding; it expresses not the slightest desire or intent to reach a better understanding. It produces either submission or further disharmony and greater antagonism.” As the definition of maturity became less nuanced and good personal relations took precedence over interest in raising children to be champions of justice or productive competitors, the references to channeling anger, rather than controlling it completely, dropped from sight.63 At the same time, discussions of anger and aggression became increasingly extreme, dotted with references to “explosions” and to deviant children “choking with rage.”

The new approach recognized that some anger was unavoidable. Like fear and jealousy, anger became an emotional cross parents had to help children bear. The central aim was to convert potentially horrifying anger to bland and harmless expression. Further, it was now taboo to punish or moralize about angry expressions: both would simply make the child more angry and/or drive the emotion deeper, another potential cause for festering. Parents should also of course avoid the Victorian impulse to approve displays of childish temper as demonstrations of “spirit”: anger was a serious problem, even in infants. The goal was to provide an understanding, supportive response to children’s anger, designed to “prevent emotional sores from bursting.” A child who learned to handle anger at home would not develop the kind of truculent character that would blow up at work or in marriage: “The more [the child] releases the anger, the less of it will remain, provided it has been handled in an acceptant way that doesn’t make new anger take the place of what has drained off.”64

The positive strategy involved in all this combined the same elements recommended in fear and jealousy socialization—avoidance and ventila-
Parents should be careful to remove as many sources of anger as possible by promoting good sleep, allocating material possessions fairly, and of course avoiding anger themselves. Children should be taught to identify their own anger—being able to label emotions early on received growing emphasis—and they should learn, though with no overt disapproval attached, that feeling angry was unpleasant. Further, they should be encouraged to talk their anger through, to learn that verbal expression would make the nasty emotion go away and that no physical actions—even diversionary ones like hitting the floor—and no positive results were associated with the experience. At most, some role playing might aid the process if talk alone did not suffice. Children's angry impulses must be diverted, replaced with other feelings "more socially useful and personally comfortable." "Feelings can be changed, with changed behavior intelligently following."65

In the familiar pattern, adult anger was now seen as resulting from childhood mishandling and repression. Angry adults were immature, though no less dangerous for their childishness: "they are possessed of a devil," becoming tyrants in office and home alike. In his later editions Dr. Spock, moving away from his initial, inadvertent Victorianism, specifically associated temper control with maturity. Properly adult behavior meant solving problems without anger, and American society, in the good doctor's mature judgment, needed more of this kind of control. Other authorities had moved to this position by the 1940s, emphasizing the negative results of aggression. Earlier ideas that anger might be useful in righting social wrongs were jettisoned (with a partial exception in a childrearing manual directed toward blacks): children should see authority as just and problems as resolvable through calm compromise. Rules encountered in both childhood and adulthood might not always be right, "but we cannot break them or have temper tantrums because they do not suit us personally."66

The new approach to draining anger was born at a time when childrearing advice was largely permissive, directed against real or imagined traditions of repression. Early recommendations thus stressed the effort to provide an understanding and supportive response, though the goal of reducing anger and preventing its formation in character was firmly maintained. This approach easily passed into the somewhat stricter mood of the 1960s and 1970s, when the goals of compromise and conformity could be more explicitly identified. Just as the attack on
sibling rivalry survived the transition from behaviorism to neo-Freudianism, so the overriding interest in defusing childish anger superseded more superficial fads in expertise.

Ventilationist strategy assumed that the family must play an important role in listening to expressions of anger, and this provided a certain verbal leeway that contrasted with the greater Victorian desire for harmony at all costs. Children might need to do more than verbalize or purge their anger; they might need to tell their parents that they were angry at them. This seemingly permissive concession, however, was immediately hedged with restrictions, for anger must be released without damage or even hostility: “You don’t want to worry or irritate anyone else when you use your Rage Release.” Any admission of anger must quickly yield to kisses and hugs, and the emphasis on calm statements—“do you know that makes me mad?”—suggested that the goal was to impose rational control even before the emotion was vented. Highly regulated, passionless discussion, not emotional conflict, was the goal when a family dispute emerged. Marital advice literature followed essentially the same approach, as a “fair-fighting” fad emerged in the 1960s. Angry spouses were urged to shout into closets to “vent hostility.” While marital disagreements were inevitable, quarrels should be postponed until the couple could be “calm” and under “control.”

The twentieth-century approach to anger decisively rejected some of the tensions inherent in the Victorian style. Popularizers disdained the public-private dichotomy, nor did they try to teach people to control their anger in all sorts of situations while saving the essential passion as motivation. But in place of these complexities, a new anomaly was introduced: because anger was inevitable and could not safely be repressed, some open manifestations had to be allowed; yet because anger was thoroughly unproductive and unpleasant, these manifestations must be as circumscribed as possible. Apparent tolerance, in this situation, barely masked a whole set of control mechanisms.

For angry family members were, like angry people generally, simply immature. There was no just cause for anger. Here, family advice joined the earlier workplace wisdom. Marital conflicts were thought to result from displaced anger in childhood, and ideally, this knowledge should cushion a spouse’s response. As the increasingly popular “Can This Marriage Be Saved” column in the Ladies Home Journal argued from the 1950s onward, “Try not to take personally everything a spouse says
in anger. His anger is often based on his own insecurity.” Marriage counselors chimed in, repeatedly associating anger with immaturity. While the new tolerance allowed that marriage could survive an occasional quarrel, it was still the case that “most bickering in marriages would stop if husbands and wives would just be polite and ‘behave like adults.’” Authorities like Robert Blood distinguished between arguing and quarreling: the former, quite compatible with a good marriage, occurred “as long as two people are able to cope with their problems objectively... as long as emotions are still under control.” As for real anger in marriage, images of warfare and “nuclear explosion” bedecked discussions of it. Communication, which might include calm, purely verbal expressions of anger, was touted as the healing alternative to angry exchange, for there was no grievance that could not be emotionally controlled by free and frank talk. Anger was either avoided in mid-twentieth-century marital advice or, its inevitability reluctantly conceded, it was trivialized, dismissed as superficial rather than deeply felt. As with jealousy, accusations were turned against the accuser: is your spouse unreasonably angry or is it you? Victorians, at least as concerned about the results of quarreling in the family context, conveyed a sense of deep passions under stern control—and, of course, available for deployment elsewhere. The new-style family advice sought to dismiss anger with a laugh and a reminder about immaturity; intensity gave way to cuddles and bemused questions about what the fuss had been about in the first place. Ideally, deeper passion had disappeared by adulthood, for if it survived it would denote an antisocial, aggressive personality; and there was no useful function for anger, in the home or outside it.

Conclusion: The Larger Campaign

The trajectories of the new attacks on negative emotions were not identical, partly of course because the emotions themselves vary. Fear roused concern because of its damage to the individual; jealousy and anger also harmed the individual, but these emotions were condemned primarily because they interfered with constructive dealings with others. Moderate differences in timing combined with significant distinctions in the audiences addressed: discussions of fear began in the childrearing manuals and only gradually spread to the cultural expressions of adult institu-
tions like the military, whereas the revisions of Victorian anger standards moved in almost literally the reverse order.

Nevertheless, the overriding similarities were striking. The concept of bad emotions united fear, jealousy, and anger around an emphasis on unpleasantness and destructive consequence. This categorization built on Victorian disapprovals, particularly of jealousy and anger, but it went well beyond Victorianism in denying the usefulness and emphasizing the extreme inner discomfort of the negative emotions.

New cultural standards began to emerge in all three cases in the 1920s, and their full statement required about three decades to develop. By the later 1950s mature and multifaceted expressions of the reasons behind hostility to these emotions and the strategies designed to curb them were readily available, and middle-class audiences were, if letters to magazines and questionnaire data can be believed, routinely consuming them.

Hostility to fear, jealousy, and anger displaced the gender distinctions that had been so prominent in Victorian culture. Remnants of the Victorian connection between jealousy and femininity survived, to be sure, but popularizers made it clear that boys as well as girls could be threatened by the monster. Moving in the opposite direction, the campaign against anger deprived men of disproportionate access to the emotion, at least in principle. Childrearing authorities no longer distinguished between girlish sweetness and desirable boyish pugnacity, and the standards at work quite explicitly urged control on both genders. Fear, finally, became a problem for people in general, not a sign of feminine weakness and an occasion for masculine challenge. Men and women did not necessarily respond to the new culture in the same ways, but there is no question that, in all areas, Victorian assumptions about distinctive characteristics and distinctive functions declined rapidly. Negative emotions were now too devastating to form part of either masculine or feminine identity.69

One of the symptoms of the decline of gender emphasis was the uniformity of concern about young children. The new wisdom saw dangerous potential in the nature of infants; Victorian innocence was a thing of the past. Unattended, children were quite likely to develop bad emotional character as they were victimized by fear, jealousy, or anger. Popular articles stressed, however, that while emotional problems were to some degree inherent, they could be contained and shaped. The
underlying consistency in twentieth-century approaches to the negative emotions lay in this insistent focus on early childhood, in two respects. First, proper socialization laid the groundwork for adult ability to avoid or largely control the emotions that had been so menacing in infancy. There was real, if nervous, faith in the results of parental watchfulness, and real dependence on these same results to produce anger-, jealousy-, and fear-free adult capacities at work and in the home. Second, the dominance of childhood experience allowed adult deviance to be condemned and dismissed as immaturity. Significant expression of one of the negative emotions—as opposed to mere ventilation—now became the symptom of individual fault, demanding no particular response except (should the onlooker be so inclined) a patronizing tolerance. Twentieth-century popularizers took the task of emotional socialization extremely seriously: "Anger and fear are behind most behavior problems. Help your child to the security and self-reliance which insure self-control," read a Parents' Magazine heading of 1932, expressing the urgency of the whole childrearing issue precisely because of its adult implications.70

The emotional gap between childhood and adulthood widened in this process. Whereas the Victorians tended to see a continuum between relatively early childhood and subsequent experience, with character-building learning occurring at all major points, the new wisdom stressed the importance of granting children support that mature adults should not require. Thus children could vent, require compensations, command diversions, but adults, as products of this careful childhood, should need less care. They might maintain earlier habits, arranging distractions for themselves, but they should have passed the point of expecting peers to rally around to help out.

The somber new emotional demands of adulthood were masked by recurrent references to greater openness and tolerance in childrearing. Manifestations of negative emotion by children were to be greeted with great caution; punishment and even overt disapproval were to be avoided, and popularizers made considerable show of their distaste for "traditional" harsh reactions. In all three cases, however, supportive reactions were designed to dampen fervor, and they were accompanied by clear, if implicit, messages designed to teach the young to be embarrassed by their childish displays. In adulthood, constraint was more obvious still, for knowledge of what constituted immaturity served as a
vivid reminder of which emotions had to be avoided or concealed. Verbal venting might be permitted to a degree, amid congratulations about triumphing over Victorian "repression"; but the margins of expression narrowed as a systematic rational suppression Victorians had never claimed moved to center stage and negative emotions lost any motivational role. The fact that the new standards for negative emotions arose concurrently with liberalization in other areas, such as sexual behavior, posture, and clothing, indicates at best a superficial relationship between the two phenomena. Though some scholarly observers have claimed a coherent pattern of "informalization," the claim is off the mark. Casual clothing, more open sexuality, or a lounging gait were signs of a more flexible personal identity and defiance of rigid standards; the trajectory of these developments was quite different from that of the new norms of emotional maturity, though the new informalities might make the new emotional standards more tolerable.

As the standards applied to negative emotions coalesced, so did appropriate strategies. To prevent inevitable surges of jealousy, fear, or anger, Americans were told to stay away from provocative situations; avoidance was the first rule of wisdom, prepared by parental manipulation and ideally maintained in independent adulthood. Distraction was a second weapon, though more clearly for fear and jealousy than for anger; material inducements might modify fear or dilute resentment of a sibling. Finally, a third recourse was for a child to announce an emotion, properly labeled, in expectation of parental reassurance or its equivalent—though whether this strategy was sustainable beyond childhood was open to question. The new emotional culture waffled on the issue of whether the desired strategies would produce a mature personality immune to jealousy or significant anger or simply a personality capable of controlling and concealing these emotions.

Management of the negative emotions most obviously focused on sustaining personal relationships, whether in the family or on the job. Along with inner unpleasantness (whether experienced or taught), potential damage to the ability to get along with others justified the "negative" label in the first place. But the negative emotions were also attacked because of their potential intensity, their capacity to escape control. Twentieth-century popularizers dealing with jealousy, fear, or anger advised against any expression, save the carefully verbal, lest it run wild. Here lay a crucial departure from the Victorian confidence that
dangerous emotions might be successfully used. In the new view, emotions became all-or-nothing propositions, a set of impulses that could run a person into the ground. This is why childhood, in the twentieth-century view, became such an emotional mine field, filled with traps for the unwary or untutored. Emotions like jealousy were condemned not simply because they were negative but also because they were strong. Words like “devastating” were routinely applied. For all three negative emotions the image of festering, or explosive potential, permeated the popularized literature, particularly on childrearing. Emotion here became a powder keg, whose charge increased with each mismanagement. Frequent menacing imagery appeared in discussions of all three negative emotions, which were replete with references to juvenile delinquency, Nazism, and a variety of social ills—all the more frightening in that the emotions involved were now seen as to some degree inevitable, at least early in life. Beyond the repercussions of specific judgments on individual emotions or even the new management strategies, the redefinition of emotion to emphasize the inherence and threat of vigor raises some of the most important questions about the meaning and impact of the post-Victorian style.

Soon after the new emotional culture began to take shape, psychiatric redefinitions of insanity began to include a “borderline” category that, though always vague, embraced a number of instances of “emotional immaturity,” including chronic anger, impulsiveness, and fearful anxiety. Building on efforts since the 1880s to devise a category that would include excessive manifestation of normal responses without extreme behavioral symptoms—to provide a label for diffuse personality disorders, in sum—the borderline concept provoked dispute from its introduction in the late 1930s. Its diagnostic use increased steadily, however, particularly by the 1970s, and it was formally included in the standard psychiatry manual in 1980. Borderline definitions offer important tools in diagnosing mental illness, but they also suggest the importance of new and increasingly defined standards of emotional normalcy, making what nineteenth-century observers would have termed “character disorders” into outright maladies. This development, to be sure, was distant from the more mundane popularizations of new standards of adulthood, but it potentially reinforced some of the same points.

As the mainstream middle-class emotional culture emerged progressively from the 1920s onward, its contrast with Victorian norms gained
a growing range of expressions. While a few messages remained constant—don't get angry at the kids or scare them deliberately as part of discipline—most of the lessons and accompanying strategies were new, as childhood became more emotionally vulnerable, adulthood ideally more rational. Victorians had worried about fear, jealousy, and anger, but they thought they could put these emotions to use. Twentieth-century popularizers worried massively about the same emotions, and they urged Americans to avoid or conceal them.