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Growing hostility to the emotions labeled as negative was an important development, involving rejection of several basic emotional reactions that Victorians had regarded as functional and motivational if properly handled. To be sure, twentieth-century emotional culture did not create the newly negative verdict from thin air. Victorians and their predecessors had already warned about aspects of anger and jealousy and even about their potential for racing out of control, and they had raised new cautions about fear as well. To some extent, then, twentieth-century developments involved highlighting and extending these precedents in light of new contexts. For example, while the campaign against jealousy was new, given greater Victorian confidence in positive affection between siblings or lovers, it followed in part from increased social interaction between men and women, which raised the possibility of sexual jealousy considerably. The change was significant, but it was not entirely startling.

Through the heightened attention to negative emotions, Americans became increasingly conscious of the gap between pleasant and unpleasant emotional experience. By the later twentieth century several studies revealed the great capacity of Americans (as compared to other cultures) for distinguishing between unpleasant and pleasant emotions and, of course, markedly preferring the latter. While other cultures, such as the Chinese, manifested a sense that certain emotions were difficult or even
unpleasant, they might also believe that these emotions served important functions, as a result maintaining a less simple pleasure/pain dichotomy in their emotionology. Comparative studies also revealed how unusually eager Americans were to deny experience of negative emotions or to conceal this experience. Thus, for example, by the 1990s Americans were far more likely to disapprove of jealousy than were the Chinese, but they differed even more in their professed eagerness to hide the emotion. The same held true for anger, in comparison with Chinese, West Indians, and Greeks. Pride in self-control also applied particularly to the negative emotions. A major opinion survey in the early 1970s listed ability to keep one’s temper as one of the five most commonly desired character strengths: “When I get into an argument with someone, I know how to calm things down quickly.” Americans, in sum, clearly picked up the cultural signals about negative emotions and liked to believe they lived up to the standards, at least when they talked about values to pollsters and similar academic intruders. These qualities replaced Victorian-style claims to courage or moral passion, granting of course that comparable questionnaires did not exist in the nineteenth century. Aversion to unpleasant, presumably antisocial emotions formed a major part of the transition from Victorian to twentieth-century culture as the multifaceted preachments, reaching the middle class from home and workplace alike, struck an increasingly responsive chord.

The growth of systematic hostility to the negative emotions was not the only shift in emotional norms, however. Also taking shape from the 1920s onward was a substantial redefinition of several emotions that Victorian culture had not warned against at all. Guilt, viewed as unpleasant but essential in the nineteenth century, now took on dangerous overtones, verging on inclusion in the negative-emotions category. Grief, which no one could argue was explicitly antisocial, also earned new warnings and constraints. Finally, love, while still very positively valued, was also redefined as Americans learned that intensity even in a good emotion could be risky. Explicit attacks on Victorian love ideals emerged in several quarters, and a more restrained vocabulary was urged in a variety of personal encounters.

These developments, as much as the attack on the negative emotions, changed the dominant emotionology, redefining which emotions could be publicly expressed or urged and reducing the level of intensity that could be regarded as healthy or normal. These changes were linked to
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the more straightforward attacks on fear or anger by a common aversion to undue intensity and potential loss of control or vulnerability to frustration. Love, unlike anger, was still good, but like concentrated anger, too much love might lead to distortions, generating maladjustment and bad decisions. The most impressive feature of the new, underlying attempt to replace intensity with a blander emotional regime involved the spreading impulse to keep not only unpleasant experiences but even agreeable emotions under careful wraps. Playing it cool meant not being carried away in any direction, even one that in moderate proportions could be approved.

Guilt

The reassessment of guilt followed logically from the growing emphasis on distinguishing between emotions as acceptable because pleasant and unacceptable because painful. Attacks on guilt had been part of the growing warnings in the childrearing literature about anger, jealousy, and fear. One of the new taboos in dealing with childish manifestations of these emotions involved making things worse by adding guilt. For example, it was thought that the angry child would become more angry (whether overtly or not) if guilt were applied. Guilt became a source of frustration that might in turn exacerbate durable emotional malfunction. Up-to-date advisers were quite aware of their innovations in this area; guilt became part of a repressive Victorian past that had to be exorcised.\(^2\)

In addition to reflecting concern about the impact of unpleasant emotions, the growing warnings about guilt fit amid the shifts in emotional culture in other ways as well. Guilt’s potential power was recognized and addressed in essentially the same fashion as anger or jealousy: it should be ventilated so that it would not take hold. Children were increasingly trained to recognize guilty feelings and express them in hopes of adult sympathy. “I am feeling guilty” became a plea for reassurance that in turn should quickly replace any intense inner experience.

Then, too, the lack of vivid emotional replacements for guilt confirmed the twentieth-century tendency to seek nonemotional substitutes for profound emotion. Guilt in this sense was attacked not only because it was unpleasant but also because it could run too deep. Whereas the increasing distaste for undue shame in the early nineteenth century
involved an immediate if implicit quest for a substitute form of emotional enforcement, the attack on guilt was not matched by any clear replacement. In terms of recommended norms, the danger of severe emotional sanctions tended to preclude any systematic effort to develop alternatives for guilt. Revealingly, in the later twentieth century, characteristic punishments for children emphasized temporary deprivation of material comforts and leisure activities, not emotional sanction beyond a certain embarrassment in front of one's peers. Whereas Victorians had adopted a clear, emotionally symbolic punishment to replace prior shaming—the idea of going to one's room, being separated from normal family affection, and thus developing guilt to the point of being able to apologize on the strength of the emotion—twentieth-century parents moved increasingly to the more emotionally neutral practice of "grounding"—interrupting a child's normal enjoyment of toys, television, or excursions with friends. Grounding was punishment, and it carried emotional overtones of mutual annoyance, but its thrust was not primarily emotional. Thus it fit precisely the notion that explicitly emotional sanctions had become too risky.

Ruth Benedict correctly noted a move away from traditional shame and guilt in a 1946 essay: "Shame is an increasingly heavy burden . . . and guilt is less extremely felt than in earlier generations. In the United States this is interpreted as a relaxation of morals, because we do not expect shame to do the heavy work of morality. We do not harness the acute personal chagrin which accompanies shame to our fundamental system of morality."³

This judgment can be readily confirmed and partially explained by an examination of characteristic childrearing literature and related child psychology from at least the early 1930s onward. Writing for the Child Study Association of America in 1932, for example, indomitable popularizers Dorothy Canfield Fisher and Sidonie Gruenberg wrote that it was "undesirable for a child to develop a deep sense of guilt and of failure" (the equation is of course revealing in itself). The authors admitted that children should learn to be concerned about wrong behavior, but their attempt to distinguish between such learning and the emotion of guilt was rather inchoate. A popular manual in 1934 clarified, though only in passing, that guilt had become undesirable: "Practice in controlling adverse emotions is often necessary." Authors Carl and Mildred Renz urged parents to control their own emotions in the interest of
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avoiding guilt in their children. In dealing with childish sexual interest or toilet training, for example, a child should be “protected from an impression that there is anything shameful or disgusting about his misbehavior.”

Treatment of this sort made it clear, in fact, that guilt was being linked to other negative emotions in several senses. First, it was not constructive, being likely to cause either harmful distress or outright misbehavior in a child. Dr. Spock, for example, while not discoursing on guilt directly, warned against harsh discipline in such areas as toilet training, where punishment could damage a personality by making it durably hostile or inducing such generalized guilt that the child would suffer from pervasive “worrismomeness.” Guilt feelings could be blamed for aggressive and even criminal behavior, or it could undermine confidence in much the same way that fear could do. The role of guilt in anxiety was frequently noted as part of the reason why the emotion could not be viewed as positive, and the “repressed energies” resulting from guilt could induce all sorts of mischief.

Second, like the more obviously negative emotions guilt had the capacity to fester, building up in children to the extent that adult functioning would be hampered. Thus a child made to feel guilty will suffer “a harmful effect upon his mental health as long as he lives.” Guilt about sexuality received particular attention, with the related topic of toilet training being a close second. Sexual guilt laid on a child might “unfit the individual for adult conjugal relations.” Far more than the campaigns against fear or anger, concern about guilt generated a direct attack on childrearing practices of the past, when parents had used the emotion to discipline children and had created damaging inhibitions in the process; as Fischer and Gruenberg noted, “traditions of guilt and sin” needed to be rigorously overthrown.

Third, as with the negative emotions, avoidance of guilt also involved new duties for parents. Parents should help children bypass behaviors and situations that would arouse great guilt. They should keep their own impatience in check by not expecting too much too soon (in toilet training, for instance), and they must avoid humiliating a child. Precisely because many parents had been raised amid guilt, they needed to take careful emotional stock before they dealt with disciplinary issues. “Unless he [the parent] can keep his own emotions under control . . . he will not be able to train his child properly.” Parents must come to terms
with their own repressions lest they pass them on to their offspring. From this initial parental injunction, the notion developed that an individual who induced guilt in another was in many ways the greater offender than the person whose behavior caused the confrontation in the first place. Ironically, instillers of guilt now had much to feel guilty about, for causing emotional distress was more reprehensible than many bad actions.

Finally, and above all, guilt became a negative emotion not only because it was unpleasant (its association with anxiety conveyed this link) but also because its intensity might so easily incapacitate. Popularizers and research psychologists alike talked of “floods” of guilt or of people “laden with their feelings of guilt.” They lamented the way guilt could induce a “merciless kind of self-condemnation” and a host of related irrationalities. Guilt could paralyze thought and so prevent proper self-direction and control. Adults who had been made to feel guilty as children could be infected with feelings that they could not easily recognize and therefore could not govern.8

In the childrearing manuals guilt did not command the systematic attention that fear, anger, or jealousy did. The emotion was somewhat more abstract, and some observers wavered between the new wisdom that guilt was bad and the earlier recognition that it served some undeniable functions. Thus a 1959 text offered the usual condemnation of guilt as a cause of frustration and anxiety but also noted in a separate section, with no attempt to reconcile the contradiction, that the emotion was essential for society in serving as a “silent policeman.” The main reason for such scattered treatments of guilt, however, lay in the fact that commentary on guilt was diffused among more specific commentaries on sexuality, toilet training, and general disciplinary approach. Brief comments on guilt’s harmfulness and deleterious intensity undergirded more specific efforts to teach parents to be patient, to “take it easy” in order to avoid making children feel guilty about perfectly natural functions and interests. Another reason why elaborate comment on the emotion itself was not judged necessary was that guilt, unlike fear or anger, was avoidable. If parents broke through the customs of the past, they could raise children free from this particular emotional distraction. Thus strategies for avoiding guilt were downplayed in favor of urging parents to gain command of their own “repressed neuroses” in the interests of raising emotionally healthier personalities in the next generation.9
Increasingly, the new attitude toward guilt blended with attacks on anger and jealousy as part of the effort to reverse Victorian cultural emphases and produce an emotionology systematically purged of dangerous intensities. But the new approach concerning guilt required more than warning labels and parental strategies. It also demanded some attention to alternatives. For despite their eagerness to escape Victorian repressiveness and blind insistence on childish obedience, the new breed of popularizers clearly recognized the need for self-restraint. Therefore, if they advised that guilt was no longer an appropriate enforcer, then they obviously needed to indicate what would take its place. The classic negative emotions did not require this next step: anger, jealousy, or fear could be branded as bad, strategies developed for avoidance or control, and that was that. Guilt, in this sense, was more complex, which was one reason why many popularizers groped for some distinction between guilt and a healthy (presumably less emotion-laden) conscience.

Three alternatives to the Victorian emphasis on guilt developed, two of which were explicitly discussed in childrearing manuals. First, parents were urged to help children avoid guilt, not only by restraining their own emotions in discipline but also by monitoring behavior so that potentially guilt-inducing situations became unlikely. Here, behavioral attention could make emotionally based self-criticism less necessary in the early years of childhood.

Second, parents should help children understand appropriate behaviors rationally. The reason for patience in toilet training, for example, was that at a certain point, after age two or three, children could be talked to about proper cleanliness. They might even, as Dr. Spock suggested, want to control their bodily processes on their own. Discipline of all sorts should make children think. Emotion should be avoided precisely because it beclouded reason. Calm parents could talk to their children, who would, equally calmly, come to agree on goals—if parents did not press the goals prematurely. Ideally, then, a combination of behavior strategy designed to avoid distressing situations and rational control would generate the good behavior families and society had a right to expect. Guilt need not enter in, and indeed, in some formulations, no emotions of any sort were necessary to achieve propriety in word and deed.

But the larger campaign to control other negative emotions and some of the language in the comments on guilt itself suggested a third, im-
plicit but probably most important attack on guilt. According to this approach, people would learn through their upbringing that inappropriate emotional expression could be condemned as immature. The warnings to parents to keep the results of their own misguided upbringings under control not only credited the possibility of rational dominance—parents could learn to behave before they distorted their own kids—but also reminded parents that mistakes reflected an essential childishness that should embarrass any mature adult.

As in the Victorian period, explicit emphasis on shame in childrearing remained fairly subdued. Children were not to be taunted or exposed to the scorn of their siblings. Indeed, twentieth-century parents, and even the schools, moved farther from reliance on shame than the Victorians had done, reducing public humiliations in the classroom, for example. With shame still downplayed and guilt now attacked as well, emphasis in childrearing, at least as conceived in the mainstream middle-class culture, shifted to rational explanation and persuasion as the proper reactions to bad behavior, supplemented by an emotionally neutral denial of privileges if necessary. Unpleasant emotions were neither to be scorned nor attacked through guilt but rather ventilated, enabling children to defuse the emotional experience through labeling and talking out. Because it dissociated emotion from action, this tactic minimized the need for formal adult response. Ventilation was the alternative to adult riposte (with its potential for harmful guilt) and to the dreaded festering that might convert a passing negative experience into a personality trait. Reliance on ventilation formed the new first stage in the complex task of disciplining oneself without rousing intense emotional impulses either as motivations for good behavior or as side effects. This strategy was supplemented, of course, by parental tactics designed to constrain opportunities for bad behavior or negative emotional experience. Revealingly, school honor codes, a classic way to express reliance on a regime of guilt, ossified after the mid-twentieth century, with only two American universities (Air Force Academy and Dartmouth College) launching a new honor code program after 1945. Here, too, efforts to help avoid both temptation and potential guilt pangs forced new kinds of adult supervision or manipulation.

The childhood phase did not, however, directly carry through to adulthood. Whereas in Victorian days guilt instilled in childhood was meant to serve as a lifelong guide, in the twentieth century the relation-
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The relationship between the two life stages became more complicated. The same prescriptive literature that urged anxious attention to children's experiences of anger, jealousy, or fear—and avoidance of guilt—cold-shouldered the same negative emotions expressed by adults, blanketing them with the label "immature." Immature emotions expressed by adults, in turn, should be corrected by embarrassment, which involved a different type of ventilation technique. Most obviously, the strategy of allowing people to repeat angry grievances was designed to make them see their own childishness until, sheepishly, they would realize their folly and bring their emotionality under control. Well-bred people would need to experience this technique rarely, for their rational controls would normally operate. But where breeding failed, embarrassment provided the technique that would allow reason to replace emotion, without setting in motion defensive emotional intensities that could weaken control still further. Both guilt and shame were involved in the new reliance on embarrassment, but in typically muted fashion. Embarrassment was less profoundly internalized than guilt in that it required outside stimulus and was not intended to cut too deep. At the same time it was less public and more subtle than shame, involving individual recognition of childishness, not overt derision from the outside. Evisceration of intensity, not passionate judgment either by self or others, was now the goal as twentieth-century American culture sought to combine emotional control with avoidance of excess even in defense of proper standards.  

The effort to replace guilt with embarrassment in regulating negative emotions and other unacceptable behaviors not only worked against intensity but also assumed an audience. New sensitivities to peers and immediate superiors were essential to the successful operation of embarrassment. Revealingly, advice to adults about anger frequently included the otherwise bizarre recommendation that anger might be expressed completely in isolation if necessary—shrieking in the closet—because this outlet would produce no audience response, and hence no embarrassment. Thus concealment also flourished in this atmosphere, since people could avoid the new methods of reproof by hiding their emotional reactions.

The overall effectiveness of the new system of regulation and suppression must await subsequent comment. Its intended superficiality did not preclude impact. At present it is most important to note that the increasing aversion to guilt fit in with the overall shift in emotional
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style, becoming a part of a new emotional regulatory system that not only required a host of novel tactics, beginning with parental treatment of young children, but also deliberately avoided emotional depth. In this system, sensitivity to others’ reactions would allow individuals to correct their courses without intense internal responses—a strategy that would effectively overcome the threat to rational control posed by guilt.

Grief

The transformation of twentieth-century grief has yet to be explicitly studied. Commentary on twentieth-century reactions to death from historians like Philippe Ariès and psychologists like Elisabeth Kubler-Ross indicates an increasing distaste for death; a desire to isolate it in alienating hospital environments; and (though more rapidly in Europe than the United States) an increasing preference for cremation as a replacement for traditional memorials and rituals. Lack of adequate outlets for mourning resulting from the decline of formal periods and markings of grief has also been noted. But the actual historical process by which a rich Victorian grief culture yielded to the colder reactions of the twentieth century has not been examined.

Unlike guilt, grief did not exactly become a negative emotion. However, the experience of grief was regarded as unpleasant, lacking the saving graces that Victorian culture had provided for it. Even more important, its potentially consuming qualities inevitably drew growing disapproval. Precisely the feature of grief that had seemed most suitable to nineteenth-century observers—its capacity to take a person out of normal reality in reaction to loss—now became menacing. Thus, while grief was not blackened quite as thoroughly as were the negative emotions, it began to encounter a combination of concern and neglect that marked a pronounced shift from nineteenth-century standards.

The initial reconsideration of the Victorian valuation of grief began in the 1890s, mainly through the medium of opinion articles in middle-class magazines. Although preliminary to a full emotionological change, this reconsideration entered into the process of reshaping basic standards as magazines like Outlook, the North American Review, and others offered an array of articles on death and its emotional overtones from the 1890s through World War I.

Two factors, at least, accounted for the early start on a revisionist
approach. First, death rates began to drop rapidly in the United States from the 1880s to the 1920s, particularly among children. It was almost inevitable that such a dramatic development would have cultural repercussions. Second, and perhaps even more important to the editors about death, discussions of Victorian ideas about mortality followed from the “warfare between science and theology” generated by the debates over evolution. Death proved to be one of the areas where enlightened modern opinion found it easy to attack old religious beliefs, Victorian among others, and while this focus was not directly emotional, it had emotional implications that were gradually taken up. For these reasons the chronology of the attack on grief was somewhat different from that of the other attacks on Victorian emotionology. However, as the early results fed into a more explicit review of grief from the 1920s onward, when editorial debate declined but explicit socialization advice increased, the concordance between attacks on Victorian grief and re-considerations of jealousy, fear, and guilt clearly emerged.

One side of the debate in the 1890s and 1900s featured careful restatements of Victorian values. Outlook, as a Christian periodical, particularly defended the importance of grief. Editors urged readers to experience the vitality as well as the inevitability of sorrow “by bearing its full impact with patience, sweetness and faith.” In 1906 Lyman Abbott reminded readers that suffering educates and ennobles and ex-tolled the strengthening effects of grief: “We are perfected in character in the school of suffering.” “Who would live in a world of sorrow and never know sorrow? Blessed are they that mourn, because in their sorrow they can, if they will, strengthen those that sorrow, sharing their grief and bearing their burden for them.” A 1902 article echoed the Victorian belief in the union of loved ones in heaven as a hope that could undergird grief: “It is in the pain of separation that the deepest joy of reunion is born; it is in the anguish of loss that the bliss of final recovery is prepared.” The link between love and grief remained: “To be conscious that others grieve and not to grieve with them would be not to love.” But this Victorian continuity now had a defensive cast to it, for other arguments were more widely disseminated.

One subtle source of attack on Victorian grief really involved a Panglossian extension of Victorianism itself: If death involved quick union with God and only brief separation from loved ones on earth, why bother to grieve at all, and why dread death? “Why should it not
be to all of us the Great Adventure? Why should we not look forward to it with anticipation, not with apprehension?” In this upbeat Christian rendering, joy, not grief, should predominate, and the bittersweet ambivalence of Victorian culture was muscled aside in favor of assertions of perpetual happiness. In 1907 Jane Belfield wrote on death for Lippincott’s Magazine, stressing the folly of great pain. After all, not only death but also reunion with family is certain, so death need not involve intense feelings at all but rather “emotions and aspirations hushed.” Another tack, slightly different from Christian optimism, increasingly emphasized the debilities of old age, such that death could and should be calmly greeted if, as was increasingly the case, it had the courtesy to wait until people had passed through normal adulthood. Outlook also took up this theme, stressing death as a pleasant release from decrepitude: “The stains of travel were gone, the signs of age had vanished; once more young, but with a wisdom beyond youth, she started with buoyant step and with a rising hope in her heart; for through the soft mist beautiful forms seemed to be moving, and faint and far she heard voices that seemed to come out of her childhood, fresh with the freshness of the morning, and her spirit grew faint for joy at the sound of them.” Clearly, in this picture, neither fear for one’s own death nor grief at the passing of an older relative made much sense.16

Popularized science attacked grief and fear of death from another interesting angle. A steady, surprising series of articles countered the traditional belief that death involved pain. Many modern spirits argued that this belief was one of the sources of Christianity’s hold on the masses, who used religion to counter anticipated suffering, but that it was empirically incorrect. This was not, of course, a direct attack on Victorian emotional culture, which had also downplayed the physical side of death in favor of a vaguely religious spirituality, but it had implications concerning grief. Science, so the modernists repeatedly argued, suggested that most deaths were actually rather pleasant. A New Englander and Yale Review article launched a seemingly bizarre debate in 1891, attacking the “popular belief” that “the moment of death is to be anticipated as one of bodily pain and mental discomfort.” Granting that there is a natural dread of death in anticipation, the article contended that most deaths involved a “pleasurable sensation.” Death in old age, most notably, resembled going to sleep; it was “a slumberous condition, not unlike that at the end of a toilsome day.” Even sudden
death or convulsions, however, did not indicate pain. People under anesthesia, after all, reported "delightful sensations" and "beatific visions." Whatever pain might be involved was largely unfelt, according to the best medical evidence.  

This line of argument continued to receive considerable attention for over two decades. In 1901 a *North American Review* piece noted that morality would improve if death were no longer used as a threat, for its pain is in fact illusory. The *Fortnightly Review* contended more generally that with medical improvements, plus the new understanding that death need not be feared as painful, "death is disappearing from our thoughts." "Perhaps the most distinctive note of the modern spirit is the practical disappearance of the thought of death as an influence directly bearing upon practical life." Because death was losing its terrors—being now "regarded rather as a welcome friend than a grisly visitant"—and because beliefs in personal immortality were fading, the death of another "frequently causes more relief than grief to those who remain." The article claimed that a host of new developments, including the tensions involved in medically prolonged life and the growing popularity of cremation, evidenced major changes in reactions toward death, particularly a decline in fear and sorrow. In 1909 *Current Literature* returned to the medical view, which reduced death's terrors and emphasized gradual, rather peaceful decay. "We do not die suddenly; our existence perishes gradually with the weakening of the organs." So, by implication, why a great fuss when the final stage occurred? By 1914 *Living Age* could refer in passing to virtual unanimity in the claim that "the 'death agony' is an unscientific conception," which in turn meant that the whole atmosphere of death needed review. *Current Literature* attacked the idea that death or loss of consciousness should provoke fear; people should get used to the "hard facts of science" and stop emoting so much about what was in fact not only inevitable but also rather tranquil. Churches needed some other argument (if they could find one) to attract reasonable people back to attendance; death and grief were outdated religious motivations.  

These arguments about science reflected a desire to expose death to the cold light of reason and also to pick up on medical advances, including the growing emphasis on organic deterioration as the leading killer rather than epidemic or disease. The scientific approach included a number of idiosyncratic byways. Some commentators explained in-
creases in suicide as evidence that attitudes toward death were losing emotional charge. Others argued that euthanasia followed logically from the new understanding of death's painlessness. Popularizations of Elie Metchnikoff's arguments that death-causing microphages could be defeated, thus allowing massive prolongation of life, constituted another means of arguing against conventional attitudes toward death. The main point here is the steady current of attention given to the necessity of challenging traditional responses in the name of science and progress. As death became a scientific topic and older attitudes were presumably exposed as fallacious, the emotional overtones of death, including not only fear but also anger, lost justification, and thus the need for pronounced grief was obviated.

Other commentary on emotions associated with death flowed from a series of articles on foreign death practices, which could be used to highlight American gains in objectivity. Another popular theme involved critiques of expensive funeral practices and the increase of professional morticians. A North American Review article of 1907 distinguished between appropriate recognition of the gravity of death and the exploitative ceremonies that played on grief. "Nobody goes to see a man born, but the entire community turns out to see him buried." Funerals had become perverse. "We could never understand why old women should, as they unquestionably do, love to attend funerals, or how anybody could be induced, except as a matter of duty, to make a business or profession of the handling of corpses." The only undertaker worth his salt was the progressive practitioner interested in helping a family save money and curtail needless agonizing, though the author granted that traditional grief should not be assailed too frontally. A Harper's Weekly piece echoed these sentiments, with emphasis on minimization and low cost: a cheap funeral should be entirely adequate "to satisfy any one except those who want really unnecessary display." The Survey, for its part, condemned grasping undertakers. "Nothing less than ghoulish are some of the stories of the pressure put upon grief-distracted people to honor their dead at excessive expense." Emphasis, of course, rested on economic good sense, but a corollary implication was that sensible people would not let themselves be so overcome by emotion as to fall prey to the greedy.19

Finally, a trickle of articles played up a somewhat different theme of modern life, noting the rise of death-defying behavior in auto racing and
flying. Thrill seeking here transcended caution, and death receded to the background. And just as the new moderns defied the fear of death, so should those confronted with the sudden death of an acquaintance handle the situation coolly. “The best psychology of life is equally the best psychology of death”: be glad to live and gladly die. Even religious authors had to agree that nineteenth-century death attitudes had been rather “vulgar and morbid,” resulting in funeral practices that were often “in bad taste”; they also castigated the “old idea” of grief as heart-break.20

While death itself received more explicit attention than emotional reactions to it, up-to-date authors did comment on grief as well. As the Independent noted in 1908, “Probably nothing is sadder in life than the thought of all the hours that are spent in grieving over what is past and irretrievable.” Time wasted was only part of the problem; loss of control was the other: “It is only man [of all the species] that allows his sorrow so to overcome him that he spends hours calling up the pictures of past happiness which cannot be brought back.” People know this, but their grief overwhelms their reason, with the result that they nurse sorrow rather than looking for happy distraction. Here was a direct attack on Victorian emotionology: grief has no function, its effort to maintain contact with the departed being foolish at best, unhealthy at worst. Modern “psycho-therapeutics” must be invoked to help people escape conventional grief, and medical attention was necessary to combat any physical causes of “melancholic feelings.” A bit of grief might be tolerable, but weeks of tears suggested “something morbid, either mental or physical.” Women of course were the worst offenders: “When a woman cannot rouse herself . . . from her grief there is need of the care of the physician.” The Independent editorial acknowledged that grief used to seem consoling, when a young spouse, for example, mourned the death of a partner, but went on to say that a great deal of unscientific nonsense used to be written about pining away from grief when often the cause was “the transmission of the bacillus tuberculosis.” “This may seem a very crude and heartless way to look at such a subject, but it is eminently practical and above all has the merit of being satisfactorily therapeutic. Nothing is more calculated to arouse people from the poignancy of their grief than the realization of a necessity to care for their health.” Thus, although grief might always be with us to a degree, Victorian wallowing had become ridiculous. Modern medicine suggested that mental and
physical healing often make grief entirely unnecessary. Even religion might be legitimately used, if all else fails, to pull people out of their misery. Whatever the remedy, grief "in excess" must be attacked. As the editorial concluded, in an orgy of scientifism, grief is a "contradiction in the universe, an attempt on the part of a drop in the sea to prevent the tidal progress of the ocean of life of which it is so small a part, yet every atom of which is meant to serve a wise purpose in all its events." 21

The new view of death and grief was both confirmed and enhanced by recommended reactions to the massive slaughter of World War I. This event, which might have prompted a return to older notions of the comfort and bonding qualities of grief (and doubtless it did, in individual cases), in fact served in most public commentary as yet another sign of grief's misplaced, even offensive qualities. The dominant theme emphasized the need to put grief aside—as a British article put it, "to efface as far as possible the signs of woe." While this approach called upon a Victorian sense of mastering fear, it added the explicit component of downplaying grief in the interests of carrying on, even providing cheerful encouragement. The idea of death as routine and unemotional gained ground in this approach: "we are beginning to hold [death] in contempt." Current Opinion summed up the dominant thought in an essay on "the abolition of death," specifically noting the new revulsion in both England and America against Victorian habits, including elaborate, mournful funerals. The Literary Digest built on this theme in 1917: "Death is so familiar a companion in war-time that a revision of our modes of dealing with its immediate presence is pertinent to the relief of human anguish." The old Christian bugaboo, fear of death, must be put aside, as even Christian outlets admitted. Funerals should be joyful so that they do not distract from the ongoing purposes of life. People who still wanted "an old-fashioned chamber of horrors show"—the tearful funeral—must be brought into line. Referring to some neighbors who were resistant to the new approach to grief, the Literary Digest article explained, "Some of them protested at first . . . but before it was over they all took off their hats . . . and let civilization have the right of way." Another journal wanted to use the war to effect permanent improvement in the area of emotion, "evolving greater wisdom and good sense in our mourning usages." Grief should, in this revealing argument, become embarrassing: "To strive to be as natural as possible at such a time is surely the healthy attitude." Self-control, not excessive sorrow, should
predominate, and formal mourning practices, which merely encourage grief, must yield accordingly. "Let us have more sweetness—and light—in our commemorating of our dear ones." As another author put it, "When you squeeze the pusillanimous eloquence and sentimentality out of the most elegant funeral discourse, I doubt if what remains is a [fitting] tribute to the essential qualities of a brave man's character."22

After the war's end, American middle-class periodicals continued to discuss grief and death for a few years. The theme of the "unexpected pleasantness of death according to modern science" briefly recurred. Fallen mountain climbers, for example, were cited as reporting that agony had not been involved. One essayist ventured, without however offering personal testimony, that "even in cases of death from being torn to pieces by wild beasts, physical pain is surprisingly [sic] absent." Doctors continued to attest that fear and pain disappeared when death itself approached. A few religious writers returned, as in an Atlantic essay of 1922, to a defense of traditional grief and bereavement, arguing that modernist dissenters had simply not gone through the experiences necessary to be credentialed. Grief, in this view, must not be tampered with, for it was essential to ultimate recovery. But the Atlantic also published a more characteristic article in 1923 that reflected the fruits of what was by now a long transition period from the heyday of Victorianism. Without going into scientific detail, without touting medical evidence or the possibility of psychic contacts with the afterlife (a theme that had surfaced in the discussions around 1900), Sarah Cleghorn discussed her own evolution with regard to grief. Describing her grief experiences in childhood, Cleghorn made it clear that the emotion was something she had largely outgrown in adulthood as death became more familiar, its prospect even pleasurable. Her comment included an attack on her upbringing, which was "Victorian in some of the worst sense of that word." She concluded that the emphasis must be on the positive, including personal efforts to gain ascendancy over "fruitless recollection." Vigor and the full feeling of life depended on this ability to deal with death unencumbered by grief.23

With this brief postwar flurry, the long debate over how to end Victorian approaches to grief and death came to a close. Middle-class magazines turned to other topics as the issue of death and its emotional environment faded from view. Transitional themes like the attack on death as painful largely shut down. Beleaguered defenses of Victorianism
also ceased in the mainstream magazines. Even the interest in criticizing
gouging funeral directors seemed to disappear. Yet the attack on Victo-
rian concepts of grief had three ongoing results that incorporated the
new hostility to the emotion more fully in middle-class emotionology.
First, while discussions of death and grief became far less common, the
occasional comment reminded the middle-class audience of the accepted
emotional rules; second, the agreement reached about seeking to reduce
grief translated into dominant therapeutic emphases; and third, advice to
parents sought to develop appropriate socialization strategies to remove
intense grief from childhood.

The first result was the growing silence itself. Into the later 1950s
discussions of death and emotional reactions to it seemed out of bounds,
either not worth pen and ink or too risky to evoke. After this period, by
the 1960s, observers of American (and European) death culture after
this began to talk of death as a modern taboo.24 They exaggerated
slightly, as we will see, but the contrast between the 1890s–World War
I decades, when active discussion was almost an essayist’s staple, and
the subsequent cessation of comment was genuinely striking. Either
editors assumed that their audience had come to terms with appropriate
attitudes or judged that elaborately evoking the topic was risky precisely
because the new, upbeat standards were too shakily established to war-
rant exposure. Whatever the reasons for it, grief now generated wide-
spread avoidance—and in this respect, though to an unusual extent, it
joined the other emotional intensities.

An occasional article renewed the death-as-painless theme along lines
of scientific refutation of misleading myths. “Medical men assure us that
the struggle with which life quits the body is not . . . painful to the dying,
however distressing is may be to the watcher.” The corollary, of course,
was that grief was not, as it had once been held to be, a reverberation of
sympathy with the suffering of an expiring person. A 1927 article added
psychic evidence, noting that communications from beyond the grave
never stressed pain. A 1950s effort in this genre stressed science more
strictly, ending with the plea: “Look death in the face. His countenance
isn’t so terrifying as we are led to believe.” Potshots at the ritualistic
gobbledygook of traditional funerals still received comment, emphasizing
among other things the needless emotional pain that these events
cause the “already anguished family.” “Why is it that we are able to
cast off conventions pertaining to every event in modern existence except
the burial of the dead?" The author proposed simpler, more rational as well as less expensive ceremonies designed to ease emotion rather than play on it. Even Christian Century urged more "natural and happy" funeral occasions. The same journal did publish a few laments about the inadequacies of modern emotional styles, urging the importance of grief in leading to appropriate spirituality. Modernism, in this rendering, could be dangerously dry, while modern life offered too little preparation for death. "There is safety in grief's greatness." Even these comments, however, did not replicate the Victorian fullness of grief, for they recognized that they were going against the predominant culture, and they also sought a quick end to grief through religion. They were distinctive in insisting that grief must occur and in their emphasis on spiritual solace, but the Christian popularizers seemed to agree that in itself grief was simply painful, to be escaped as quickly as possible. Whether modernist or more traditional, however, articles on this subject were few and far between. Apparently the topic was generally considered best avoided.

Whether this relative silence reflected a desire to make death taboo, however, is debatable. It may instead have followed from a sense among the popularizing pundits that the relevant issues were closed, that by now everyone knew the new rules. The largest number of articles during the late 1920s and the 1930s—and they too were infrequent—suggested an assurance that modern Americans were rapidly moving toward appropriate enlightenment about death and grief. Beatrice Blankenship, writing of many family deaths, noted how rarely death intruded on the routines of modern life. She criticized ritual remnants such as irrational fear of death or disturbing funerals. Death, even a child's death, while it might elicit some grief, should be treated rationally and calmly, even as modern people were losing the false certainty of an afterlife. More bombastically, Mabel Ulrich wrote in 1934 of the decline of religious beliefs and their replacement by scientific curiosity and self-control. Only a few backsliders remained: "Is it too far-fetched a hope that to these when they have forsaken their wavering misty image of heaven there may come a consciousness.... of the amazing relevance of life?" "Modern knowledge... offers to the intelligent person to-day a conception of living which is a positive answer to old death fears." The American Mercury proudly boasted that in contrast to emotion-sodden Europe, "America Conquers Death." "Death, which dominates the
European's thought, has been put in its proper place on this side of the water." This article praises modern Americans for triumphing over their cultural past, when death once hovered much closer to home. In 1940 Scholastic acknowledged real grief but urged the possibility of allowing life to go on equably even after a death in the immediate family. Distorting grief, the author argued, usually resulted from some "unpleasant and mystifying experience" in connection with death during one's childhood—another indication that appropriately low levels of grief, like other issues in emotion management, depended on up-to-date child training.27

Even World War II produced little general reconsideration of death and grief. A few articles during and after the war suggested that conquered grief could be a goad to constructive action—a new twist that did however evoke a more Victorian treatment of emotion. More commonly, magazine articles stressed that death could be faced bravely: "So we would have to carry on. He would want us to. There was still work to be done in a needy world." Bitterness and moping ran counter to constructive behavior. To be sure, grief must be faced when a loved one dies in war, and some Christian commentators used the occasion to remind their readers about spiritual solace and even the comfort of formal mourning. In general, however, World War II produced less comment on appropriate emotional reaction than had World War I—another sign that death was being avoided more fully and also that cultural rules about constraining grief had circulated more widely. War stories and films, for their part, tried to mute the subject by carefully arranging to have only peripheral figures die; protagonists might see death around them, but they survived to the happy ending. Again, grief need not apply. A surprisingly sparse set of popular articles directed at war widows or other bereaved women confirmed the stiff-upper-lip tone: emotion should not be indulged, and women should plunge into war work or volunteerism to keep their minds off their troubles. "Don't wear mourning too long. It expresses no real respect for the dead, and it is depressing to the person who wears it and to friends and family who see it."28

The second result of the reconsideration of Victorian grief involved the dominant therapeutic approach. By the 1920s, partly as a result of Freudian influence but partly, as we can now appreciate, because of shifts in more general middle-class prescriptions, most therapists dealing
with grief moved toward what has been called a "modernist" approach. Freud had valued grief as a means of freeing individuals from ties with the deceased, but he had made it clear that detachment was the ultimate goal and had warned against the stunting that could result if grief were not transcended fairly quickly. Later modernists downplayed grief even further, viewing it as a form of separation anxiety, an inappropriate or dysfunctional attempt to restore proximity. In most instances, of course, grief played itself out as mourners gradually abandoned hope that the lost person would return; but from the therapeutic perspective there was constant danger that a more durable imbalance might form. The therapeutic goal, whether outside help was needed or not, was severance of bonds with the deceased or departed. Therapy or counseling should work toward this process of withdrawal, and those who retained grief symptoms must be regarded as maladjusted. By the 1970s even counseling with older widows encouraged the development of new identities and interests and promoted the cessation of grief and its ties to the past.29 "Grief work" meant work against grief and an implicit attack on Victorian savoring of this emotional state. Appropriate terms were developed for excessive grief—two from the 1960s were "mummification" and "despair." "Chronic grief syndrome" applied to a situation of clinging dependency, most common among women, when a parent or spouse died. The idea that grief followed from love was also attacked; psychologists argued that in cases of spouse death, grief developed particularly strongly when a love-hate tension had existed, grief then picking up on a sense of guilt for the hate rather than a nostalgia for the love. Mental health meant breaking bonds and avoiding dependency. Grief, contradicting both goals, became a target for attack.30

Related to the therapeutic approach was the emotional context developed by other health professionals for dealing with death. Because of the desire to avoid grief and emotional entanglement, doctors and nurses, particularly between 1920 and the 1950s, sought to avoid attention to imminent death. Nursing handbooks provided short, matter-of-fact paragraphs on how to recognize impending death and how to lay out a corpse. Both doctors and nurses emphasized concealment of probable death from patients lest unacceptable emotions develop (and in order to protect medical personnel from emotions of their own). Again, grief must be bypassed.31

The third area in which the new antigrief regime manifested itself
from the 1920s onward lay in a more familiar realm—advice to parents on how to socialize children. Here, the general aversion to Victorian grief was compounded by two factors: the rapid decline in child mortality, which made it progressively easier to dissociate childhood from traditional concern with death; and the rising anxiety about children’s fears. From D. H. Thom in the mid-1920s onward, discussions of children’s fears frequently embraced the subject of death as popularizers tried to help parents deal with irrational worries about such fanciful prospects as being buried alive. The same new breed of experts warned against the common assumption that children developed attention to death only after their initial years, and they also cautioned that conventional Victorian euphemisms, such as the equation between death and sleep, actually might increase childish fear. As Sidonie Gruenberg noted, “‘They go to sleep’ is one example of a convenient but dangerous evasion which could make a child approach bedtime with alarm.”

This new approach to death in the childrearing advice was facilitated by the removal of death from the family context, not only because of rapidly dropping child mortality rates but also because of removal of sick adults to hospitals, grandparents to separate residences, and the dead themselves to funeral homes. Further, the decline in adult mourning that followed from the attack on Victorian ceremony also made it easier to separate children from active comment on death, as did the distancing of cemeteries.

In the new context children’s fears of death provoked complex reactions among the popularizers. On the one hand, general instructions about fear urged frankness, talking things out. On the other hand, adults themselves were being urged to keep death at an emotional distance, which made it difficult to follow the general line where this particular fear was concerned. A clearer conclusion was that traditional Victorian approaches would not work. Children should not be widely exposed to death ceremonies, and they should not be filled with stories of angels and heavenly reunions. Parents’ Magazine cautioned against “conjuring up a heaven of angels and harp playing,” for “inevitably the small girl or boy will discover that mother and father are not certain about the after life. Such a discovery augments the fear of death.” One handbook urged parents to emphasize death’s humorous side, while carefully avoiding ridicule—a clear effort to desensitize. Other authors suggested carefully evasive phrasing so that the child would receive no images that
he could easily apply to himself. Referring to a grandparent’s death as
“all through” might thus be a good idea. “Fear of death arises when the
child imagines not mother or grandmother, or the bird, but himself
being covered up with dirt. That much the child can imagine; that much
is within the child’s observable experience. But if the child gets the idea
that a dead person is ‘all through,’ the identification of himself with the
dead person or animal is more difficult.” 33 Parents apparently obliged,
eager to avoid the necessity of dealing with children’s griefs or fears.
Thus, a 1943 letter to a child described the death of a family member in
these words: “That door which opens and swings only one way, was
thrown open for Dr. Tuttle.” 34 It is doubtful that this imagery would
make children stay away from doors or grieve heavily. The entire argu-
mentation assumed that the Victorians were wrong in thinking that
children would not be severely touched by grief or might be instructed
by it. It also assumed that family unity in grief had somehow become
irrelevant, for reactions to death were now gauged purely in terms of
their (usually harmful) impact on individual psyches. The whole Victo-
rian grief context had disappeared as grief became simply another prob-
lem, though a potentially difficult one, in the emotional raising of
children.

Experts urged parents to tell children that most death resulted from
old age. “If such an explanation is grossly inappropriate,” added Alan
Fromme, “reference may be made to a most unusual illness which none
of us is likely to get.” This approach clearly enabled avoidance. To be
sure, when the subject of death could not be avoided and grief did
emerge, advice givers urged parents to reassure their children—though
this theme received greatest emphasis before 1920. “To childish grief we
should give the same loving sympathy that we should give to real grief
in any other phase of life. It is a mistake to repress tears or sobs which
arise from such a cause; it is far better to let the child ‘cry it out’ unless
the current of his thoughts can be turned in another direction.” But
parents should avoid showing emotion on their own. One of the reasons
for abandoning mourning and its colors was to help children ignore
death to the greatest extent possible. When information had to be con-
veyed, “let us give the facts to the child with as little emotion as possi-
ble.” For older children, factual, scientific information would help sepa-
rate death from powerful emotion—here was a child-socialization
variant on the medical modernization approach in adult contexts. Par-
Parents were advised to tell children about other cultures' ideas about death, and to talk to them about medical data when their understanding permitted, but to keep the whole subject dispassionate. Some authorities also urged not only dry facts but maximum avoidance. Fromme, for example, advising that children be kept away from funerals, wanted to prevent any glimpse of intense adult mourning. Death itself should be acknowledged quickly, lest children suspect dark secrets, but ceremonies as well as emotions might best be removed.35

Grief rules were clearly amalgamating with the new emotional norms applied to fear, anger, and jealousy in childhood. Children were seen as far more vulnerable than had been the case in the nineteenth century. Parents were placed under much greater emotional constraint in dealing with children, a particularly novel development where grief was concerned. Efforts at avoidance ran strong, with ventilation coming in a poor second in the overall attempt to shield children from the power and pain that grief entailed. Great emphasis was placed on chasing away fear and also on appealing to reason. One Parents' Magazine author acknowledged that the power of grief makes it difficult for parents to maintain rational control but went on to say that this was precisely why the emotion's power must be combated, for it is necessary to “maintain some equilibrium to carry on.” Children need not be “bowed down” with grief as are some misguided adults. All fears should be dispelled—and this, rather than grief, drew the greatest attention of childrearing popularizers during World War II. Again, if parents could keep control of themselves and give children cold facts (about the reasons for war, for instance), incapacitatingly intense emotions should be avoidable. “If we try to bear a certain matter-of-factness in our discussion, . . . the child . . . will meet many minor death experiences as just one more interesting phenomenon.”36

Death scenes also began to decline in children’s stories. Killing and, particularly in boys’ stories, discoveries of dead bodies occurred more frequently than before, but without emotional context. Lingering illness, the tragedy of a life plucked too soon—these Victorian staples declined. The emotionlessness developed to replace encounters with fear extended also to death. Killings were mechanical, discovery of corpses titillating but not grief stricken. Jack London’s Buck in The Call of the Wild, to take a fairly representative early-twentieth-century example, is unmoved
when he finds an arrow-ridden body and a dog thrashing about in death agony: "Buck passed around him without stopping." 37

As we have seen, adult grief issues were increasingly minimized, shrouded in silence, or at most addressed through therapeutic approaches directed toward recovery from the emotion as if from a disease. The approach recommended for children—keeping them away from death or, in fiction, from any emotional overtones associated with death—rounded out a consistent picture. After several decades of diverse kinds of attacks on Victorian grief assumptions, middle-class culture resolutely worked around grief. The emotion became unpleasant, potentially overwhelming, lacking in any positive function. Correspondingly, the approach to grief increasingly resembled the approach to the negative emotions.

A final sign of the new grief culture emerged, though somewhat belatedly, in the etiquette books offered up to a still-eager middle-class audience. Emily Post, the leading authority in the interwar period, painted an essentially Victorian picture even in 1934, when she repeated the wording of a long section on funerals that she had initially written in 1922. She urged a variety of mourning symbols and ceremonies, including "hanging the bell" outside a home, and stressed the importance of punctiliousness precisely because emotional reactions to death ran so high. Her main advice was that readers should acknowledge the intensity of grief and respect its varied courses, expressing active sympathy when the afflicted sought company but also respecting their privacy. Grief had no sweetness in this portrayal, but its vigor was viewed as inevitable. Constraint applied only to those dealing with the mourners, who needed to put selfish interests behind them in the interest of providing comfort and calm. "All over-emotional people . . . should be banned absolutely" from grief situations. Emily Post attacked overelaborate funerals—though allowing that they were appropriate for those who found solace in them—but she noted that while formal mourning was in partial decline, it could actually serve as a protection against real sorrow. Etiquette, in sum, lagged behind other areas of emotional culture when it came to reactions to death, in part because recommendations were less frequently reworded, in part because advisers assumed that polite form and continuity with past practices were intertwined. 38

But even in this area change did occur, and it confirmed the earlier
shifts apparent in popular magazines and childrearing literature. By 1952, when Amy Vanderbilt issued her etiquette book, the major signals were quite different, although, etiquette being etiquette, there were still forms to observe. Business matters now received as much attention as ceremonies, for the first job of the bereaved was to check on wills, bank accounts, and medical formalities. Not only funerals but also mourning had become far more simple—Vanderbilt praised the decline of mourning costumes—and these trends were good because they so lightened the emotional mood. Some bereaved individuals could even express happiness, and this was a positive sign. Friends of the bereaved should still express sympathy, of course, but they should be far more careful than before not to encourage grief itself. “It is better to avoid the words ‘died,’ ‘death,’ and ‘killed’ in such [condolence] letters. It is quite possible to write the kind of letter that will give a moment of courage and a strong feeling of sympathy without mentioning death or sadness at all.” Most revealing was the advice to the afflicted themselves, who now had an obligation to control themselves. Whereas Emily Post had readily allowed the emotion to overcome all rational or altruistic capacity for a time, not so Amy Vanderbilt and her peers in the 1950s. Grief simply must not be intense. “We are developing a more positive social attitude toward others, who might find it difficult to function well in the constant company of an outwardly mourning person.” Whatever went on inside should be kept firmly under wraps. Vanderbilt went on to note, in recognition of the more general culture, that wartime had taught people to restrain their grief because it damaged morale and gave comfort to the enemy. With this, the focus of etiquette shifted largely from appropriate sorrow and condolence to emphasis on restraint and an upbeat mood. Substantial grief had lost its validity in this most conventional and change-resistant of popular advice sectors.

Love

The most striking sign of change in emotional culture involved the new cautions applied to love, the key positive emotional virtue in the Victorian pantheon. Unlike grief or guilt, love was not rejected, and therefore analysis of its reconsideration must acknowledge considerable subtlety and some continuity. It did not become a negative emotion, but new
constraints and redefinitions revised Victorian standards considerably, with decline in intensity being the central ingredient in the overall shift.

Love remained decidedly positive, one of the really helpful and pleasant emotions if properly managed. Caution applied to exaggeration and excess, not to affection itself, and lack of affection was unquestionably at least as dangerous as overabundance. Amid considerable debate, however, love lost its Victorian qualities. Its centrality was disputed, its automatic beneficence was questioned, and new dangers were associated with it. Its soaring qualities yielded to prosaic emotional adjustments and compatibilities. Even when love was urged and praised, then, the Victorian aura had vanished.

Motherlove. Victorian motherlove died in American emotionology during the 1920s and 1930s. Given that maternal affection had served as an emotional wellspring in the nineteenth century, the shift away from reliance on motherlove clearly indicated that emotional culture was changing dramatically.

Preparation for reassessments of motherlove surfaced around 1900. Middle-class women’s magazines began running a series of articles on the new tensions between mothers and daughters that were arising as young women were exposed (or so wrote the editors) to opportunities that their mothers simply could not appreciate. “The mothers of these modern girls are very much like hens that have hatched out ducks.” In this new context essays and editorials began lamenting the serious problems that inevitably developed in mother-daughter relationships and usually blamed mothers for not understanding their daughters’ new needs. In this new genre mothers were assumed to be unsympathetic to modern aspirations and, as a result, overly critical, driving away their daughters’ confidence by nagging and carping. At the same time, somewhat ironically, mothers were castigated for being overpermissive, failing to instill necessary discipline.

None of these articles directly addressed the issue of emotion, but they strongly implied that whatever the qualities of maternal affection might be, it was no longer adequate to the task. Conflict, not love, seemed to pervade this basic family link, and the primary fault lay with mothers. “The unnatural burden of filial obligations and scruples imposed by some mothers is the prime factor of the secret antagonism existing between them,” claimed one magazine in 1901. Advice manuals
began counseling mothers to adopt specific strategies to keep their daughters’ confidence, again suggesting that love itself was insufficient. While the mother-daughter bond should be the tightest of all, wrote Gabrielle Jackson in 1905, it could misfire—and if it did, “it is . . . mother’s fault.” A basic need was for mothers not only to keep pace with their daughters’ interests but also to relax control and emotional demands in order to grant independence. Again, love was not directly addressed in this discussion, but its potential excesses lurked in the background.40

Feminists added a second note to the new questioning of maternal adequacy. Charlotte Perkins Gilman sounded characteristic warnings in 1903. “The mother-love concept suffers . . . from its limitations,” she wrote. It restricted women to an unduly narrow field of action, and while maternal nurturance could serve society, in Gilman’s view it was misplaced in the home itself. According to Gilman (herself alienated from her daughter), trained professionals could take care of children better. “That the care and education of children have developed at all,” she argued, “is due to the intelligent efforts of doctors, nurses, teachers, and such few parents as choose to exercise their human brains instead of brute instincts.” The very fact that many mothers manifested fear of competing caregivers revealed the flimsiness of their emotional base: “The terror of the mother lest her child should love some other person better than herself shows that she is afraid of comparison.”41

Nonetheless, great praise for motherlove did persist. Conservative writers urged the intensity of motherlove for parent and child alike. Aline Hoffman argued that “our lot, our principal office is, then, maternity . . . motherhood is the paramount duty of woman.” James Fernald added that unless they were poor, daughters should stay at home until marriage in order to solidify the emotional bond “and help the dear mother who cared so tenderly for [them] in the weary loving years gone by.” Scientists added their mite. G. Stanley Hall, criticizing what he saw as a growing career emphasis, insisted on the primacy of maternal affection for adult and child alike. As in other areas, Hall built Victorian emotional assumptions into his purportedly empirical psychology. The woman who did not concentrate on motherlove was the “very apotheosis of selfishness from the standpoint of every biological ethic,” losing among other things her “mammary functions” and leaving “love of the child itself defective and maimed.” The resultant lack of full affection in
turn appeared “in the abnormal or especially incomplete development of her offspring,” even more in adolescence than in childhood itself. As late as 1925, Dr. S. Josephine Baker argued for the fundamental importance of maternal love in formulating the character of the child.42

This implicit debate about motherlove between advocates of Victorianism and the new feminists and self-styled modernists turned into a more systematic rejection of Victorian assumptions during the 1920s. Disagreement continued as popularizers sought to find a proper definition of affection, but virtually none remained to argue for the Victorian definition of boundlessly good, sacrificial maternal love itself.

Fiction for boys now omitted mother. The theme of mother as a virtually religious talisman, a beacon guiding boys back to morality and domestic bliss, had vanished by the 1920s. Mothers might be heroic, as in the Matchlock Gun of 1925, or they might be nagging nuisances, or they might be virtually absent, as in the Hardy boys mystery series, where father Fenton Hardy played a bit part because he at least had an interesting job but where mother was rarely referred to at all. Mothers might play a number of roles, but they were no longer emotional lighthouses.43

Building on earlier feminism, a new group of experts attacked maternal emotionalism as a basis for women’s work or social service. Scientific training, not motherlove, should guide social workers and nurses in a new, genderless professionalism. In 1921 a woman social worker wrote of dealing with problems of unwed mothers: “Success is achieved in inverse ratio to the degree of emotion involved.”44 Objective science, not maternal love, must serve as the guide. “It is high time that we seriously consider facts, not fictitious heart throbs.”45 Social work must be removed from the field of emotional action; “sentimental or perhaps even morbid motives” must be banned. Not only in social work but also in medicine the idea that women brought special qualities to bear through their actual or potential fund of motherlove declined in the face of this science-based professionalism. The prestige of motherlove, its role as emotional anchor, declined in the process. The terms “maudlin sentimentality” and “philanthropic hysteria” were now used—by professional women—to describe maternalism in the public sphere. Not only lack of a “thorough-going scientific effort” but also love’s “superheated” qualities called it into question.46

Most important, motherlove was rendered newly problematic within
the family itself in advice literature and other commentary on childrearing. A series of authors hammered home the point that mothers frequently made mistakes; their love did not necessarily guide them accurately. This was not an entirely novel claim, for nineteenth-century authors, while often honoring maternal emotion, had cheerfully pointed out the need for external advice in the physical care of children. Now, however, this need also applied to emotional and moral guidance. In 1927 Dr. Smiley Blanton cited case after case in which mothers had disciplined their children improperly. Children's natural impulses, indeed, were likely to be more constructive than those of many mothers, whose reactions Blanton frequently castigated as "unjustifiable." Blanton took fathers to task as well, but he more commonly noted parental combinations in which both parties were at fault, and he applied the worst strictures to mothers themselves. "There are many women who . . . have the inborn knack of managing children, who seem to understand them, and have a feeling for them. . . . There are other women, often very fond of children, who are conspicuously lacking in this power." The average mother, between the extremes, needed training and expert advice, for whatever her emotional disposition, love alone would simply not suffice.47

Motherlove, finally, could easily run "out of control." A growing body of childrearing literature in the 1920s and 1930s argued that mothers were too prone to overreaction, with the consequences of their unrestrained passions harming boys and girls alike. O'Shea put the problem this way in 1920: "While nature has thus widely endowed the mother with all-embracing love for her children, it would have been better if nature had equipped the mother so that she could control her affection by her reason when her children need social training."48 Or as Gilbreth put it eight years later: "It is too bad that freedom of expression, so admirable, perhaps, for one member of the family, may at the same time be so disastrous in its effects on another. Motherlove, for example. Some sort of control is indicated, unless the technique of sublimation has been well developed." Most notoriously, Watson directly attacked mothers' cloying affections in his chapter on "The Dangers of Too Much Mother Love." Mother became too dependent on her children's affection, wrote Watson, particularly in the modern world with husbands away at work. "Her heart is full of love which she must express in some way. She expresses it by showering love and kisses"
upon hapless children, threatening their independence and mental health in the process, transforming a healthy child into a whining, dependent "Mother's boy." "Mother love is a dangerous instrument," for overcod-dled children would be particularly incapacitated in marriage because of the sexually inspired love they had received from their mothers. The ideal child, in turn, was emotionally autonomous almost from birth—"relatively independent of the family situation"—and sexually well adjusted. Few popularizers went to Watsonian extremes, particularly in arguing against physical contact with the child, but many joined the master in warning against maternal excess. "There is a whole class of gushy, emotional parents who are always protesting their love by words and embraces and by excessive fussiness about health and safety.... Their egotism, their fears and anxieties, and their own lack of self-control are also apparent in a thousand ways." 49

In these formulations motherlove verged toward becoming a negative emotion outright. It shared with those emotions the qualities of harming others, of befouling them through excess, and it required the same kind of self-control. To be sure, Victorians had urged mothers to keep their love under partial wraps and to emphasize self-sacrifice, but they had assumed an abundance of passion. In the new culture rationality might be preferable to even the most positive maternal emotions.

Love remained essential, however, and childrearing advice did not become entirely consistent on this subject. Guidance to parents in dealing with children's jealousy or fear stressed the importance of emotional reassurance and abiding love. Some authorities attempted to reconcile motherlove and maternal self-control by distinguishing among stages of childhood. Ernest and Gladys Groves, for example, argued that with babies "unstinted personal affection" is vital: "The little baby cannot be loved too much." In the first few months parents were to let the emotions show fully—to "make the most of their opportunity to fill the little life with love." While essential, however, this was a brief phase; thereafter, love became at least as much a danger as a blessing. After infancy "the parents have to guard against smothering the child's developing tendencies in a too vehement love, and thus preventing his ever attaining independence." 50 Further, the Groveses' approach, though retaining an element of motherlove, treated intense love in a manner similar to that in which many other twentieth-century emotions were treated, as an emblem of immaturity. Untrammeled love was fine for babies but should
be grown out of. These guidelines had the potential to make not only passionate motherlove but also undue intensity in love of all sorts an embarrassing reminder of infancy.

During the 1930s researchers developed the basis for a somewhat more positive approach to mothers. The British psychoanalyst Winnicott, for example, argued for a concept of “good enough mothering,” assuring women that most of them could summon up enough affection to get their job done. The concept affirmed the importance of maternal competency and acknowledged an emotional component, but it hardly revived Victorian awe at the powers of motherlove; indeed, it seemed consciously to admit the loss of this culture and to compensate by accepting a much more moderate, even prosaic emotional base as adequate.51

From this make-do approach, in turn, beginning with Dr. Spock in 1945, childrearing manuals became a bit more consistently supportive of parental love, urging mothers in particular to have confidence in their emotions. The message reflected the pervasive concern about excess but confirmed babies’ need for “gentle and loving” treatment. “Children need to have family affection, loyalty, and love behind them in order that they may grow into self-sustaining, self-respecting persons.” While acknowledging love, this new tone reflected the distance from real Victorianism. Fathers were included with mothers with regard to parental emotion; there was nothing very special about paternalism. “Affection” increasingly replaced “love” as the principal noun, and references to affection were frequently combined with injunctions about common sense, harmony, and other virtues—the emotion itself was not singled out, nor was it considered transcendent. As an adoption book noted, “A confident, serene love is what he [the adoptive child] needs and what you will give him. Not suffocating love, not blind, sacrificial love that wipes out your own identity.”52

Thus, despite a bit more support for motherlove after the 1940s, the cautions persisted in full force—though now they could be mentioned only in passing because the basic standards seemed so well established. Thus the mother and child relationship was “often too intense and precarious,” according to a 1952 manual. Or according to a 1970 book, echoing Watson, “Mothers, particularly, rely heavily on their children to give them satisfactions and pleasures that more appropriately should come from the marriage relationship.”53 Under “Emotional Growing
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Sidonie Gruenberg reminded parents of the need for increasing emotional independence, which in turn involved separation from parental love: “Our small isolated family units are likely to get overcharged emotionally, and we do have to bring outside interests and other friends into our lives to help balance things.” A dependent child would be incapacitated, going through life seeking only gratification of appetite: “We need no amplification of this point to see how seriously handicapped in life such a child is. Another child may grow to regard the hothouse atmosphere of too much love as stifling to his urges toward independence,” and might grow up to feel that “any evidence of love is dangerous to individual freedom.”

The basic message persisted, from the interwar decades onward. Love was necessary to a point, but it could be abused. Intensity must be avoided. “We must recognize in this connection a fundamental principle in child care: Excessive stimulation of any emotion in childhood should be avoided, whether the emotion be one of fear, anger, grief, exhilaration, or love.” Placidity must conquer fervor, even when the emotion was seemingly pleasant.

Romantic Love. The death of Victorian-style motherlove in some senses encouraged new emphasis on spousal love. Many advice writers, including Watson, urged healthy parents to express their love for each other, thus automatically curbing the risk of emotionally overwhelming their child. From this it could be argued that marital love was unique, permitting no real excess. Letters were cited in marriage manuals that, while not exactly Victorian-type outpourings, suggested boundless enthusiasm. “Dearest of my heart: Lover I do love you so very much. Honey dear I just love, love, love you more and more all the time. Bless your heart you are just too dear for words to utter. Darling ‘Daddy’ I do love you more and more every second of the day. I’ll sure kiss you to death sweetie when you do come [home].” Advice manuals in the 1930s offered formulas for advancing spousal love. One argued that both spouses should not only actively but also publicly express love, should “figuratively—sing it, dance it, look it, and live it.” In no sense, then, did love die, and there was undeniable continuity with Victorian love standards. Nevertheless, the Victorian version of romantic love was redefined in three related senses. First, the centrality of spirituality was replaced by the superordinate centrality of sex. Second, the emotion’s
threat to rational calculation received new emphasis. And third, the very
importance of intense love was directly disputed. Even more than with
motherlove, some positive valuation persisted. Almost everyone agreed
that spousal love of some sort was good, but what kind of love, and
under what restraints became basic questions in a variety of popular
outlets as Victorian agreement on a soaring, ethereal passion disap-
peared.

Signs of the new culture began to emerge, though tentatively, in the
1920s. Early symptoms of it were attached to the same kind of self-
conscious “modernism” that had attacked conventions of grief and jeal-
ousy, and like other branches of modernism, the new view of love
emerged on both sides of the Atlantic. The British Mrs. Havelock Ellis
wrote in 1921, for example: “If monogamy is to be the relationship of
the future, it will have to widen its doors, subjugate its jealousies, and
accept many modern devices for spiritualizing physical passion.” While
the last reference had a Victorian ring, along with more than a little
obscenity, Ellis’s work on the whole argued for a love that would be
decidedly nonexclusive, permitting a variety of relationships, and that
would focus fairly frankly on sexual compatibility. Her work, and that
of American pamphleteers on modern marriage like Judge Ben Lindsay,
bypassed an array of Victorian conventions, most notably the references
to ethereal spirituality. Again, unacknowledged links to Victorianism
persisted: Lindsay thus wrote of “that free and spontaneous intensity so
necessary to love.” But the effort to equate love with religious heights
was obviously anathema to the new modernists, as was any attempt to
speak of love as the spiritual merger of two souls into one—hence the
attacks on jealous exclusiveness.57

Modernist views on love won some currency in middle-class maga-
zines, if only because of their shock value. The initial books themselves,
particularly those by intellectuals like Mrs. Ellis, had a more limited
audience. Nevertheless, an audience open to new kinds of advice about
love and marriage was developing, and as we will see in a later chapter,
behavior changes during the 1920s suggest that standards were changing
in directions not totally dissimilar from those recommended by the
modernists. Without question, growing emphasis on the validity and
importance of sexual satisfaction increasingly entered middle-class pub-
lic culture during this decade, when various kinds of sexual advice
columns became available. Judge Lindsay confidently wrote, “I believe
that I have enough evidence to justify the conclusion not that this change in our sexual mores [toward greater expressiveness and openness] is going to take place at some time in the future, but that it has already taken place and is developing and crystallizing into a tacitly recognized and increasingly tolerated code.” Marital advice books began to make sex the centerpiece of marriage, finding sexual maladjustments basic to virtually every imaginable tension between spouses. While the new emphasis on sexual compatibility did not directly attack earlier ideals of love—Margaret Sanger, for instance, cautiously stressed a “true union” of souls as part of any sexual contact—it inevitably displaced spiritual concerns in favor of physical expression.\(^5^8\) Femininity, correspondingly, was increasingly redefined in terms of sexuality. Here was a key factor in the reduction of attention to motherlove: women were now judged by different contributions to family, and motherlove was itself seen as potentially inimical to sexual adjustment. But while sexuality brought new importance to the relationship between spouses, it worked also to redefine love and to downplay the spiritualized passion that love had once, in principle, embodied. The sexual emphasis also tended, if only implicitly, to highlight the rewards an individual should get from a relationship rather than the higher unity of the relationship itself.

Elements of the evolution in the fundamental meaning of love appeared in language. In the nineteenth century the word “lover” embraced some ambiguity in that it could refer to sexual liaison, but the predominant definition was a man who had a special sentiment for a woman. “One who loves; one who has a tender affection, particularly for a female,” was Noah Webster’s phrasing. This meaning did not vanish, but by the 1880s the word began to take on more specific courtship connotations, as with the rise in lovers’-lane references. And between the 1920s and the 1950s the full about-face occurred, as the word came to connote sexual content and little else. “Lover” came to signify what nineteenth-century dictionaries had more coyly referred to as “paramour,” and two lovers, whatever their emotional ties with one another, were physically linked first and foremost.\(^5^9\)

By the end of the 1920s, shifts in attitudes toward love yielded two specific directions, both of them in open conflict with Victorian delight in spiritual intensity. The first direction involved the emergence of a new male culture bent on freeing its charges from the shackles of emotional involvement in favor of more diverse material interests, sexuality in-
cluded. The second direction, applicable to both genders, yielded from 1927 onward a new, "scientific" current of marriage advice that was eager to supplant the vagaries of love with more concrete, less emotional calculations of long-term compatibility.

An explicit definition of masculinity that was at once snobbishly middle-class and vigorously anti-Victorian surrounded the establishment of *Esquire* magazine in 1933. The magazine's founder, Arnold Gingrich, combined claims to innovation with appeals to a male audience in explaining *Esquire*'s purpose: "It is our belief, in offering *Esquire* to the American male, that we are only getting around at last to a job that should have been done a long time ago—that of giving the masculine reader a break. The general magazines, in the mad scramble to increase the woman readership that seems to be highly prized by national advertisers, have bent over backwards in catering to the special interests and tastes of the feminine audience."\(^6^0\) *Esquire* quickly won a substantial readership, boasting 180,000 subscribers within half a year, a quarter-million by 1935, and 750,000 by 1941. Counting newsstand purchases, a 1936 survey estimated over 4.5 million readers, extending from the initial upper-middle-class audience to a more general middle-class audience and including some women as well as men. The 1936 survey revealed a solidly middle-class readership, featuring people who had at least attended college and were eager to keep up with the latest styles and standards.

*Esquire* paid a great deal of attention to love motifs during its initial years of publication. During 1934, for example, twenty-seven short stories involved love topics, with such titles as "Forgive Me, Irene," "On the Rebound," "All My Love," and "Have a Rosebud." The pace slackened a bit in 1935 with eighteen stories and articles on love, but this rate was sustained through the bulk of the decade.

In virtually all its presentations on love *Esquire* emphasized revisionism. Editorial policy, attacking Victorian love ideals for men, stated that "this is a man's magazine, it isn't edited for the junior miss. It isn't dedicated to the dissemination of sweetness and light." *Esquire* trumpeted the idea of a "New Love," picking up on the more general themes of the previous decade and explicitly countering the etherealized and spiritual definition of love that had been urged on Victorian men.\(^6^1\)

*Esquire* placed its attacks on love traditions in a venomously misogynist context, which is itself a fascinating shift away from official Victor-
rian sanctification of women in discussions of love. Articles during the 1930s blasted women’s lack of creativity—women were “created to be helpers”—and their emphasis on instinct over reason. “Feelings, not principles, regulate the typical woman’s life.” This chauvinism was all the more alarming given women’s steady march into men’s domains—one of the clearest nightmares for Esquire’s writers. “After taking over the bars and the barbershops, women elbow into the sports pages.” “It may be, indeed, that a gradual and complete shifting of the recognized fields of the sexes is taking place. If this is so, and much current evidence points to it, I am glad that I am an old, bitter man, with not much time remaining.” Pushy, oversexed, and irrational, women had become the enemy.62

It was not surprising, in this context, that love required reconsideration, which is why the early years of the magazine featured such prolonged attention to the topic. In this first phase, marked by the explicit campaign against Victorianism, the contours of the new love were most directly delineated in articles by marriage experts, though similar notions found in the magazine’s many relevant short stories may have sunk deeper roots. The popularizing experts and most of the fiction writers spoke with a consistent voice, extending the pioneering notions of the 1920s while also translating them into an aggressive masculine voice.

In 1934 Henry Morton Robinson launched Esquire’s new emotional foray with an article on the “Brave New Love.” Robinson, a former Columbia University professor and board member for Reader’s Digest, saw himself in the front line of a new “rebellion” “in the lives of those persons who most easily and naturally reflect the genius of the time, a brilliant experimental use of the new love.” Robinson castigated older love ideals, with their assumptions that “a pair of passion-oozing souls could merge into a mystical unity” as “a dream conceived in fallacy and proposed by childish desires”—an interesting echo of the more general campaign to infantilize strong emotion. The new love had no illusions, being “an adult emotion without that annoying fuzz of pubic hair on its handsome cleft chin.” Women might seek the old romance still, but men needed an alternative to the “childish myth” that would weaken them in the face of voracious females while causing needless emotional suffering.63

A more positive definition of the new love emerged in a 1936 article. Its author repeated the denunciations of older romantic ideals and em-
phsized rational, cooperative arrangements between men and women. Soaring ideals and spirituality were largely absent, but so were the earlier put-downs of women. "Love" became a summary word for practical accommodations that could allow a couple to live together harmoniously, sharing various interests, including sexuality. Companionship, not emotional intensity, was the goal.

Esquire's short stories, with their frequent treatment of love themes, drove home the same points, with rare exceptions. A 1936 story implicitly captured the transition in standards. "Sleepless Night" depicted a husband in bed with his slumbering wife:

She rested motionless and it seemed to the young man that her light breath, the faint perfume rising from her hair, the dimly illuminated outline of her slim body, entered into the design; the harmony of this night was its essence, refined and alive. He felt a renewed surge of love and softly bent to kiss the white forehead.

However, as the night wears on, the circulation in his arm is cut off, and he grows uncomfortable with his wife's position. His resentment also grows:

Women, with their ill-timed joys and superficial sadness, never kept the promises given by their eyes. Even the capture they yielded was transitory; after a while, it had a taste of corruption and death.

When morning comes, the husband keeps silent about his thoughts, eager to avoid trouble. Clearly, deep love has been evoked and rejected as the man's emotional outlook has matured during the night. Accommodation, not misleading passion, is the only realistic hope.

Other stories demonstrated the futility or irrelevance of romantic commitment. Plots featured in 1934 and 1935 dealt with partners who differed greatly in their approach to romance. In one, a woman urges her man to be more romantic rather than seeking conquest without love. The man responds, "one must be hard. In love, he who does not devour, is devoured. All the same, it must be a relief, now and then, to give in, to be the weak one, to seek one's happiness in someone else's happiness." In fact, the man does try a more tender approach, only to have the woman leave him because she prefers "a man who compels one to make sacrifices." "Second Honeymoon" involved another unromantic husband who tries to manifest more sentiment under his wife's prompt-
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ing—but she too leaves, in this case because he is not in step with the
New Love that everyone is urging.66

Finally, a number of stories treated sexual prowess as a mature alter-
native to love. A 1938 plot focused on men in college who are initially
naive but gain in sophistication as their emotional vulnerability yields to
sexual confidence. Another story featured a husband who takes a mis-
tress with his wife’s approval—though in this case the man suffers from
the mistress’s desire for no-strings sex.67

Esquire treated love as a prominent theme during the 1930s, arguing
against emotional intensity for mature men and offering graphic exam-
pies of how often emotional risks backfire. There were no happy endings
in which transcendent love is confirmed. The frequency of the motif
suggested real audience interest as a complicated cultural transition
was underway.

With World War II, however, the inkwell dried up, never, in Esquire’s
pages, to be refilled. Tacitly, the magazine seems to have decided both
that other issues had become more pressing for men and that the new
culture was sufficiently understood that it need not be belabored further.
Esquire turned to war reportage, and its stories dealt with adventure,
mystery, sports, and western themes. The love interest, which had al-
ready begun to decline in the later 1930s, vanished entirely. Aside from
war reporting, feature sections emphasized travel and leisure. Extensive
pictorial essays highlighted Hollywood starlets and “Varga” girls, often
with captions suggesting that these women sought sex without romance.
The same theme of emotionally neutral sex surfaced in coverage of trips
by entertainers for troops overseas. Esquire was turning, in effect, to the
approach toward women and sexuality that would be more extensively
taken up late in the 1950s by Playboy: emotional love need not apply.

After the war’s end, Esquire’s new tone persisted. In 1950 the maga-
zine announced a new philosophy, pledging firmer devotion to men’s
real interests. These included travel, automobiles, and fashion, with little
attention to women and none to love. Sex, cars, vacations, and jazz held
center stage as consumerism and adventure fantasies displaced romance
of any sort. In a rare exception, a 1952 article by a woman cited men’s
complaints that women had become too career minded and sexually
explicit; the author noted that these changes were the results of male
prodding, saying that if women had become less domestic, more “sophis-
ticated, undraped and immodest,” men had only themselves to blame.
Amid these trends, to move on to a discussion of love might have seemed downright banal.68

As Esquire and then Playboy moved ever further away from romantic themes, mainstream marriage advice, disseminated to middle-class American women as well as men, took its own aim at Victorian standards of love. Less bombastic than Esquire's masculinists, the growing ranks of up-to-date popular authorities were just as critical of intense love and sought alternate bases for durable mating. The 1927 formation of the marriage education movement, begun at the University of North Carolina, suggested a new union between presumably scientific experts in the field, who were eager to apply objective knowledge to the myths of the past, and a growing audience of middle-class youth, who sought appropriate modern standards in a relationship that had become less certain than in the past. Over the next twenty-five years hundreds of thousands of students were exposed to marriage education courses, and an even larger number of readers were exposed to popular articles by experts like Ernest Groves and Paul Popenoe in the pages of leading outlets like the Ladies Home Journal. A 1937 American Magazine article on marriage education drew thousands of letters in response, while a 1955 poll found that the majority of American women believed that a marriage course and/or serious reading were the best bases for a successful marriage. Pamphlets by authorities like Popenoe, with such titles as "How Do You Know It's Love" and "How to Get Him to Propose," supplemented the courses and the magazine fare. Clearly, advice on love-related issues during these decades reached an exceptionally eager middle-class audience.69

The basis for the new wisdom rested on a combination of science and functionalism. As in so many aspects of emotional culture during the interwar decades, science was deliberately contrasted with sentiment. Couples planning marriage should consult scientifically determined criteria of compatibility, which would allow decisions to be made with "less emotion, strain, and regret than would otherwise be the case" because the people involved would be guided by "Science."70 The functionalist goal emphasized the necessity of day-to-day adjustments, so that people, having chosen mates according to the best knowledge about such factors as religious preference, sexuality, and personality style, could cohabit durably and pleasantly. Soaring flights of passion were not part of this game plan.
The importance of love was granted. One authority, Ernest Burgess, scrawled in hand on the back of one of his marriage prediction charts, otherwise filled with scientific calculation of compatibility, "Once they are in love." But the love envisioned was a companionable affection, not an intense experience. Further, in order to preserve this distinction, love must also be surrounded by cautions. Excessive expectations were at least as dangerous as lack of attraction. As early as 1926, Burgess argued that new trends, particularly women's growing independence, were beginning to destroy old romantic ideals and that this was a good thing because romance provided a poor basis for marriage. Burgess then introduced the companionship motif that was to become a staple of marriage advice literature during the 1930s and 1940s. The aim of the compatibility tests was to determine shared interests and values, not transcendent love or a merger of souls. A well-matched couple would agree about standards of childrearing and would share a number of leisure interests. They should be affectionate, but more transcendent feelings of love were irrelevant. In fact, youth must be warned to place head over heart in making decisions about marriage. Emotional and sexual attractions might overcome sensible, functional decisions and lead to grotesque mistakes—as the growing divorce rate seemed abundantly to testify. Here, as in other emotional fields, sensible, rational restraint would keep emotion in bounds, allowing it to support choices made largely on nonemotional grounds. Real love, indeed, involved building on shared interests and distinguishing compatibility from the misleading snares of transient passion.

After marriage, emotion continued to play only a supporting role in the judgment of the new breed of experts. Few discordant couples were seen as suffering from lack of appropriate love. Rather, they were almost certain to be experiencing sexual problems, for sex became the touchstone of marital success. Sex before marriage involved anticipation but not participation, for the experts remained resolutely conventional in this area. But once marriage was launched, sex became the key to the kingdom. No amount of love could overcome sexual maladjustment, and, correspondingly, successful sex had almost nothing to do with emotional concomitants. The barriers to successful sex involved false information and inhibitions—including, of course, problems inherited from childhood such as the remnants of excessive motherlove. The cures, correspondingly, must emphasize accurate information and mechanical
arrangements. Love was no longer centrally involved. Pamphlet after pamphlet drummed home the primacy of sex in determining the fate of a marriage, and love as a separate emotional entity virtually disappeared from view. The theme was launched clearly in the advice literature of the 1920s: love was by nature sexual, and where problems arose, the physical aspect predominated. "Sex is the foundation of marriage. Yet most married people do not know the ABC of sex." "Sex is . . . the most perfect way of showing love." "When sex deserts the bed, love flies out the window. With the breakdown of the sexual relationships comes a corresponding breakdown in every other aspect of love." Developing and maintaining sexual excitement was seen as so fundamental to love that any independent definition of the emotion became irrelevant.

Overall, then, the advice that surged forward between the late 1920s and the early 1960s warned against certain kinds of love, dismissed Victorian standards, replaced love with sex as the linchpin of marital adjustment, and defined the love that should remain largely in terms of an emotional predisposition to share interests and negotiate disagreements. In this modern, functionalist view, love became little more than a collection of routine skills. An avid advice reader could easily have assumed that marriage should be contracted on the basis of carefully calculated shared habits and then cemented through sex. Advice writers who stated quite openly "first comes sex, then comes love" seem to have had exactly this arrangement in mind.

Even as the marriage education movement declined in the 1960s, it was not replaced by any clear reemphasis on intense love. Rather, it gave way to expanding interests in sexuality, particularly premarital sexuality, and to further emphasis on the idea that relationships should be calculated with a careful sense of individual benefit in mind, being exchange arrangements in which sensible partners would make sure that no great self-sacrifice was involved. Innovativeness shifted away from the somewhat conventional modernism of the interwar period to the more radical open marriage concept—which further emphasized the importance of sexual expression and the need to uncouple couples from any constraining sentimentality or emotional unity.

Middle-class emotional culture thus moved from avant-garde challenges to Victorian concepts of love early in the 1920s to two central, overlapping alternatives developed in the 1930s and 1940s. The first, a hedonistic male culture, deliberately attacked intense, romantic love in
favor of more pragmatic arrangements with women, including sexual arrangements, and a wide variety of leisure interests. The second, friendlier to the idea of mutual affection, also attacked intensity in love and urged attention to shared interests and sexuality in its stead.

Other definitions of love persisted as well. As with grief, the modernist position did not completely triumph, even at the cultural level. The new popularity of soap operas and Gothic and Harlequin romances among women during these same decades demonstrated a cultural commitment to love themes that men seemed to be decisively abandoning. Soap operas, for example, stressed the importance of love in marriage, defining other motives as invalid. Love could triumph over all sorts of apparent impediments, including the prosaic compatibility criteria of the experts. Love begat complications, of course, which gave soap operas most of their countless plots, including the theme of winning back an errant lover. Romance novels stressed love—either love moving toward horror, or initial fear yielding to love; the emotional mixture was complex, but it was undeniably intense. They also highlighted substantial female passivity in the grip of emotion. Women's magazines, more clearly middle-class in outlook, also maintained a strong interest in love themes, often alternating explorations of how to win men's love with expert articles on compatibility that touted science over affection. Further, the love articles that did persist not only maintained the love motif but often defined it in terms reminiscent of Victorian self-sacrifice.76

Yet the very presence of these disagreements over the nature of love within mainstream culture indicated how far the American middle class had moved from the heyday of Victorianism when, except in the writings of utopian dissidents, no real alternative to the standards of spiritualized love was even presented. And while a new ambivalence about modernism did develop in the materials directed toward middle-class women, women, too, participated in the search for appropriate innovations that would guide them toward greater sexual interest and sought measurements of courtship and marriage more practical than Victorian preachments had seemed to encourage. The religion of intense love still maintained some isolated chapels, but the body of the faithful had moved on.77
Conclusion

Attacks on Victorian standards of guilt, grief, and love involved several complexities not present in the movement against the negative emotions. The effort to unseat guilt was most straightforward; guilt was seen as unpleasant and therefore simply negative. Grief, on the other hand, gained some negative connotations, but it was not renounced quite as simply; countercurrents persisted in advocating the necessity of grief while the more dominant interest in restraining grief generated considerable vagueness as to how this was to be accomplished. Portraits of grief-free people alternated with scenes in which grief existed but was recognized as unfortunate and therefore erased as quickly as possible. Love was more complicated still, for change here involved massive redefinition and downgrading, but not frontal attack. The result was inconsistency, as the same cultural outlets both praised and warned against love. The further result was considerable lack of clarity as to how adequate love was to be generated and measured—for example, by mothers with their children—and how it was to be combined with the restraint essential to guard against irrationality and excess. Nothing so simple as ventilation was urged in the love field, for real love of some sort remained desirable.

However, while redefinitions of “good” emotions were inherently less straightforward than the attacks on bad emotions, several common themes did shine through. One of these was the idea that infants had emotional needs different from adults and that one of the key tasks of child-rearing was to develop appropriate emotional maturity in which all emotions could be held in check, with embarrassment acting as the guardian of restraint. Another theme was that men and women were not as emotionally different as Victorians had assumed and that neither gender had special license to indulge in a particular kind of emotional intensity. A new set of gender quarrels was implicit in twentieth-century emotional culture, as Esquire’s authors seem to have realized, but it did not involve selective freedoms from emotional restraint. Above all, emotional intensity became a consistent danger, whether the emotions involved were negative or potentially positive. Strong emotion served no greater purpose in love than it did in anger. Here was a set of emotional values, clearly distinct from Victorian preferences, that requires brief summary before we turn to the challenging task of analyzing sources and impacts.