The Need for Outlets: Reshaping American Leisure

Some societies may manage almost complete control of at least one strong emotional category, like anger. The Hutterite religious sect in Canada discouraged aggression by providing no rewards for angry behavior and no examples of adult anger. As a result, despite severe discipline and many frustrations, it avoided almost any kind of interpersonal aggression. Zuni Indians prohibited not only outward signs of anger but the inner feeling as well, a standard that children learned as part of their initiation into religious adulthood. The Utku Inuit group tolerates anger only in infants; beyond that, it provides neither vocabulary nor behavior that could encourage anger, and manages to remain apparently anger free.¹

These examples of extensive expunging raise some questions, of course. First, they involve small, unusually cohesive cultures; such thorough repression may be unimaginable, even for a single social class, in a larger society. Second, they involve a single reproved emotion, not the recent American pattern that seeks to control intensity across the board. And finally, they may not actually have succeeded in fully repressing the emotion in question. While the Utku resolutely avoid anger, they kick their dogs viciously and, when encountering frustration, they frequently cry; emotion may have been successfully diverted, but it has hardly been expunged.

Although it was averse to intensity, twentieth-century American emo-
tional culture did not attempt a full repression of major emotions. Popularizers urged verbal identification of the emotions, and assumed that, while successful socialization would reduce their strength and avoid "festering," they might well persist. The trick was to control or conceal, not to escape altogether. The culture itself, then, raised the issue of what might happen to emotions that could not be openly indulged but that endured nevertheless.

In fact, the twentieth-century standards raise issues important to emotions research in general. Both the possibility of basic emotions and observable historical continuities in human emotion suggest that people may have a common range of emotions or affects that are biologically or psychologically programmed in. If this is the case, then culturally constructed efforts to constrain emotions may well affect overt expression, but the emotions will also demand compensatory outlets—as with the Utku and their dogs. Thus the new attempt to restrain certain emotions and emotional intensity in general forces some inquiry into potential outlets. As we will see, emotional constraint not only served as a direct cause of new laws and habits; it also served as an indirect cause of approved surrogates.

Apart from the possibility that certain emotions are basic, the sheer power of Victorian values made it probable that, especially during the first generation of cultural change, considerable continuity would persist from the past even as some shifts began to take hold. The potency of the imagery of motherhood, or transcendent love, or righteous masculine anger clearly might live on, possibly merging with the new standards in a durable amalgam. Here, too, there may have been an attempt to compensate for the new values, and this attempt may have constituted part of the larger impact of the new emotionology. Several observers have, for example, noted a tendency for emotional nostalgia in the later twentieth century as contemporaries look back on real or imagined past images of motherhood or channeled anger and wish they could somehow be recaptured. Nostalgia might cause complexity in its own right, helping to create some alternatives to the straightforward translation of the now-dominant standards into middle-class life.²

Three issues, then, prompt a brief consideration of some ambivalent qualities in the larger impact of twentieth-century emotionology. First, because complete suppression was not envisaged, many Americans may actively have sought surrogate channels beyond secretive diary writing,
not to challenge the more fundamental standards but to relieve the resultant tensions slightly. Second, to the extent that basic impulses exist, an approach so much more systematically suppressive than its Victorian predecessor (particularly for men) may have prompted unforeseen changes that would provide outlets outside the most official culture. And third, the sheer power of Victorian impulses (some of them relating to even earlier Western norms) may have required some compromises with Victorianism, even as the new standards largely won the day; nostalgia for past expressions could enter into this mix.

In the analysis that follows, we will see that the results of twentieth-century emotional culture involved an increasing reliance on partially symbolic alternatives to day-to-day emotional restraint, some of them expressive of Victorian standards, some of them serving even more obviously as raw release. Tracing the emotional functions of familiar twentieth-century staples in such areas as leisure and vocabulary gives deeper meaning and explanation to facets of emotional life that lie largely outside work and family. It also extends the causal power of the ascending emotional culture itself—though in some unexpected directions.

Outsiders provided one form of symbolic alternative. As with many cultures, Americans in the twentieth century sometimes looked to them as legitimate targets for otherwise dubious intensities. Some picked internal targets, like minority groups, but on the whole the public use of these groups for venting suppressed emotion declined in favor after the 1920s. Foreign enemies were another matter; Hitler and then Soviet Russia provided outstanding symbols against which fear and anger could be directed. Whether American emotional culture encouraged more symbolic enmity than was otherwise likely merits consideration. Anger, fear, and grief partially constrained at home could pour out in hostility to foes abroad, even more than is usual in the arena of international conflict. The Soviet atomic threat, which generated fear that Americans had been taught they should be able to avoid, may thus have generated unusually strong reactions against Communist evil, in this case at home through McCarthyism as well as abroad.3 As the Soviet threat faded in the later 1980s, efforts to find new targets for intense hostilities—as in likening Iraq’s Saddam Hussein to Hitler—might also suggest emotional needs that made foreign villains particularly welcome. Proving an un-
usual employment of outside emotional targets would admittedly be difficult, but the possibility is real.

More obvious, and more clearly related to the peculiarities of twentieth-century emotional culture, was the use of more accessible cultural symbols to relieve emotional pressures imposed by the new norms. Revealingly, whereas the word "cool" was a standard invocation in daily exchanges, the word "hot" began to apply to leisure goods such as intense music, or sex, or consumer sales items, or any new popular-culture icon. Revealingly also, while "hot" might have been good in these symbolic connections, it never came to rival "cool" in standard vocabulary. Hot qualities remained not only separate from but also more dangerous than the approved cool.

Balancing standard norms with outlets was a difficult task in twentieth-century America. Individuals and at times the larger society could come close to explosion when suppressed emotions were unmatched by suitable releases. Individual tantrums, and collective hysterias directed for example at feared minorities or foreign devils, suggested the fragility of the balance. Nevertheless, outlets did help, and the emotional culture defined a wide array of usages for watching displays of intensity by others.

**Release through Power: An Emotional Upper Class**

Because of personality traits of Victorian heritage or some other complex set of factors, many individuals in the middle class defied the pervasive injunctions against emotional intensity. A marriage partner might still try to dominate through anger or compel attention through intense grief. The new norms affected the range of emotional experience, but there were hosts of variations.

One of these variations stemmed from status. Individuals of high status could still release types of emotional intensity that were normally disapproved. The corporate work environment was democratic in tone, but at least in the United States, some limits applied. Thus the T-group movement, while generalizing recommendations about calm and control, rarely evoked participation by top management. Correspondingly, executives were far less likely to emphasize smooth personalities and more likely to stress aggressive traits than were middle manag-
The Need for Outlets

ers. After a prior career in middle management, some executives doubtless maintained a controlled, superficially friendly style, but this was far from the norm.4

Furthermore, precisely because intensity was normally shunned, the impact of a temperamentally manipulative executive could be confusing. Outbursts that would usually bring discredit to their presenters were less clear cut when combined with power. Small wonder that many middle managers commented on how "frazzled" they were; in addition to meeting their own requirements of emotional control, they also had to mediate between demanding working-class subordinates and angry bosses. By the same token, chief executives could escape from a work life of emotional caution by capping successful promotion with a relaxation of the twentieth-century emotional rules.5

By 1990 a new phrase denoted both the temptation of those atop the hierarchy to indulge in more spontaneous emotion and the tension that this habit could evoke. American leaders began to speak, or be spoken of, in terms of "going ballistic." Thus in 1992 President Bush was reported as "going ballistic" over information leaks in his administration. Or as the same president had disclosed in 1988, with characteristic verbal felicity, he might at times go "a little ballistic—which is only part true—semi-ballistic." This exaggerated missile terminology suggests both an attempt to recognize the unusual, extreme quality of anger even at this level and a desire to make sure the emotion drew attention by subordinates. Emotional life, newly constrained at most middle-class levels, was definitely not yet egalitarian.6

The Therapeutic Approach

The constraints of the new emotional culture were clearly reflected in the growing use of formal therapy, wherein individuals sought to release their grief, anger, or fear in the privacy of a professional office. Talking out intense emotions became a central therapeutic mechanism that fit the wider notions of verbal venting while also serving as an acceptable, because confidential, outlet.7

Along with individual sessions, group therapy movements built on the dominant culture and its attendant constraints. In 1959, to take one widely publicized example, Synanon was established in California to provide self-help for heroin addicts. The organization was founded on
the assumption that addicts were unaware of their own realities, using drugs to escape bottled-up emotions that must be effectively released in order to restore proper functioning. Given a lifetime of self-deceit and emotional evasion, “truth” required open expressions of verbal violence and hostility. Cathartic sessions promoted foul language, shouts, and violent gestures in order to achieve two purposes: realistic self-confrontation and draining of the accumulated emotion. Release was essential, not to arouse anger but to avoid festering. Insults and other provocations built up confrontations during the catharsis, for lashing out was a vital, though early and temporary, phase in the emotional healing process.  

The Need for Outlets: Family

Unlike some top executives, most middle-class people could not count on bending the rules or finding occasions in the daily routine to set off emotional missiles. Nor did most rely on therapy groups. Therefore many people experienced a new need for alternative settings in which a different emotional vision could be indulged.

For some, one such setting was the family. Though it was technically against the emotional norms to do so, many people allowed emotions carefully bottled up on the job to spill out at home. Even though they knew that their outbursts were inappropriate, they could not contain themselves—and their guilt could actually add fuel to the fire. By the 1960s some authorities were suggesting that the family be used as a release, “providing a place where one can safely drain off hostility that has accumulated in the outside world.” This was described as “one of the important mental health functions of a good marriage.” Some husbands, particularly, adopted this tack. One commentator described a man who “had no difficulty keeping his small-boy side locked away while he was at work.” But his immaturity could not fully be stifled: “To him, ‘relaxing’ at home had come to mean letting the small boy call the shots and bully everybody.” Yet for most people this outlet, if used at all, provided scant relief; polls revealed growing discomfort, with oneself or with a spouse, when hostile emotions burst forth. “I’d get so upset, I’d throw up and not be able to eat.” “When she comes after me like that, yapping like that, she might as well be hitting me with a bat.” And there is evidence, further, that middle-class couples in particular
worked hard to restrain emotions, even in times of economic tension, that other American families might release more freely.\(^9\)

The strict rules many people tried to impose on themselves could certainly prove counterproductive. It is possible, even in some middle-class families, that the absence of regular opportunities to express vigorous, hostile emotions drove some individuals to greater extremes when they passed the breaking point. Family abuse was of course no invention of the twentieth century, but it may have been exacerbated by the very effort of emotional constraint. Parents who carefully learned that even mild expressions of anger against children were damaging might in some instances have prepared for an episode of more extensive abuse by their curbs on daily spontaneity. Jealousy, sedulously denied by most men, could trigger beatings and worse, and some authorities contended that the very act of denial intensified the anger and made the ultimate conflagration worse.\(^10\)

Yet extensive use of the home as a place for emotional release was not common, precisely because it so clearly deviated from long-standing emotional rules. The larger impact of twentieth-century emotionology was to support a growing array of symbolic emotional alternatives that in turn described a large part of the leisure life of the growing middle class.

*The Need for Outlets: The Culture of Leisure*

Many cultures offer channels for deviation from standard social constraints. One example is the often-noted role of approved drunkenness and some sexual license in what otherwise seems a straitened Japanese middle-class existence. Certainly Victorian culture had its escape hatches. Vigorous moral reform could provide women with occasions for righteous anger normally reserved for men, while men could seek alternatives to sexual regulations through pornography, use of prostitutes, and the like. Even women could find opportunities for mild sexual titillation in stories of aristocratic derring-do, like du Maurier's tales of Trilby. Where emotional norms were concerned, however, most Victorian leisure culture abided by the rules. Stories of transcendent love or successful battles with jealousy or fear were written in ways that seem naively exaggerated today, but they were in full harmony with desired
intensities. Sports helped boys and young men carry out injunctions to preserve but channel anger and to cultivate courage.

How well this harmony between leisure and mainstream values worked may be questioned. Many middle-class people, even aside from "hysterical" women, may have been too constrained by emotional norms that not only regulated their work and family relationships but also ruled their available reading matter and leisure-time activities. On the other hand, the fact that both leisure and real life allowed for opportunities for emotional intensity may have made the amalgam work for many people. While spontaneity was discouraged, blandness could also be avoided by people who formed intense attachments to friends or family, who prided themselves on the passion that impelled them in work or on a playing field, and who sought reading matter and other entertainment that would help them imagine themselves in other emotional excursions that seemed challenging extensions of real life.

Beyond reinforcing approved emotional intensity, elements of nineteenth-century leisure culture provided undeniable excitement. With new forms of fiction, like hard-hitting detective novels of the Nick Carter genre, and with growing use of sports and some frequenting of lower-class amusement centers, the excitement potential accelerated in the final two decades of the century. Some leisure historians and theorists, building on these developments, have assumed a straight-line trajectory between Victorian amusements and more contemporary patterns. However, despite undeniable links in both form and excitement function, the twentieth century added important new ingredients, based not only on more ample time and resources but also on growing needs for emotional alternatives.\(^{11}\)

It is hardly a secret that middle-class leisure began to diverge strikingly from Victorian patterns by the 1920s, with some limited innovations taking shape even before 1900. Popular fiction and then films moved away from straightforward moralisms into a variety of escapist ploys, featuring new levels of adventure, violence, and implied sexuality. Sports gained growing audiences, and while they embodied some key Victorian values, their role began to change for the middle class in important ways. Heightened consumerism poured new passions into the acquisitions of things. Middle-class people, in sum, began to seek experiences and imagery that would allow them to use leisure safely to compensate for the growing stringency of their emotional life. Much
leisure became deliberately separate from, almost deliberately antagonistic to, the norms of daily life.

Attempts to explain the dramatically novel tone of twentieth-century leisure have often floundered. New technology such as movies and, later, television provided a new framework for leisure but hardly accounts for the form it took. After all, Victorian moralisms could have been translated to the new media, and they sometimes were, to a limited extent. Commercial manipulation by the new capitalist captains of professional entertainment clearly helped prompt a growing emphasis on impulse and also a certain passivity within the target audience. Appealing to widespread human interests literally around the world in the twentieth century, commercial manipulation does help explain some of the new leisure currents, but it does not fully account for audience response in the United States; there is a gap to be filled. Many authors have also pointed to growing middle-class interest in lower-class and ethnic entertainment forms that provided alternatives to middle-class inhibitions. Entertainers from outside the mainstream middle class acquired new roles, and some middle-class youth deliberately went “slumming” in order to experience new forms of music, looser language, and more open sexuality. Criminal elements associated with leisure interests such as gambling gained new influence in the process. But even granting an increase of democratic impulse in a consumer society and a modification of Victorian snobberies, it is not clear why middle-class people found new uses for alternative cultures in their leisure lives. Gambling impresarios may have benefited from the new quest for excitement, but they did not cause it.12

The development of new emotional constraints, particularly the new barriers against intensity, helps account for crucial directions of twentieth-century leisure in the growing American middle class and for the meaning of this leisure. The new emotionology also contributes directly to an understanding of the timing involved; after all, some of the possibilities, including lower-class contact, had been available long before they were actually taken up. Correspondingly, the new leisure, broadly construed, helps explain how Americans could accept the new emotional rules in their daily lives: by seeking a realm of imagination now explicitly different from their actual emotional routines. Leisure was not life, as some advocates of a new leisure ethic mistakenly argued.13 Its divergence from normal rules was precisely its emotional function. Commercial
The Need for Outlets

promoters seized on these new leisure needs and perhaps extended them, but they did not create them. Influences from lower-class social and ethnic groups fed into the leisure patterns, but only because middle-class people found in them some of the symbolic alternatives they now required. As leisure time grew, the relationship between leisure and daily reality changed dramatically. Emotional needs served as the intermediary between several developments such as corporate work and the new direction of leisure.

Growing interest in sexuality, particularly but not exclusively among men, formed one vital channel. By the 1920s groups like fraternity brothers began to talk more openly about sex, to seek sexual pleasure more consistently, and to think about sex more often or at least more consistently than their Victorian counterparts had done. Where actual sexual opportunities fell short, an increasingly charged world of fiction and advertising extended the imagination. Sex or sexual musings provided an intensity that emotional life might now lack, an ability briefly to lose oneself without directly violating the emotional code.14

Language loosened in the new leisure culture. Cursing became more common, first among men and then among aspiring women in the middle class. The growing openness of swearing has been widely noted in histories of twentieth-century middle-class culture but is hard to explain. Contacts with lower-class elements that had never accepted Victorian shibboleths about profanity fed into the new pattern, but they hardly account for middle-class acceptance. The same holds true for media promotion of looser language; while shock value helped sell certain books and movies, it was responsible more for furthering a new middle-class impulse than for creating it. Beginning in the 1920s some new expressions, like the popular and ambiguous exclamation “nuts,” followed from the growing effort to pursue sexual interests more openly. But acceptance of swearing, including women’s growing tolerance even before their own widespread indulgence, allowed more than sexual allusion. It permitted a verbal jolt at a time when standard emotional rules were tightening. The same people who were learning to mask their anger, or even to claim they had none, might now openly say “hell” or “damn” or, still later, even “fuck.” The words were not intended to convey deep anger, and it was a task of middle-class auditors to learn not to take the words seriously—a test of their own participation in a charade in which strong words were meant to be divorced from strong
emotion. Saying the words might provide some release, but their utterance was often accompanied by a carefully reassuring grin designed to confirm that no real emotional rules violation had been intended.\textsuperscript{15}

Sports, shopping, and escapist fiction provided three other outlets, often combined with more open sexuality and looser language, in which intensity could be sought outside normal emotional life. These outlets tended to promote a growing quest for the excitement that Victorians had sought in passion. And by being disconnected from the usual rules, they also fostered a certain passivity in which acts and products offered by others might substitute for direct experience.

Consumerism was hardly new in the twentieth century. Elements of it surely date back to the first uses of economic surplus in human life, particularly in emerging upper classes, and a modern form of more extensive, expressive consumerism has been plausibly traced to the eighteenth century, when acquisition of things like stylish clothing began to play a new role in Western society.\textsuperscript{16} In the twentieth century, however, consumerism became more widespread, commanding new uses of time and fostering new environments like shopping centers and then malls. It also became, in its own way, more intense. The new emotional culture deliberately fostered surrogate attachment to objects as a means of preventing emotional intensity among people. Thus, as a means of curbing sibling jealousy, children were taught to turn to their own things and to expect new ones. Adult men were offered consumerism as a preferred alternative to intense romantic love, and the newly touted companionate marriage emphasized shared enjoyment of acquisitions. The act of shopping began to acquire a potential passion of its own, particularly for middle-class women. At an extreme, the passion could turn to kleptomania, in which the intense yearning for goods surpassed both any real economic need and the law itself.\textsuperscript{17} Theft aside, it was now permissible to invest emotional meaning in the act of acquisition and in the objects acquired. American advertising and merchandising carefully stressed ultimate equality of access, and as a result consumerism was not seen as violating democratic standards or directly leading to envy.\textsuperscript{18} This further legitimized an attachment to things that might easily surpass the newly constrained attachments to people. Revealingly, new emotional involvements with pets accompanied the growing interest in things. Surely the vital connection between consumerism and emotional culture helps explain consumerism itself, a dominant phenomenon of twentieth-cen-
tury American life but one whose meaning—as opposed to its utility to its capitalist promoters—has been difficult to penetrate.

Like consumerism, sports also appeared in modern form before the twentieth century but took on additional meanings because of new kinds of emotional needs. Whereas shopping may have served women more fully than men, sports involved men more than women, though gender distinctions were not absolute.

The emergence of new sports emphasis in the nineteenth century formed part of Victorian emotionology. It largely differentiated boys from girls. It helped teach boys not only physical fitness (an interest that girls might also acquire) but also the manly emotional qualities of channeled anger and control of fear. Sports served many other functions as well, including recalling more traditional, preindustrial community solidarity—there is no need to push emotionological explanations too far. But the relationship to Victorian values was obvious, and it was often noted in prescriptive literature about how boys could be trained to be men.19

Victorian-traditional qualities in sports persisted through the twentieth century, a phenomenon that provides one of the real complexities in dealing with the actual incorporation of newer emotional standards. Although boys were taught in early childhood to be emotionally similar to girls, for many decades access to sports was exclusively theirs. As in Victorian times, they were still told that sports allowed men emotionally to prove themselves. In sports activities they were allowed physical contacts and embraces with friends now denied in other settings. They were told to conquer their fear and to deliberately seek aggression. Emotion remained good in sports, and sports were still touted—Victorian style—as providing valuable training in emotion.

Yet because of the larger changes in emotional culture, including the new emotional rules that were urged on men at work in their capacities as middle managers or salesmen, sports integrated less fully with men’s lives than had been the case in the nineteenth century. Sports now provided occasions for nostalgic indulgence that were vital not so much to train men as to help them endure the new emotional rules that corporate manhood entailed. The symbolic functions of sports changed precisely in the decades in which they began to gain vast new popularity. They explicitly became emotional outlets, and this new function often overwhelmed more traditional purposes:
I watched the Steelers lose football games every way you could think of and I never bitched. And I ain't no gambler neither. Never bet a penny on the football game, I just used to go to old Forbes Field every Sunday when the Steelers were home and it just brought out a lot of emotion in me I couldn't get rid of no other way.

Those are men. Giants. And they're down there strugglin' and sweatin' and bleedin' and doin' a little war right there between those little chalk stripes on the grass and I just found out I could whoop and holler my guts out and nobody would think I was nuts. It didn't make no difference to anybody else what I was really hollering about. People around me were all hollering too. I mean, it really helps you, brother, to reach down to your toes and pull out a yell you been keepin' bottled up inside you for Christ knows how long.20

Twentieth-century men watched games that recalled physical skills they had shared or wished to share, but above all they watched games that reflected different emotional rules from those they lived with. They could watch ritualized, in-your-face arguments with referees, open exhilaration, emotional comradeship in victory or loss, courageous play through pain and violent clashes on the playing fields or hockey rinks—they could watch, in sum, Victorian-style intensity writ large. While most of the sports that gained spectator popularity had been regularized in the nineteenth century, through provision of standardized rules and settings, they moved away from stiff-upper-lip amateur sportsmanship toward more emotionality during the twentieth century. They also gained a wider and more emotional audience as a result of new technology and new American needs. American sports crowds remained relatively orderly, but as they shouted, raged, and cavorted, they allowed emotional release and a sense of emotions shared with strangers. Even home audiences could join in loud celebrations or laments in which emotions overflowed normal bounds. The African American crowds that rejoiced over radio broadcasts of Joe Louis bouts in the 1930s were not unique; raucous parties and even solitary shouting attended the steady spread of sports presentations over the airwaves.21

Direct spectatorship also soared. For major league baseball it tripled during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The rise of professional football dates from the 1920s and was thus coincident with the full development of the new emotional culture. Annual rituals like the Army-Navy football game or the major New Year's bowl games were also enshrined in the same period and were followed by a wide array of professional and college tournaments. Not only national leagues but also
local teams, including high school and club performers, provided outlets for emotional crowds. The importance and meaning of sport changed, particularly for spectators, as the emotional ramifications increased along with new media reportage and greater leisure time. The word “fan” gained currency from its inception in the mid-1890s to its solidification in the language by the 1920s. Apparently an American abbreviation of “fanatic,” the word appropriately suggests the kind of intensity now applied to, and found in, the act of sports spectatorship.  

Furthermore, the emotional representations of the players themselves expanded beyond the Victorian version of channeled male passions. By the 1970s and 1980s the open emotionality of athletes reached new levels. Even staid sports like tennis saw a new kind of contentiousness that offended purists but attracted viewers who enjoyed a blend of performance and vivid feelings—even outright immaturity. Players in several sports developed new levels of taunting and new displays of triumph—while men in ordinary life were being enjoined to conceal such sentiments more fully than ever lest they rouse the resentment of others in the workplace, including a growing group of sensitive women. Taunting “trash talk” and dancing celebrations over fallen athletes became commonplace, to the apparent delight of partisan crowds. “The truth of the matter is, spectator sports are more fun now because athletes are willing to let their emotions show. . . . Athletes lead cheers, milking the crowd for emotional support.” And, one might add, crowds themselves gained ever greater levels of release.  

Thus sports gained stature among men as symbolic expressions of emotions now largely excluded from ordinary life—just as jousting tournaments in the late Middle Ages had for a century or more recalled earlier forms of contest. For many players, even in strictly amateur matches, and for the even larger spectator throngs, sports allowed a relaxation of the normal rules of feeling and expression—and almost surely made the rules easier to accept when ordinary life resumed.

For an even wider array of Americans, fiction and media representations, including popular music, came to serve the same function, presenting emotions that were far stronger and less alloyed than their audience could allow themselves to experience in the daily routine—or offering excitement without specific emotional representations. The variety of formats was great, and their service to dominant emotional culture provides only one source of explanation for the overall tenor of Ameri-
can leisure life.\textsuperscript{24} Other family and personal needs, commercial pressures, and technological opportunities must be factored in. Nevertheless, understanding the use of leisure as a form of emotional alternative provides some unifying explanations otherwise lacking. Furthermore, the trend away from portrayals of surrogate emotional intensity toward audience-rousing excitement with less explicitly emotional overtones suggests an evolution that paralleled the growing hold of the culture of constraint in daily middle-class life. Nostalgia for elaborate emotions was still served, but gut-wrenching though not explicitly emotional violence or terror gained ground.

Gothic novels and soap operas, for example, did not provide their largely female audience with Victorian versions of spiritual love; rather, they offered an intense mixture of emotions in which women were represented as passive victims of passions beyond their control. The Gothic motif often had love conquer accomplished women, after which fear predominated as women remained powerless. Harlequin romances moved in the opposite direction, from fear to love, with women becoming somewhat more potent as love began to triumph. Soap operas emphasized the power but also the complexities of love, which ultimately, if briefly, won out over other relationships, including those based on power or money. Here, obviously, the “new love” theme of accommodation and careful planning was turned on its head, for love was deliberately portrayed as blind and compelling. Soap operas might also showcase other intense emotions, including anger. By the 1980s angry people were portrayed as heroes up to 82 percent of the time—again in deliberately, cathartic contradiction to anger standards in the ascending emotional culture. The audience for soap operas and romance novels was by no means exclusively middle class, to be sure, but the release they provided extended to this group as well, from the housewives tuned in to radio pathos in the 1930s to the fashionable audiences for prime-time television soap operas in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{25}

Films offered a variety of emotional messages, including both support for the new culture and surprisingly literal, nostalgic representations of Victorian values. Early on movie stars recognized their role as emotional/sexual idols feeding the fantasy life of an audience pressed by routine and seeking some vicarious alternative to daily emotional constraints. Stephan Stills told a Harvard Business School panel in 1925 that he knew what he meant, as a symbol of masculinity, to the bored,
unchallenged men of his generation.26 Ironically, the increasing regulation of noise and other spontaneous expressions in anonymous movie theaters added to the regulations of twentieth-century life, in contrast to the livelier traditions of vaudeville. But this very repression increased viewer involvement with the emotional meaning presented by the vivid lives on the screen. Emotionally as well as sexually fervent personalities contrasted with the bureaucratic routines of everyday existence—and with the subdued atmosphere of the movie house itself.

In addition to romantic passions, movies, radio, and related fiction developed other revealing emotional styles. One, building particularly on the literature and comic strips offered to adolescent boys, featured the emotionless hero who experienced great excitement while displaying no passion of his own. The Superman comic strip, conceived in 1938, represented a young male fantasy of overwhelming strength and flight—and attendant ability to attract female interest that was completely ignored—unencumbered by emotional complexities. Jerry Siegel, one of the creators, talked of his inspiration: "As a high school student ... I had crushes on several attractive girls who ... didn't know I existed. . . . It occurred to me: What if I had something special going for me, like jumping over a building or throwing cars around or something like that?" Superman's defense of virtue and "the American way" was a Victorian throwback, but his immunity to fear and other emotions made him representative of a new kind of hero appropriate for a culture of greater emotional control. Some of the same qualities, including imperviousness to emotion (leavened occasionally by a certain compassion, but more often by hostility to women), would enter other hero genres, including even the Rambo films of the 1980s.27

Sometimes accompanying the emotion-free hero, another film and fiction motif involved a growing interest in provoking audience terror. From Frankenstein films to teenage exploitation movies and the gratuitous violence of the 1970s and 1980s, shock scenes elicited, as one viewer put it, "an intensity rarely if ever encountered" in ordinary life. Use of stories to elicit fright was not novel, of course. Monsters inhabited the folktales of premodern cultures, and Victorian fiction had offered a terror genre. But the theme escalated in popular American fare after the 1930s and was shorn of some of the more obvious religious, guilt-infested connotations of its predecessors. Along with other fear-provoking experiences, such as the more challenging amusement park
rides and staged "fright nights" on Halloween, terror films provided another interesting contrast to—another catharsis for—the dominant emphases of the new, real-life emotional culture being installed in the same decades. This was fear as pure sensation, not as a call to courage or to other, more complex emotional intensities. It provided what by the 1980s was intriguingly labeled a "rush"—a passing, spontaneous intensity separate from one's normal emotional personality. Except for aficionados of daredevil stunts, escapist terror was experienced passively by people safely ensconced in movie houses or roller-coaster rides. It was a release from the normal rules, not an extension of them, and it was popular for that reason. As with professional sports, emotionally escapist fare sold well, adding a vital ingredient to a consumer culture that in other respects supported a more restrained emotional style.28

In addition to fiction and film, popular music provided its own intensities that also frequently contrasted with more explicit emotionality. An emotional singing genre persisted, particularly in the "country" movement, that lamented the throes of love and jealousy and celebrated manly courage; again, leisure outlets appealed to diverse tastes. More interesting, however, was the music that was either purely instrumental or whose lyrics carried little overt message; this music drove home an intense beat and, aided by new technologies, featured increasing physical volume. Aspects of jazz, and even more of rock and roll, celebrated intensity with no explicit emotional strings, and the addictive popularity of the new styles suggested an audience search for leisure forms that could overwhelm, that were exciting but did not require elaborate emotional expression. In some instances by the 1960s, deliberately anti-establishment lyrics expressing raging cynicism about love and the sweeter emotional snares added passionate words to the overwhelming sound. Hostility, like terror, may have served as an emotional surrogate. As in sports, music audiences screamed and jumped, turning spectatorship into an emotion-draining crowd activity. As in sports also, the intense musical performers often featured racial minorities whose presumed freedom from constraint provided symbolic outlet for a middle-class, though in this case also largely youthful, audience.29

Sports, terror films, amusement parks, rock music, sex (particularly with the growing emphasis on orgasm)—all had the capacity temporarily to block out other impulses and provide a moment of exhilaration. All might cancel out rational restraint, usually without imperiling emo-
tional control once the moment had passed or the leisure setting had been abandoned. The contrast between the quest for excitement, usually vicarious, and the growing hostility to emotional intensity offered no real contradiction. The two movements fed each other, as cathartic cultures have always done. The result, nevertheless, was a fascinating duality in many American lives, between the bland emotions lived and the soaring excitement witnessed and perhaps shared with roaring crowds. It was also a testimony to the real power of the emotional culture, which was strong enough to force these channels of release. For the theme of symbolic alternative ran through an array of leisure representations from the 1920s onward, from childhood fright fare through the sports thrills that comforted graying middle-aged men. The passivity of much American leisure—the growth of spectatorship, culminating with the ascendency of television—was consistent with the emotional needs that bore on entertainment. People wanted more to witness emotion than to experience it; removal from participation, except for an anonymous shout or two, was precisely the point, for active participation would contravene the dominant emotional rules. Of course passivity resulted from other factors too, including available technology and commercial pressure; but it served its audience, who wanted forms of release that were quite separate from reality.

Conclusion

The driving need for surrogate emotional outlets fed a series of developments in American leisure during the twentieth century. It translated general pressures into specific leisure forms, rivaling and perhaps surpassing the importance of commercial manipulation or contact with the lower classes. A quest for excitement—usually vicarious—created new interests for middle-class Americans, contrasting markedly with the Victorian emphasis on the desirability of calm havens. Twentieth-century leisure placed a premium on “action,” as in the Gamblers’ World banner, “For the Individual Who Enjoys Action,” or the ever-renewed action-adventure category of police movies and violent television shows. From the popularity of rock stars to that of the mean-spirited mockers on hate-radio shows in the 1980s, leisure forms increasingly stressed bombastic style over content, providing a thrill without emotional involvement.30
The importance of emotional release through leisure highlighted the role of actors in twentieth-century American culture. Deft at taking on others' emotions without venturing their own, actors represented emotional vigor and thus provided contrast with normal constraint. In the new emotional culture, the idea of acting also appealed to the strong impulse to conceal. Indeed, acting was built into normal emotional interchange.  

Emotional release also depended heavily on strangers, in complex ways. Increasing reliance on sports and entertainment for emotional release provided new opportunities for cultural "otherness." The stereotyped roles for actors of Mediterranean origin as steamy lovers or for African Americans as exuberant, emotionally spontaneous athletes and musicians contributed to the rise of these groups in the world of emotional symbolism—a rise that could easily eclipse their gains in many other spheres. Strangers in this sense performed a new emotional service for the middle-class mainstream. Strangers of another kind also provided a setting for more direct emotional release; anonymous crowds allowed demonstrations of anger or exhilaration that many people would deny themselves in other contexts. Max Weber's dictum that modern societies imposed uniform rules for acquaintances and strangers alike was not true for Victorian society, given the domestic-public division, and it was even less true for the twentieth century. Emotional control applied to acquaintances and, in most respects, the family, but greater intensity might be ventured, fleetingly, among strangers. This standard applied to other encounters with strangers aside from that of anonymous crowds. For example, fingered or shouted displays of rage while driving were surely intensified by the strains of commuting, but they also served as a more general release that often differed sharply from middle-class emotional behavior in other settings.

Growing use of vicarious outlets also called additional emotions into play. Media and sports could represent intense grief, anger, sadness, or fear. Nostalgia for Victorian emotions featured strongly in fiction and film, differentiating this emotion in the twentieth century from Victorian reminiscence of the real or imagined physical qualities of bucolic scenes. Further, surrogate emotional attachment to the acquisition of things opened the way to greater envy as an intense emotion appropriate for a consumer society. Envy was not officially countenanced; indeed, it came under the same strictures against intensity as did the other major emo-
tions, which was one reason why Americans began to call it "jealousy" and to attach the same sense of opprobrium or embarrassment to it.\textsuperscript{33} Envy was an immature emotion that should at least be veiled. American advertising (unlike European) usually avoided explicit appeals to envy, preferring the democracy-of-buying-opportunity approach instead. Nevertheless, though envy has not been well studied, the emotion almost certainly found new outlets. Attachment to things included attention to one's neighbor's things—keeping up with the Joneses, in the popular midcentury phrase—and this invited implicit envy as a partial substitute for other kinds of emotional fervor. At the same time, however, envy was characteristically less intense than more reproved emotions such as jealousy.\textsuperscript{34} Again, escapism remained compatible with real-life anti-intensity.

On yet another front, shock entertainment of the sort purveyed in teenage exploitation films by the 1960s appealed to a growing fascination with disgust that was signaled by the rising use of the word "gross" to designate a revulsion that was not however entirely unpleasant. Disgust is another emotional area that invites exploration in the history of twentieth-century passions.\textsuperscript{35} Attraction-repulsion reactions to vicarious objects of disgust—gigantic insects, or slime, or simulated gore—often combined with vicarious fear. Finally, sports and some media portrayals also catered to exhilaration at a time when direct displays of exhilaration on the strength of one's own accomplishments were increasingly discouraged as vain and unsocial. By invoking additional emotions—again, usually vicariously—the growing role of outlets multiplied their functions in the realm of feelings without, however, directly contradicting the basic anti-intensity norms in daily life.

How well the outlets served is of course questionable. Twentieth-century emotionology raises fascinating questions about the extent to which emotions can be transferred to different and less direct settings. It is incontestable, however, that the transfer was attempted, and that it generated a pervasive new impulse in the shaping of American leisure life.

Vicariousness, however, was not the only innovation as the new leisure culture responded to twentieth-century emotionology. A strong movement to substitute sensation for emotion (at least, emotion as defined in Victorian terms) also emerged. Instead of cognitive musings on the courageous conquest of fear, films, amplified music, and amuse-
ment parks called on an ability to enjoy, or survive, brief bombardments of shock and surprise. As with the growing intrusion of sexuality on what had been emotional ground, the emphasis on sensation introduced greater physicality to the arenas where indulgence contrasted with normal restraints.

The need for representations of a different, more vivid, and more sensational set of emotional standards to contrast with the new constrained normalcy created a dual middle-class culture not unlike the more famous two cultures that emerged in contemporary intellectual life. To be sure, the American middle class did not directly embrace all the fancies of modern art, which in turn continued, often deliberately, to defy bourgeois taste in a battle that had begun in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the alternatives that modern artists threw up against scientific and social-scientific rationalism emphasized some of the same spontaneity and excitement that the middle class sought in spectatorship. The subdued restraint of actual emotional life was balanced out by the exuberance of professional athletes or rock stars, just as science was challenged by the efforts of antirepresentational artists to portray the irregularities of a world gone mad. Unlike the artists, the bulk of the middle class held back from direct participation in its alternative emotional world, preferring to pay entertainers (handsomely) to act it out; but the middle class did not commit fully to a single reality.