Two issues inevitably arise from analyzing recent changes in emotional culture. Neither permits a definitive answer in the context of this study, but both warrant comment before we return to the more definitive findings for a real, if brief, conclusion. The first issue involves the relationship between the standards established between 1920 and 1950, with expanding impact into the 1970s, and more recent trends: Are we operating within the same basic framework, or has some other major shift intervened? The second issue involves some editorializing: Were the emotional characteristics of twentieth-century middle-class America good or bad in relation to Victorian or other precedents? Few comments on shifts in national traits can avoid some value judgments, and it is better directly to admit as much than to mislead by implicitly claiming objectivity.

Present and Recent Past

The new emotional culture that replaced Victorianism was well established by 1950, with consequences that gained ground, for the most part, at least through the 1970s—as in the case of law. As for the past decade or so, we have no reliable models to suggest how often significant, directional changes in emotional culture ought to be anticipated. We know that no formulation lasts forever, and we know that very
frequent, once-a-decade or even once-a-generation shifts do not normally occur, despite contemporary impressions of great change. For example, childrearing fads oscillated back and forth between permissiveness and strictness from 1900 to 1950, but these short-term shifts did not undo the more fundamental framework in which child socialization was being transformed toward regulation of emotional intensity and preparation for goals in school and corporate work. Even the upheavals of the 1960s, so strikingly iconoclastic at the time, yielded only modest durable changes in American culture; indeed, in certain respects, as we have seen in connection with the discomfort over anger and jealousy, they actually confirmed mainstream standards.¹

Thus we know that directional changes occur fairly rarely (witness the long duration of essentially Victorian standards, with some slight modifications in the 1840s that then lasted into the twentieth century). We know that short-term deviations, though sometimes widely touted by contemporary media eager to show how everything is changing around us, do not necessarily deflect the more important standards. But we do not know the exact duration of an emotionology. Therefore, perhaps the most honest way to deal with the problem of contemporary standards would be to stress lack of perspective and let it go at that. Certainly, I do not wish to join those historians who establish a pattern in the past and then leap to the present to assert continuities or stark contrasts without noting the need for serious examination of intervening developments. Yet our story takes us so close to the present that some straws in the wind might be swatted at.

There have certainly been some modifications in the culture that began to take shape seventy years ago. These modifications, along with a media-fed propensity to assume that we have just witnessed a particularly sharp rupture with our past a couple of minutes ago, might lead some to make a case for a new, "postmodern" period different from the framework that operated until recently. Let us briefly examine some of these modifications.

Beginning in the 1960s, concerns about the limitations of "modern" grief standards began to circulate, spearheaded by gurus like Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. As death and dying courses proliferated for a time on college campuses, it became fashionable to assert that contemporary Americans had lost the ability to die well or to mourn well. Much of the criticism was directed at doctors and hospitals wedded to a death-
fighting stance, but grief came in for comment as well. According to some experts, contemporary society, having removed death from home and family and become focused on the shallow joys of work and material acquisition, had shunted grief, not only damaging the process of dying but also leading to severe psychological stress among those left behind, perhaps even causing unnecessary depression and even suicide. New movements like the creation of hospices attempted to reintegrate the family with death, allowing more “natural” grief in the process. Therapists began to rethink their penchant for damping down grief, wondering if the emotion should not be encouraged instead. There was no full revolution in standards, and indeed a steady increase in the use of cremation in the United States reflected a continued wish to handle death in an emotionally unobtrusive fashion. But there is no question, either, that grief had been turned into a problem case in which the overall impulse against emotional intensity might have to be rethought, and was being rethought in some quarters.2

To some observers by the late 1980s, Americans were becoming too free in expressing their anger. Unpleasant encounters with rude sales clerks and hostile strangers—including highway drivers—fed the impression that emotional controls were breaking down. Carole Tavris wrote a popular book on this subject, and her views were echoed in a number of editorials. Apparently growing rates of violence, including family abuse, seemed to support the notion that anger was breaking out of its previous bounds. Anger seemed to be reintroduced into the political arena with the rise of feminism in the 1970s and then other ardent protest movements organized around issues such as abortion or gay rights. Here were groups that made no bones about their grievances and their right, even their responsibility, to be deeply angry at their opponents—be they men, intolerant heterosexuals, or prochoice advocates.3

Impressions of new outpourings of anger deserve serious assessment. Obviously, not all Americans agreed on standards, and unquestionably some new movements consciously strove to modify blanket constraints. At the same time, the cautions against anger—such as the editorials on civilized people’s responsibility to remove anger from public exchange—reinforced the larger anti-intensity culture. Further, some of the scare stories—about family abuse, for example—correctly identified problems but tended to exaggerate their incidence or at least their novelty.
Increases were claimed without full evidence, and some kinds of abuse were cited as frequent that were in fact quite rare (or, in not a few instances, completely fabricated). These dramatic new cautionary tales constituted a means to gain additional support for constraints on anger and aggression, reinforcing middle-class anger standards. It is not clear that the standards themselves were being modified.4

By the late 1980s a few observers began to talk of some positive uses for jealousy. With growing emphasis on sexual fidelity under the impact of AIDS and persistent concern about family stability, a few popular magazine articles began to take a second look at this “negative” emotion, arguing that a bit of jealousy might be socially useful and that an individual need not feel hopelessly guilty upon discovering some jealousy in his or her bosom.5 As for guilt itself, scattered comment bemoaned its decline in what seemed to be an amoral, corrupt society during the 1980s.

Symbols of intensity also crept into daily life through the back door of the new leisure outlets. Signs of exhilaration—the clenched fist and dramatic exclamation—used for sports successes like a tennis win or a football touchdown spread into television shows, where they applied to sexual triumphs or simply to getting a good grade on a test. From television these signs migrated into “real life,” with young middle-class Americans using these gestures to express great joy over often modest accomplishments. Whether this interesting interpenetration of leisure culture with daily emotional life had much meaning—in particular whether it indicated some significant new acknowledgement of intensity rather than a labored stab in that direction—is debatable.

Changes in gender roles based on the growing movement of women into the labor force generated increasing discussion of emotion in the 1970s and 1980s. Feminists and male liberationists tried to put additional pressure on middle-class men to restrain anger and aggressiveness and to display greater empathy and affection. Women were called upon to express more assertiveness—as carefully distinguished from anger—and to moderate any impulse toward self-sacrificing love. Some middle-class men became more active as fathers, and researchers busily discovered that men could nurture children as well as mothers could. Few men, however, attempted to rival women in child care, and in general, given the declining per capita birthrate, emotional attention to children probably declined. These important developments affected emotional stan-
standards but did not clearly redefine them in fundamental ways, except insofar as they pressed further in the direction of greater gender uniformity, a trend that had been established a half-century before. Men’s ongoing complaint that women were too emotional also reflected an earlier trend that continued to complicate not only relations between the sexes but also the implementation of the basic emotional standards.6

A number of indicators suggested a reversal of the trend toward homogenization that had been active in emotional culture and other areas between the 1920s and the 1950s. Americans became more diverse in terms of class and ethnic divisions. Some of the trends underlying the new diversification patterns were the rapid growth of immigration, largely from non-European sources; the increasing assertiveness of African Americans; and the emergence of new economic divisions between the broad middle class and the unskilled as the economy continued to move away from a manufacturing base. By the 1980s, of course, diversity itself was being celebrated as a major political and educational goal. But even before this point reading materials, including popular magazines, moved away from attempts to feed on growing consensus toward representation of more specialized interests. Diet, which had become more uniform, now splintered into a growing variety of taste groups. Some of this diversification inevitably affected the middle class itself, creating opportunities for certain groups to distance themselves from mainstream standards—as in the commune-based youth movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. More important was the inescapable fact that emotional habits still dear to the middle class did not describe some other categories in American society, some of whom were more obviously angry, more prone to open grief, or in other ways divergent from the anti-intensity norms still embraced, in the main, by the middle class itself.7

Modifications of the anti-intensity standards—increasing disagreement in groups outside the middle class and occasionally amid groups within it—have clearly added some new complexity to the twentieth-century framework during the past decade or so. Fundamental change, however, has probably not yet occurred and may not even be foreshadowed by the developments outlined above. The principal causes that generated the anti-intensity emotionology in the first place continue to operate: the requirements of a corporate, service-oriented economy and management structure; small family size, with emphasis on leisure and
sexual compatibility between spouses; consumerism; and anxiety about hidden forces within the body that might be disturbed by emotional excess. Reliance on key outlets for release from emotional constraint, particularly through leisure, have if anything accelerated. And the American middle class is still in a relatively early phase of assimilation of the new culture; it would be unusual to see a replacement model taking definite shape just forty years after the culture reached full articulation.

Furthermore, there is considerable evidence of continuity from the established framework. During the 1960s and 1970s the greeting card industry that had grown up around Victorian emotional sentiments in the nineteenth century began to diversify. Victorian-style emotions still figured prominently, now more comfortably purchased commercially than written directly. But a new genre appeared—the humorous, somewhat mocking card that so clearly expressed a common discomfort with too much intense emotion. Jokes, for many trendy buyers, were more appropriate than mushy sentimentality on occasions such as Valentine’s Day. Joke cards themselves evolved. They became increasingly accessible, and by the 1990s they increasingly emphasized sexual innuendo and prowess—another suggestion that combinations first established in the 1920s are still alive and well.

The ongoing decline of Victorian-style love has already been noted. Teenage dating and adult vocabulary about relationships continued to change from the 1970s onward, and a series of popular films about murderous romantic obsessions, in which women (particularly) became fatally emotionally attracted by passing romances, drove home the point that intensity might be dangerous.

Attacks on intense anger persisted. Popularized articles repeated most of the old formulas, in which anger builds up blood pressure and speeds up heartbeat, “and you become a pressure cooker waiting to explode.” Suppression of anger was bad, but having anger in the first place was in many ways even worse. To be sure, popularizers acknowledged that anger might exist; as with grief, though to lesser degree, recognition of some real problems attached to restraint may have increased. But while release might be essential, it should not burden relations with others; here, the anti-intensity standards remained in force. People were advised to allow a cooling-off period—“I don’t want to argue with you at this time, because I’m not going to be rational”—and then to solve the problem calmly. Or they should throw a tantrum when no one else is
around—"punch the sofa pillows and yell or shake your fists and jump up and down." And if all else failed, and there was still anger that could not be harmlessly expressed, they should "seek professional help."  

Anti-anger campaigns continue to grace corporate programs. In the early 1990s the Total Quality Management movement swept through American businesses and even academic sanctuaries. Borrowed from Japan, it had originally been sketched by American psychologists soon after World War II. Not surprisingly, it actively furthers the agenda of emotional restraint, urging that emotions play a role at work only insofar as they promote loyalty and motivation (does the organization's "vision" provide a "strong EMOTIONAL PULLING FORCE?"). Otherwise, along with detailed procedures for running meetings and coordinating projects, the TQM movement stresses emotional pruning as one of its three major goals. "Interactive skills" training involves teaching workers and managers labels for supportive behaviors that will avoid provoking others and thus disrupting contacts along with strongly negative terms for various types of emotional interference. Defensive or attacking stances that involve strong emotions are taboo: "Defending/Attacking behavior is seen as making personal attacks, moving away from issues, and becoming emotional." "Temper become frayed. These spirals are easy to start but hard to stop." "These behaviors usually involve value judgments and contain emotional overtones." Elaborate, if somewhat childish, exercises take trainees through situations in which they are supposed to apply the correct tag and the correct judgment. Retraining is considered necessary when emotionality has not been properly noted or, even worse, has actually been approved.

The TQM movement is interesting in three respects. First, in its emotions component it literally repeats hosts of training attempts of the sort first launched in the late 1920s. Second, to the extent that it innovates, it extends the assumptions of general emotional control. Whereas the first wave of corporate guidance taught people to control their own emotions but to be prepared to deal with other people's, TQM, like the T-groups in the 1960s, assume that everyone should share responsibility. Once properly trained, everyone should be able to avoid intense feelings, though it might be necessary to deliver an occasional clucking reminder that colleague X seems to be a bit "attacking." Furthermore, high-level executives are asked to join others in this emotional constraint program, though some still hold out for greater personal latitude while urging
their subordinates to toe the line. Finally, the sheer popularity of TQM, though based on several factors, reveals the ongoing currency of anti-intensity assumptions. Along with some better problem-solving skills and more focused committee meetings, keeping rationality at the forefront will make all well with the American economy. Correspondingly, an effort to keep work criteria central to the larger emotionology also persisted.

On another front, graders began to be urged to keep emotion out of their assessments of students' work. Not only anger but even annoyance was not to sully marginal comments on an essay, for example, no matter how stupid the error in usage or how often repeated. This directive, reflecting the wider effort to make education friendly, not only extended the emotional control theme to graders. It also assumed that students had internalized the new standards, such that the intrusion of any but the most supportive emotions would put them off—in contrast to earlier periods when teacher anger, however unpleasant, could be motivational.9

A final case for continuity arises from the movements to encourage more active fathering that were in force by the 1980s. These movements were only partly novel, for in fact they built on the greater approval of fathers that had developed from the 1920s onward. Fathers were urged to express more supportive emotions as part of their new role in child care, but no one expected or recommended great emotional intensity. Fathers could be careful monitors and good friends to their children—the fathers-as-pals approach, launched in the 1920s, was given greater latitude—and affection for children remained essential, but the all-out devotion of the ideal Victorian mother receded ever further from memory.

American language continued to reflect incorporation of a pleasant but nonintense emotionality. "Niceness" became a watchword for sales clerks and others in casual contact. "Have a nice day" struck many foreigners—even neighboring Canadians—as a remarkably insincere phrase. At the same time, though, they noted that Americans did seem "nice," an attribute that includes unusual discomfort with emotional outbursts on the part of those raised in different cultures where displays of temper might be more readily accepted. In American culture, "nice" did have meaning—it connoted a genuine effort to be agreeably dis-
posed but not deeply emotionally involved while expecting pleasant predictability from others.

Because we are so close to recent developments, it is obviously easy to exaggerate continuity or change. A fuller study, and more time in which to evaluate some of the modifications that clearly have entered in, like the new approach to grief, might yield conclusions different from those sketched here. Tentatively, however, a verdict can be offered: key trends have persisted, gaining new expressions in several areas, and alterations have largely operated within the established framework. Even some of the warning signals, like the periodic jeremiads about growing anger and abuse, have served in fact to reinforce the basic norms of restraint within the middle class rather than to herald some new emotional anarchy. Whatever the future might hold, at the end of the twentieth century middle-class Americans continue to value cool—as the ever-ascending popularity of the word itself suggests.

Progress or Deterioration?

Histories that deal with changes in human characteristics or intimate activities almost invariably raise questions about the quality of the changes. Were they good or bad? Should we somehow work for a restoration of past values instead of debased modern currency? My principal purpose in evoking this inescapable topic is twofold. First, I find it difficult to offer firm judgments in this area, not so much because I recognize that the objectivity of this book’s historical findings is disputable as because tastes vary, and one person’s gains may be another’s loss. Second, it is vital, whatever tastes are involved, to stress complexity; twentieth-century standards were not necessarily worse than their Victorian counterparts, but rather offered a different pattern of advantages and disadvantages.

A few observers have argued for progress, and many of the early proponents of the new standards certainly thought they were advancing clearly over the confusions of their predecessors. They believed that restraint of intensity would produce less violence, better personal adjustment (recall the good results anticipated from reducing smothering mothering), better relationships on the job, and so on. Ex post facto praise for the new standards has particularly focused on the benefits of
liberation and candor. Cas Wouters thus writes of American pilots in the Gulf War who spoke freely of their fears before undertaking bombing missions, correctly noting that this open venting of emotion would have seemed unmanly in the Victorian code. Presumably, mental health is better served by this verbal openness, which does not diminish soldiers’ ability to drop bombs on hapless Iraqis. In the 1970s several scholars praised the new liberation from jealousy, arguing that less possessive love freed people for more genuine relationships and better sex.

The problem with these arguments is that they involve potential misuse of the idea of liberation, at least in the U.S. context. As we have seen, in many ways constraint actually increased. Thus, for example, freedom from jealousy was great for some people, who felt little of the emotion themselves and enjoyed promiscuity or the prospect of it, but it was hell on wheels for those who did experience the emotion but were urged to deny its validity. Furthermore, although greater verbal openness might well be a gain, in certain cases, as with grief, even this opportunity declined in comparison with Victorian usage.\(^{10}\)

The more common tone adopted in discussions of the decline of Victorianism and the rise of a different, twentieth-century personality is one of lament. David Riesman’s contrast between inner-directed, highly motivated nineteenth-century types and other-directed, peer-influenced, less achieving contemporaries, though carefully balanced, inclined strongly to a sense of loss. This sense is clearer still in Christopher Lasch’s update on this account, which contrasts highly motivated if somewhat neurotic nineteenth-century Americans with indulgent, narcissistic, standardless contemporaries, open to the whims of outside experts and consumer gurus. According to Lasch, things were better back then: kids were given clear standards, parents had confidence in their values, people worked harder and with more sense of meaning, and so on. Not coincidentally, Professor Lasch was invited to converse with former President Carter during the latter’s crisis-of-values phase at the end of the 1970s, though by that point Americans generally were not interested in learning about how they had jumped the moral rails. Other sweeping assessments have chimed in, some quite recently. Robert Bellah’s ambitious inquiry into the tension between family cohesion and individualism shows that the latter is clearly gaining and offers some pessimistic judgments about the results for the larger society, though Bellah does acknowledge some positive potential for the family. Barrington Moore
laments the decline of the basis for moral outrage, which has led to a decline of really challenging social protest that might in turn keep the wielders of power at least partially honest. Charles Sykes zeroes in on the decline of guilt and the associated collapse of a sense of personal responsibility; individuals have become insatiable, in his view, and their reluctance to experience intense guilt leads them constantly to blame others and to seek redress from the outside world. Even Warren Susman’s heralded contrast between nineteenth-century emphasis on character and twentieth-century emphasis on personality seems to denigrate the more recent patterns, showing personality to be more manipulative, more shallow than the Victorian character that, as we have shown, was meant to develop around the management of intense emotions.11

Evaluations of this sort do not, of course, pick up all the facets of emotional change. Sykes, for example, may overdo rampant individualism by failing to note the number of constraints, both bureaucratic and emotional, under which modern Americans labor. Lasch’s claim of rising narcissism has not been widely accepted as an empirical statement, though it seemed challenging for a time. But the studies of American character that contrast it with the Victorian past do overlap with the findings of the present study of emotional standards, and their uniform pessimism might certainly apply to my findings as well.

It is easy to join the distinguished scholars who have already pointed out the drawbacks to twentieth-century emotionology. Because of our own nostalgia for aspects of Victorianism, itself a part of contemporary emotional culture, it is hard to avoid some sense of things gone awry. The very process of change causes problems; adjustment of standards can be confusing, even if the new goals are just as acceptable as the previous goals had been to the prior culture. Men, for example, who faced new pressures to curb anger at work, might find the transition difficult, even despite the symbolic outlets provided through sports. The same applies to women denied such easy claims to the powers of intense motherlove. Too much challenge to emotional standards can cause anxiety in itself, and it is possible that this result has been part of the twentieth-century condition for the American middle class.12

Beyond the difficulties of transition, the new culture had some unquestionable drawbacks. It did place important constraints on certain types of emotion, causing individuals to feel guilty when they experienced impulses such as jealousy. Inability to express these impulses
might actually have heightened anger or frustration even as direct outlets for anger and frustration declined. This was not of course a brand-new problem: Victorianism had its strict rules as well, particularly for women, but the level of constraint did rise after 1920 for the middle class overall. Noting another, related conflict between rules and impulses, Hochschild has described the extent to which work-based requirements for emotional suppression could confuse reactions off the job as well.13

The drawbacks of twentieth-century emotionology were not simply personal. They also affected interpersonal relationships and the society as a whole. Intense bonds, particularly in friendship, were harder to maintain; along with other factors, such as changes in residential patterns, this result of the new emotional culture yielded new potential for a sense of loneliness. On the societal level, the emotional basis for middle-class protest, or at least acknowledgment of the validity of intense grievance, eroded to some extent even as the occupational structure became increasingly middle class; this could be judged a significant deterioration in American political life. Even protest movements that did surface seemed to lack full sustaining power, in part perhaps because their middle-class participants grew embarrassed about their own anger. This is a plausible ingredient (among others) in the collapse of student rebellion in 1973 (interestingly, a collapse much more complete than occurred in Europe) and perhaps in the oscillations of feminism. More generally, the new culture encouraged a certain amount of passivity, with the strong reliance on acting out by means of watching others perform, the use of embarrassment to enforce careful rules on intensity, and the emphasis on fatigue as a legitimate reason to pull away from normal emotional performance. It was safer to be tired than to be emotionally upset, and the sequence of terms generated to describe the need to withdraw—"stressed out," "burned out"—along with probable new emphasis on sadness as a means of pulling back, highlighted the cautious aspects of the new emotional culture.14

The impact of twentieth-century emotionology on families is harder to pin down. Obviously, overt family instability increased during the decades in which the new rules were installed. Less intense emotional commitments may have played some role in this complex process. According to polling data, appreciation for children declined, at least between the 1950s and the 1970s, and greater impatience with immature
emotional outbursts may well have entered into this important process. On the other hand, reported satisfaction with spouses increased, and men's satisfaction with marriage remained high and even grew at points, which might mean that, for some key groups, a focus on a less emotionally intense but companionate marriage paid off.15

Furthermore, there were some definite advantages to the new culture. Differential gender standards declined despite persistent beliefs about love or anger that reflected older patterns. This change facilitated new kinds of feminist arguments on behalf of greater equality, though a tension remained between claiming equality on the basis of shared human worth and emphasizing distinctive feminine virtues. As we have seen, less rigid emotional differentiation between the sexes may have heightened contentiousness, providing men and women with new ways to complain about each other's interpretation of the new rules. But it is possible to argue that, on the whole, greater equality was served. By the same token, some of the specific pressures of Victorianism on women lessened, and with this came a decline of tensions that had resulted in disproportionate female hysteria.

New sexual interactions gained from the twentieth-century rules on jealousy, though these can be variously evaluated. Some men may have benefited from less rigid rules about masculine intensities; the possibility of admitting fear rather than claiming courage, of relying on professionals to act out some of the more demanding masculine rituals, and of emphasizing charm over channeled anger surely offered relief to many men. The fact that certain men's groups demanded even greater changes by the 1970s may have reflected some of the flexibility already acquired through the replacement of Victorian stereotypes; the earlier improvements may have made it possible to envisage more improvements in the same direction. Even the new rules on grief may have pleased some people, freeing them from elaborate ceremony and a kind of compulsory emotional routine. While "liberation" is the wrong word for a new pattern of constraint, there were some emancipating qualities for many individuals.

The greatest potential gains from the new emotionology involved relationships with other people. Despite variety and complexity, many workers did report fewer emotional hassles with supervisors by the 1940s and 1950s. The pressures to offer smiling courtesy to customers—the impersonal-but-friendly motif—may have improved the experience
of shopping. As McDonald's and other chains spread in the 1980s, efforts by American companies to teach Russian employees to treat customers pleasantly highlighted U.S. standards and suggested some ways in which they might yield a more pleasant daily existence (always depending on one's value system, to be sure, and recognizing that some strain for workers was attached). It seemed "nicer" to be a customer in the United States than in Russia. Not everyone lived up to the new rules, and the need for outlets prompted some rough edges, but it is not fatuous to claim measurable improvements. In general, as many sociologists have argued, emotional inequality decreased in the twentieth century despite some hesitations in the upper reaches of management. Emotional abuse of subordinates probably declined and certainly could be more readily identified and complained about.\(^\text{16}\)

The main point is not to argue a clear case of progress or deterioration but to stress the impossibility of such a case against those who have exhibited undue optimism and the even greater number who have greeted twentieth-century emotionology with pessimism. The new culture functioned, and its strengths and weaknesses were simply different from those that had prevailed in Victorian culture. Some emotional cultures, to be sure, might be rated less adequate than average; a few societies that seem to encourage high levels of anger, with resultant interpersonal conflict, may not work too well.\(^\text{17}\) But the labeling game is risky, and certainly the balance sheet of twentieth-century emotionology defies easy bottom lines.

There was definitely a somewhat manipulative quality about contemporary emotional culture that might be noted without slipping back into the change-as-deterioration syndrome. Particularly in the past few decades in the United States, when the basic constraints have persisted along with a vocabulary of therapeutic mental health, some misleading signals have been offered. Middle-class people have been treated to a rhetoric of impulse and spontaneity while being told simultaneously to keep emotions damped down, to avoid public displays or impingements on others. The effect can be an image of freedom, particularly when contrasted with simplistic images of past repression, that is belied by the ongoing injunctions against real intensity. Thus new concern about grief does not yet affect actual rituals of mourning, and anger can be described, but only calmly or privately, and it should not be indulged. We have not, in sum, been treated to many honest appraisals of our actual
emotional values, which is one reason for tracing the origins and causes of these values, as this book has done.

Whether or not better understanding will produce better personal or social results is anyone's guess, but I have a bias in favor of understanding. It is also important to remember not only that contemporary emotional culture has real advantages but also that any society imposes restraints on impulse. A problem with some pessimistic descriptions of the twentieth century is that they suffer from the false impression that social controls are new and evil inventions; such controls have always existed in some form, and ours may not be the worst imaginable.

One point seems quite clear. The causes of the emotional standards that replaced Victorianism were neither frivolous nor short lived. Thus there is no prospect of recapturing Victorianism whole, even if to do so were desirable. Nostalgia may usefully highlight some current shortcomings, but it may also be a misleading guide. We may be able to modify the emotional culture so solidly established a half-century ago; someday, also, Americans will surely move to another framework. With better understanding of what our rules really are, some individuals may choose to carve out slightly richer options. But we have been dealt a powerful cultural hand, and indications are that most middle-class Americans are still playing it.