

REMEMBERING MY FATHER

An Intellectual Portrait of "The Man Who Saved Marriages"

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A few months ago I drove down Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, past the building not too far from Hollywood and Vine that once housed my father's American Institute of Family Relations. This used to be one of the spiffy areas of Hollywood, and I remember how proud he and my mother were when the building was purchased and renovated after World War II; he was able to move his Institute--the oldest and for nearly half a century the largest family counseling organization in the nation--out from an office in the center of downtown Los Angeles where he had founded it in 1930. My father spent the rest of his working life in this building; he thought of it as his international headquarters. In the late 1940s, before I went East to college, I spent many a Saturday there helping him, usually stuffing envelopes and licking stamps with the clerical staff.

In returning to Hollywood I wasn't sure what to expect. My father died in 1979 at the age of 90. He had relinquished the reins of the Institute a few years before that, after reluctantly acknowledging his failing memory, and spent his last year in a nursing home near one of my older brothers in Florida. After his death, realizing that the area was turning seedy, the new managers had moved the Institute in the early 1980s out to the North Hollywood-San Fernando Valley area. Later, struggling to survive, it was merged with another counselling organization. Last I heard it had vanished from the American scene.

The building was still there--itself a surprise in southern California, the obsolescence capital of the world. It now houses something called the Annex of the American Radio Network. But most of the old neighborhood was gone, having become an area of fast food joints, run-down and boarded-up stores, the homeless, and prostitutes. The only tie to the past could be found on the side of the building where, although the actual letters had long since been taken down, I could see embossed on the stucco the faint image "The American Institute of Family Relations." I was reminded of how, in my father's day, the next door neighbor had put up a billboard on his property that completely covered up the Institute sign. He claimed that it was his "constitutional property right" (another southern California affectation), and apparently it was--at least my father was never able to get rid of the billboard. Now, of course, with nothing to obstruct, the billboard was gone.

It is not surprising that the Institute, except by a few years, failed to outlive its founder. In a 1960 article in *Your Life* entitled "Paul Popenoe--Marriage Mender," the author wrote: "a wise man once said, "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man..and Dr. Paul Popenoe..is indeed a man with a lengthened shadow." The converse of this is, when the man goes, so goes the shadow, no matter how lengthened it is. This certainly happened in the Institute's case. But what has puzzled me is how fast my father's name passed into oblivion. Today, for example, the person once generally regarded as having founded and popularized marriage counseling in America is all but forgotten in the professional field of marriage and family relations.

Although I fully recognize that a man's stature may be greatest in his son's eyes, I always thought of my father as a great man. At the peak of his career, in the 1950s and early 1960s, Paul Popenoe was probably the best known "family relations" expert in the nation. In addition to running the Institute he had a nationally syndicated daily newspaper column, "Your Family and You," was host of a popular "unrehearsed and unscripted" television program titled "Divorce Hearing" in which he counselled real-life clients, and was a regular guest on the Art Linkletter "House Party" and other radio and TV shows. He had lectured at over 200 colleges and universities and was the author of some seventeen books and hundreds of articles, both scientific and popular. He is perhaps best remembered for the *Ladies Home Journal* advice column "Can This Marriage be Saved?," which he developed in 1953 with the writer Dorothy Cameron Disney and which, for its first few decades, carried his introduction and picture and was based on actual files from the Institute. Still running, the column is currently billed as "the most popular, most enduring women's magazine feature in the world." In 1960, the *Ladies Home Journal* carried a feature article on my father entitled "The Man Who Saves Marriages." At least in southern California, which is all I knew about, he had become a celebrity through frequent TV appearances. One could seldom go into a restaurant, for example, without people recognizing and coming up to him.

Paul Popenoe's television and radio popularity was no doubt generated by his strong and unique personality. A highly learned, even brilliant man, who was well versed in the classics and knew eight languages, he possessed a fabulous memory, a sharp, ever-present wit, and a down-to-earth manner that gave him a compelling presence in public. The author of "The Man Who Saves Marriages" described him: "a fascinating conversationalist, he peppers his words with the spice of funny anecdotes, endless statistics and pertinent quotations from the Bible and Shakespeare...he has a dry, crisp, staccato way of talking and a wide smile both bashful and kind." A friend of fifty years once said of him, "the most successful man I know with the least self-conceit," and "infinitely wise."

He was a direct, no-nonsense, roll-up-your-sleeves kind of man. "Call him about some matter and it's done--bang!--practically by the time you hang up the receiver," one writer stated. This quality of directness may account for some of the immense, long-lasting appeal of the "Can This Marriage Be Saved?" column, in which one reads the wife's story, then the husband's, and then bang--the necessary steps to be taken to save the marriage. No beating around the bush.

Yet, while Paul Popenoe is still remembered by those senior citizens who looked at his materials or watched him on TV, his impact in the professions and in the worlds of elite and academic discourse seems to be nil. There could be many reasons for this turn of events. He was largely a professional loner who remained aloof from professional associations and was unable even to find a suitable protege to take his place at the Institute. And, although he was an accomplished scholar, he desperately wanted to improve the world and therefore became a popularizer, putting out his message directly to the people in speeches and popular articles, rather than in academic journals. Academics and professionals have never taken kindly to such behavior (and, over the years, he did not always take very kindly to them, either).

But surely one important reason for the swift fading of his reputation is that his was a message people no longer wanted to hear. He was a man of the old school, one who believed in strong family men who sacrificed for their children, in premarital virginity for both men and women, in breadwinner/housewife marital roles, in strict marital fidelity, and in two-parent families. In short, he was a fervent proponent of what we now call the traditional nuclear family. Needless to say, this message came under heavy attack in the cultural revolution that began in the middle of the 1960s. And, from his side, he was thoroughly repelled by the personal liberation ideology, new age consciousness, playboy mentality, and alternative life styles that then came into vogue. He found these cultural shifts to be in opposition to everything he stood for. Thus it may be that Paul Popenoe and his views were swept away in a cultural tide.

Today in the 1990s, however, with the huge cohort of baby boomers having finally reached the middle of the family stage of the life cycle, the cultural revolution that began in the 1960s is looking ever more frail. There is a new spirit of familism afoot, a realization that many children have been damaged by "me-generation" upbringings in the past thirty years, a sense that men culturally have been cast adrift, and a growing feeling that we must try harder to foster social bonds and family values. One even hears with increasing frequency the thought expressed that perhaps we should try to undo the sexual and gender revolutions and restore the traditional nuclear family. Paul Popenoe would have loved this aspect of the nineties; he would have thought that society might be shifting back to his basic view that "successful marriage and sound family life are the basis of any enduring civilization."

In light of this possible cultural shift toward a "new familism," it has been especially intriguing for me to have the opportunity to reconsider Paul Popenoe and his views. I wanted to come to terms with just how much of what he believed about families, and especially the role of fathers, I consider still to be valid today. And I thought it might be of interest to others to know what kind of father, husband, and family man Paul Popenoe was. That is a subject on which little has ever been written, least of all by one of his sons, and it speaks directly to the issue of the validity of his views. In this regard, I'm sure that I am not alone in holding the opinion that one of the best tests of a person's views is how well they work out in practice.

His Life Story

My father often called himself a Victorian man and turn-of-the-century Republican. He was born the eldest of three sons in 1888 in Topeka, Kansas, into a family whose forebears on his mother's side (Bowman) came over on the Mayflower and on his father's side (of French Huguenot extraction) came around 1690. He was very proud of his blueblood and American pioneer background (one relative was reputed to have fought alongside Daniel Boone at Boonesboro), and like many strong familists he maintained a life-long interest in family genealogy. (My mother's family background, however--maiden name Stankovitch and of Croatian descent--interested him considerably less).

My grandfather grew up on a farm outside of Topeka (the family having moved out from

Illinois, and before that from Ohio and Kentucky). He married a banker's daughter who came originally from Boston, and later became a man of modest wealth as owner of the *Topeka Daily Capital*. For part of his childhood, my father lived in a Topeka "mansion" on the edge of town; although he liked to refer to his "dirt farm" background, this was plainly more a cultural than an economic legacy. Kansas may best be known as the backwater state featured in *The Wizard of Oz*, but Topeka at that time was something of a cultural mecca by Midwestern standards and was the spawning ground for a number of prominent Americans, such as the Menninger brothers.

As pioneer families are wont to do, my father's family eventually moved on to California around the turn of the 20th century, being among the early settlers in the Pasadena area. The "official" reason given for the move was my grandfather's health, but it also appears that he had somehow lost a good deal of his Kansas-earned money. Southern California at that time (and especially Pasadena) was made up mainly of Midwesterners who worked diligently to uphold their imported bourgeois values. What an era it must have been--an upright and hard-working people with a sense of unlimited progress in one of the most beautiful places on earth. As a true product of this Midwestern Victorian culture, my father's most strongly held moral virtues were honesty, hard work, a powerful drive for personal achievement, and overall moral rectitude. His father constantly stressed to him that the goal of a man's life was to leave his mark, and the virtue that Paul Popenoe most often emphasized with his own four sons was, "Popenoe's aren't can't people." As a young man he wore stiff white collars, inhabited a world mainly of men, and absolutely adored his mother (when he was very old, any mention of her would bring tears to his eyes).

In good Victorian fashion, he also exhibited what many today would call a profound sexual prudishness. He claimed to have been a virgin at the time of his marriage at age 32 and even to have successfully eschewed masturbation; he viewed prostitution and pornography as among the world's great evils. Around women, he was awkward and shy.

But in other respects he could be marked as a California man, a free thinker. He gave up religion when he was still young (after teaching Sunday school for many years in the Congregational church) and became a secular humanist, often jokingly replying when you asked his religion that he was a member of "the First Evangelical Church of the Living Truth." He was one of the early California vegetarians, refraining from eating meat around 1905 after a fainting spell following a steak dinner at a restaurant; he kept to a meatless diet for the rest of his life. (In the Freudian spirit of the time, we--his four sons--typically interpreted this as a misguided attempt by him to curtail his overly aggressive impulses.) And it could be argued that he never would have taken up the profession of marriage counseling had he remained in the Midwest, away from "the Hollywood scene" where the need for such counseling was constantly staring one in the face.

Paul Popenoe was a mostly self-educated and self-made man. After completing two years at Occidental College and his junior year at Stanford, majoring in English but taking many courses in Biology, he had to quit college to care for his ailing father (he would have graduated with the Stanford class of 1909). His "doctors degree" was an honorary one, granted to him by

Occidental in 1929. Following college he worked for several years as a newspaper editor in Pasadena and then, after taking the proverbial Grand Tour of Europe for six months (with a difference--he later referred to it as a "tramp trip" on a reported \$2 a day), he became an agricultural explorer on behalf of his father, who in retirement had become a nurseryman. For this assignment he learned Arabic, and his travels in the Middle East to collect date palms resulted in his first book, *Date Growing in the New and Old Worlds* (1913), a complete manual for the horticulturist. But his career really began when he went to Washington in 1913 to become editor of the recently established *Journal of Heredity*. This was thanks mainly to a Kansas contact, David Fairchild, who was a prominent agricultural explorer and U.S. Department of Agriculture official, married to the daughter of Alexander Graham Bell.

Intellectually, the young Paul Popenoe was a true child of the Progressive era, a combination of Darwinian scientist, William James pragmatist, and Teddy Roosevelt progressive. Charles Darwin was his idol, and he was also greatly influenced by the eminent biologist David Starr Jordan, president and then chancellor of Stanford from 1891 to 1916, under whom he had studied. More than anything else, he was a devout advocate of science and the scientific approach, and believed that the path to human betterment lay in the application of science to society. In later years he was often quoted as saying that his mission was "to bring to bear all the resources of modern science in promoting successful marriage and family life." Although he sometimes called his approach sociological, which it surely was in an applied sense, he typically referred to himself as a "social biologist." He had never formally studied sociology and in fact became somewhat alienated from that profession over time, claiming that it had become marked by excessive cultural determinism and value neutrality.

My father's major interests in the years around World War I were heredity, and its chief social application of the time, eugenics. It has never been clear to me just how and where he picked up his vast knowledge of heredity, but his interest in both heredity and eugenics was surely in keeping with one of the major intellectual fashions of that era. Although eugenics is thoroughly repudiated today as deeply reactionary and misguided, mainly due to the racism with which it often was associated, it was then considered liberal and progressive. Living in the wake of the Darwinian revolution, as Carl Degler has recently pointed out in *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought*, most of the intellectual Progressives of that day--in America as well as in Europe--were eugenicists. This included Teddy Roosevelt, Harvard's president Charles W. Eliot, many of the leading sociologists, the socialists Beatrice and Sydney Webb, and many, many others. They fully accepted the hereditarian precepts that many personal traits are passed along genetically and therefore heredity is the key to understanding human behavior, and they further believed in the social regulation of heredity, or eugenics--controlling human reproduction in various ways for the good of society.

Amidst a group of young intellectuals centered around, and financially supported by, Alexander Graham Bell, who had become interested in heredity and eugenics through the hereditary deafness of his wife and sheep breeding experiments at his summer home in Nova Scotia, Paul Popenoe developed rapidly as a self-taught scientist and something of a now-urban

raconteur. The group, which included the prominent American geneticist Sewell Wright who shared an apartment with my father, often met for discussions at Bell's home either in Washington or in Nova Scotia. These must have been golden years for a young man still in his twenties to have been in Washington; at least that is how he often remembered them. During this period my father wrote (with Roswell Johnson, another of the group's intellectuals) the first major textbook on eugenics entitled *Applied Eugenics* (1918). The book became a standard reference in the field, coming out in a revised edition in 1933 and a sixth printing in 1949.

But then the War intervened and my father was inducted into the officer corps, ending up as captain in charge of the section on vice and liquor control of the War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities. This meant essentially, according to him, directing "the clearing out of liquor and prostitutes from around the army training camps." (It was said at the time that venereal disease was eliminating as many soldiers from combat as were battle wounds.) What a perfect job for a Kansas republican and Victorian moralist (he was a lifetime teetotaler)! He seemed to have accepted the assignment with relish. As he later told the story, when he found "vice" close to an army base he went to the local mayor and chief of police and told them to act; if they did not, he ordered them put into jail. These experiences never left him, and he was fond of telling about them in later years. (As an aside, my father was always averse to his sons referring to him as "dad" or "daddy;" according to my mother, this was because the prostitutes of that day used to bait him by calling out to him "sugar daddy.")

After the War, Paul Popenoe spent a year in New York City as Executive Secretary of the American Social Hygiene Association, a group that was trying to achieve for America--through public education--something similar, one might say, to what my father had tried to accomplish around the army camps. Social hygiene was a euphemism for sexual hygiene, with a heavy focus on premarital virginity, but the group was generally progressive in its outlook and was an early promoter, for example, of birth control and sex education.

It was in New York that my father met my mother. After he had finally made up his mind that it was time to get married, and let that be known, a mutual friend told my father that he had found "just the right girl for you." My mother, Betty, came from an economically poor and rather disturbed family situation, and had only completed nine grades of schooling, but her mother was very ambitious for her. A beautiful and graceful girl, Betty had embarked on a promising career as a rhythmic dancer in the pattern of Ruth St. Dennis and Dick Shawn. She had already had several New York performances and been taken under the wing of Frank Crowninshield of the Algonquin set and an editor of *Vanity Fair* magazine, which had done a pictorial write-up on her. For my father, it was love (or lust) at first sight. And even though he came from a totally foreign cultural environment, how could Betty turn down this handsome and debonair man of the world? The goal of almost every woman of the day was marriage, not career. After knowing one another for only six months, they were married privately in New York City in 1920 by a Justice of the Peace; my mother had just turned nineteen.

This marriage was in itself another major turning point in the life of Paul Popenoe. Still a Kansas boy at heart, and brought up with the Jeffersonian view that cities were a principal source

of evil, he found New York City (and post-War society in general) to be an increasingly alienating environment and with his new marriage sought to make a clean break. Immediately after the marriage Paul and Betty left for California, stopping in Topeka so that my mother could meet his relatives. They were headed for the Coachella Valley desert in the Palm Springs-Indio area, at that time very sparsely populated and one of the last of the frontier territories of the American West. It was also the center, not incidentally, of the American date palm industry. My father's idea was to go back to the land and grow dates, cotton, and whatever else would sell, and they bought a farm (called in California a "ranch") near the village of Coachella. Until the agricultural market collapsed and my parents gravitated back to the Los Angeles area, they lived there for six years and bore two children.

For my mother, who had known little but city life, the move to the desert was a wrenching experience. Pursuing the clearly etched female gender roles of her time, she desperately sought to be the good wife and mother, but the social isolation, the intense heat, the inadequate housing, the sandstorms, the scorpions, and the need to carry a pistol to kill rattlesnakes were terribly trying for her, to say the least. Making matters worse, my father was seemingly a virtual illiterate in the culture and character of females; a real psychological primitive. For example, when they first arrived in the desert they shared a cabin with one of my father's associates, and their domestic area was separated from his by only a sheet. My mother's consequent deep embarrassment at performing sexual and perhaps other marital activities virtually "in public" was something that was hard for my father to fathom.

But he was a fast learner, and devoted himself not only to adjusting to marriage but to intellectually mastering what he thought of as the strange and entirely separate world of women. It was this marital adjustment process, in fact, that led to his first family book *Modern Marriage* (1925). The subtitle of this book was "A Handbook for Men," and in the preface was the statement: "the book is addressed to men, primarily because I happen to belong to that sex myself, and do not feel qualified to write for women." On the front cover was the quote, "Popenoe has stated many things which a thoughtful father would like his son to know before marrying, but finds it difficult to tell." One might add, "things that he learned the hard way through trial and error." In fact, the book was very much a summary statement of everything he had recently learned about what a man had to do to adjust to an intimate life with a woman. And, although there must have been many times early in his marriage when he worried that the opposite might be true, a central theme of the book was: "monogamy is not inharmonious with man's nature."

With further marital experience, the caveat about "not feeling qualified to write for women" was soon dropped and most of his later work became unisex; indeed, his main lifetime audience was women. *Modern Marriage* was extensively rewritten, based on his later Institute experiences, for a 1940 second edition, and, by 1958, the book was in its fifteenth printing.

For Paul Popenoe the desert years had gradually shifted from farming back to intellectual pursuits. As is well known, there is nothing like having a wife and children for a man to discover the importance of "family," and the family began to loom ever larger in his interests. His marital advice book was shortly followed by a more sociological and philosophical one, *The Conservation*

of the Family (1926). Intended as a companion volume to *Modern Marriage*, which had focused on "the things that an individual can do to make his marriage more successful," the new book considered "mainly the things that an individual cannot do for himself, and which society must do for him."

My father never considered his move from biologist and hereditarian to marriage and family relations specialist to be anything unusual. His biological interests remained very much alive in the 1920s and early 1930s, and he regarded his new family interests as an outgrowth of them. *Modern Marriage* was data-based and expressly "written from a biological point of view"; *Conservation of the Family* was billed on the cover as "the first book to consider family life from a biological point of view" (although much of the data in both books was more sociological than biological). During this period, he also wrote numerous articles and three books on heredity, including a major textbook entitled *The Child's Heredity* (1929), plus several more books on eugenics.

In keeping with the decline of hereditarianism in American intellectual life, Paul Popenoe gradually shifted his professional efforts from genetic improvement to family improvement. With the help of some influential financial donors, he started the American Institute of Family Relations (then called the Institute of Family Relations) in 1930. At first a one man operation, it grew over the decades into an organization with as many as seventy counselors and by 1977 claimed to have counselled over 300,000 men, women, and children. Here is what he later said was the connection of this new enterprise with his earlier biological interests: "I had the idea that to improve the race, we should first start with the family. And since the family often suffers problems which threaten its stability, we must treat those problems. In other words, we should establish a marriage counseling center where maladjustments might be brought, studied, classified--and helped if possible."

He is said to have coined the term "marriage counselor," although he admittedly borrowed it and the idea behind it from Germany, where marriage counseling had been first developed in the 1920s. Through his work at the Institute he became best known as a popularizer of marriage and family counseling, yet he also developed a particular approach to counseling that is now coming back into fashion. In keeping with his no-nonsense personality, the marriage counselling he conducted and promoted was highly directive. He gave his clients information and encouragement and eschewed the use of the term "therapy," preferring to think of marriage counseling as more an educational than a psychological or medical process. He was especially critical of Freudian analysis, often saying that "people should be encouraged to go into action, not lie down on a couch."

While he maintained most of his Victorian values to the end, in other respects he was a progressive in his field. Among the many instances that come to mind, he was an early and vociferous advocate of both birth control and sex education in the schools, at a time when these were considered by many to be the height of moral decadence. He was a strong believer in the importance of fathers, urging them to take a more active role in their children's upbringing. And, according to a *Time Magazine* article in 1956, he devised with Art Linkletter the first

computer dating service for Univac.

Late in my father's career his growing isolation from a changing American culture became ever more apparent. Throughout most of his life, for example, his closest associates were leading scientists and professionals. Considered a mainstream figure, he shared with them both a strong scientific approach toward life and a philosophy of familism. Yet by the late 1960s and 1970s his younger colleagues were mostly religious conservatives. Many of his assistants at the Institute were ordained ministers or other devoutly religious people from such denominations as the Baptists and the Mormons (one was Dr. James D. Dobson, now president of Focus on the Family), and a large portion of the hundreds of marriage counselors trained at the Institute in those years were clergymen. My father was no more religious than ever, but these were his new professional and ideological allies and proteges. The elite of the rapidly growing helping professions, meanwhile, had headed in an entirely secular and individualistic direction, one which dismissed "bourgeois moral values," stressed cultural relativism, promoted self-oriented therapeutic ideologies, and seemed to favor self-fulfillment over family obligation. In a final irony, after years of battling the Roman Catholic church over such issues as birth control and sex education he came to think of it, too, as an ideological ally. The Church, in his mind, was at least on the pro-family side.

His Marriage

What kind of marriage did Paul Popenoe himself have? Dark hints often emanated from Hollywood scandal sheets that the man who saves marriages must have a troubled marriage himself, and there were constant rumors that he had been divorced. (The latter were particularly troubling to him, because until about 1970 he required all of his marriage counselors to currently be married and never divorced; he believed that to be an effective marriage counselor it was important to have been successful with your own marriage.) I once read in a tabloid that he was "one of three men" in Lana Turner's troubled life, another being Johnny Stompanato (who was eventually killed by her daughter). It is true that my father gave Ms. Turner marriage counseling, in fact to maintain privacy she came to our house. I can still clearly recall my brothers and I peeking out from the backyard, to which we had been sent, and seeing this glamorous blonde walking up our driveway wearing dark glasses. So much for privacy. But my father would have been the last person in the world to be unfaithful, with Lana Turner or anyone else. And in 1970, at a big family gathering, my parents happily celebrated their golden wedding anniversary.

This is not to say that their marriage was untroubled. No two people could have been much more different than my father and mother, the one rational, scientific, aggressive, and restless, the other intuitive, artistic, submissive, and nurturing. Indeed, they personified the stereotypical traits of the ideal man and woman of the time. (In my father's writings he made much of what he felt were the enormous differences between men and women and the absolute necessity, in happy marriages, for each partner to take those differences into account. This message, of course, was the subject of a withering attack by the feminist movement, but it is now

returning to the center of the cultural dialogue with such enormously popular books as Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand*.)

By today's standards you would wonder just what my parents had in common; certainly not much in any intellectual sense. But their marriage was conceived, as were most traditional marriages of that era, as a symbiotic partnership of opposites. My father, a workaholic, was totally involved in his work and did almost nothing within the home; to my knowledge he never cleaned, cooked, washed a dish, or changed a diaper while his children were growing up. Yet he did bring home the bacon (or at least a vegetarian's version of this) and had a very active interest in his garden, thus taking care of all the "outside" tasks. My mother was a full-time mother and homemaker for almost thirty years (four boys, spaced 3 1/2 years apart). Her mothering time would have been even longer except that we boys, from a very early age, were taught independence; this meant leaving home as soon as possible, which we all did by about age 17, and seldom returning. Although mother never was able to return to her dancing, as we grew older and left home she did resume seriously another of her artistic talents--painting and sculpture.

Opposites may attract, but that certainly doesn't mean they will have no problems of adjustment. My parents had numerous memorable marriage squabbles, and I often felt that many of my mother's allergies and minor illnesses were somehow the result of being suppressed and unfulfilled in a male-dominated marriage and a masculine world (it didn't help in this regard that she had only sons!). In the late 1960s I was talking with one of my brothers about people we knew who were "self-actualized," and I suggested that our father fit that bill to a tee. My brother quickly agreed. Part of the reason was surely that he had a loving, kind, dutiful wife who literally took care of his every need at home. But one would never have said that my mother was self-actualized. She was not an open complainer, and she relished her life as a wife and mother (yet often felt inadequate and uncomfortable as the wife of a famous person), but we all sensed that her life of total sacrifice for others left something to be desired. (On the other hand, a male counselor and top administrator at the Institute wrote in an obituary of my father that while my father was "not easy to work for," my mother was "one of the finest human beings I've ever known.")

It came as a tragic surprise when our mother, who was thirteen years younger than my father, was the first to die--of a stroke at age 77. In hindsight it appears that she may have sacrificed herself to an early death. She had often said that she did not want to live on past her husband's death, that he was her entire life, and that she wouldn't know what to do without him. At the time of her death our parents were still living in our boyhood home and father, in his late eighties, had serious memory loss and was even more cantankerous and demanding than usual. He was not an easy person to handle. Desiring to relinquish the terrible burdens of being both nurse and home maintainer, mother had long expressed a wish to move into a retirement home. We all thought, however, that father would live longer if he could stay in his home environment, so this idea was resisted. For mother's sake, we probably resisted too long. It is true, however, that father, once put into a nursing home, completely lost his memory and lasted only a year. In any event, this is how one traditional nuclear family came to an end.

Paul Popenoe as a Father

What kind of father was Paul Popenoe? Within the parameters of the Victorian or bourgeois family ideal of his time, he was the very personification of "the good family man." He worked hard and long, but always seemed to make time for his boys--whom he adored. Some of my fondest memories are going to work with him to downtown Los Angeles, usually with a friend, on the old southern California red trolley cars. My friend and I would hang out around his office for a while, then look around town (invariably spending some time riding on the new escalators at Bullock's Department Store), and meet him again for lunch. We would always go to a special cafeteria, Clifton's, and he was fond of telling the story that he would follow behind us in line and just order a glass of water and a toothpick; he claimed that there was more than ample food for him left on our trays at the end of the meal! Another fond memory was the entire family sitting on his bed and listening to him read stories to us.

He traveled around the United States a lot, but would frequently send us a brief postcard. I still have many of them: "Valentine's Day--and I'm certainly enjoying the butter scotch." "Glad to hear from mother about what a fine birthday party you had"; and (at camp) "are you getting in some nature study along with your crafts? and are you doing any fishing?" When he wasn't traveling, he had the work situation that most fathers (and their children) can only dream about--a home office in the rear of our property; we would frequently go back there and visit with him. And he placed special importance on the regular family meal; those were times of discussion, reflection, and much good humor.

At the same time, in true Victorian style, he was a relatively authoritarian person and a strict disciplinarian, which I'm sure was harder on my older brothers than it was on me, the youngest of the four boys. (Like most fathers, he mellowed over time.) There were a great many family rules to be followed, and punishments meted out accordingly. One punishment, if we called our mother a dirty name, was to hold us over the bathtub and wash out our mouths with soap (a frequent, highly symbolic practice in the first half of this century); another, for unruly behavior, was to lock us up in a small closet (with a window) for a while until we calmed down. He was never actually with us that much--that was my mother's role--but he was ever the distant threat "who would spank us when he got home." And occasionally we were spanked. He also believed strongly in children having household chores, and we all had various daily assignments, both outdoors and indoors (having no sisters, we had to do their work too!). We spent every Saturday morning carrying out special chores, mostly in the garden, from a long list that he had prepared for each of us.

In private, he was what today we would call emotionally repressed, or at the very least highly reserved. He was rather stiff and formal in demeanor (and always stood about a yard away from whomever he was speaking to); when we were growing up, he never hugged or kissed us, and we never saw him cry. But these are characteristic traits of males from an Anglo-Saxon background and they, too, diminished as he got older.

Looking back, it is hard for me to fault him as a father. I had an idyllic childhood. One testimony to my parents' childrearing approach was that even though my brothers and I did all of the things that young boys did in those days, including "wars" with neighborhood "gangs," none of us ever broke a limb or had a major accident. Of course it helped that we grew up in a benign, upper-middle-class suburb, during a time of great social order in America. He did set very high standards, and pushed us hard to excel. This was a constant source of anxiety, especially when we were teenagers, but we nevertheless all turned out to be reasonably happy and successful adults. If any fault is to be found it is on a psychological level. Despite his fame as a counselor he was no "sympathetic listener"; he told you what was to be done, and that was it--no back talk.

Evaluating Our Family

Yet in later life, as young adults, we seldom returned home (much to my mother's sadness), and when we did, we didn't feel like staying for very long. Partly this was because we were males, taught to leave home and make our own way in life. But there was something else, something about the subculture of the family, that drove us to distraction. For one thing we all had become liberals, the products of a relatively free-thinking family. (When my father was once asked, "why are you a Republican, but all of your children became Democrats," he replied, "if I had been a Democrat, all of them would have become Republicans!") I looked down on my parents' stuffy, Victorian sex code, on the fact that just about the only thing my mother ever read was the *Reader's Digest* (she kept it by the toilet), and on their antipathy toward Roosevelt, Truman, and John F. Kennedy and their love for fellow Kansan Dwight D. Eisenhower (actually I think my mother, like many women, may have been a closet Democrat, unwilling to speak up). More than anything else, anticipating the baby boom generation that was to come, I objected to all of their "moralizing." "Come on, lighten up, get with it, times are changing."

Something in the family seemed amiss on a psychological level. My brothers and I were never intimately close either with each other or with our parents. I never felt, for example, as if I could talk over my problems with any of them. Much of our family interaction involved good-natured but rather strained bantering, expressed through an ever-present psychological front that was dominated by concerns about personal achievement.

Also, my parents were too different from each other, the relationship was too one-sided. My father, the all-powerful rational autocrat; my mother, the passionate submissive; how were you supposed to put the two pieces together? It was partly this extreme one-sidedness that caused me to believe that my mother had not gotten all that she could have out of life. What happened to her dancing? Why was she never educated? Was it right for her to have devoted her entire adult career to waiting on my father and to raising us? Her life was clearly not as fulfilled as my father's.

Lessons for Today

In this brief description of Paul Popenoe's marriage, his father-role, and his family, you have, in some respects, a social cost-benefit analysis of the traditional nuclear family--only one family, to be sure, but prototypic of its time. In summary, it was very good for men, quite good for children, and not so good for women. Can we do any better today? "Moralizing" is now coming back into style, biological explanations of human behavior are being revived, the gender and sex revolutions are easing, and new talk of "familism" fills the media. It is an opportune time to look closely at just what the continuing relevance is, if any, of the father-role that Paul Popenoe embodied, and of the family type that he personally fostered and professionally espoused.

The answer depends on where one locates the optimum balance point among the varying needs of women, of men, of children, and of society as a whole. In the past thirty years the needs of women for autonomy and self-fulfillment have been significantly advanced, and the sexual desires of men have been catered to as never before. But the needs of children have been neglected, mainly the result of family changes, and the social order has therefore weakened. There have been sharp increases in the rates of many juvenile pathologies, such as delinquency, depression, substance abuse, and suicide.

With the deteriorating conditions of childhood in mind, and assuming that it could be accomplished, a return to the traditional nuclear family has much to recommend it. That family type was both more child-centered and more enduring than ours today; the values were clear and discipline was strong. Such family qualities seem absolutely essential to the good society. Indeed, without enduring, child-centered families that teach strong values, it is likely that society over the long term can not survive.

The traditional nuclear family, however, had two major disadvantages: male dominance, an ancient historical legacy, and the very restricted role for women, in part a product of the industrial revolution. I have two daughters whose attitudes are fairly typical of the female achievers of their generation; they are still in graduate school, one studying to become an anthropologist and the other in training to become a physician. Both are very family oriented and dearly want to have children; in this, but in few other ways, they are like my mother. They have postponed marriage and have been living with men out of wedlock; they plan to take time off from their careers to raise children, but then return. Most of all, they would find it very difficult to be married to a man like my father. They would recoil at the stay-at-home servant role he expected, and they would certainly not relish his male authoritarianism. They anticipate from their husband more of a fifty-fifty relationship (my father always advocated professionally a fifty-fifty marriage, but he didn't mean what my daughters mean by it).

These young women will probably never find a man who will agree to split fifty-fifty with them both breadwinning and child care, the goal of some feminists. And I don't think they even want that; they value a man who can be a premier wage earner and they believe that, at least in the years of infancy, mothers should have the commanding role in child care. Still, they will almost certainly marry a more fifty-fifty partner than my father was, and partly for that reason their lives will probably be much more fulfilled than my mother's was.

The big question is, to paraphrase Freud, what do men want today? My daughters will doubtless have a difficult time in the struggle to have both a family and a career, but they know clearly that they want them both. The breakdown of the traditional nuclear family has in some respects had more important consequences for men than for women, although we don't usually think of it in that way. Just as my father predicted, the sexual and gender revolutions have plainly weakened men's devotion to marriage and children. Compared to my father's era a lot more men today help out at home, but the statistics on nonmarital births, divorce, and male desertion suggest that a lot more men also have largely abandoned children and family life. The old trade-off placed by women (and society) before men to generate the traditional nuclear family was this: if you want sex, marry me; and after you marry me, you can also have the masculine satisfaction of protecting and economically taking care of me and our children. This trade-off is now history. A man can get sex outside of marriage anytime and anywhere he wants it; and a growing number of men today are looking for women they don't have to provide for economically, partly so that they can have more money for themselves.

The revolution that brought self-fulfillment to women has promoted self-indulgence in men. From a family perspective, we live in an age of the vanishing male. Both men and women are less involved in family life and child care today than at any other time in our history, but the differential between men and women in this respect is growing. Both men and women are postponing marriage and increasingly not marrying at all, even when children are involved. Yet it is men who typically balk at marriage, and we now have a historically high rate of nonmarital births. And the new ease of divorce, together with the active labor market participation of wives, make it easy for men to break out of their marriages to pursue other women, at relatively little cost to themselves. The result: more than fifty percent of children growing up in America today will spend some time before adulthood living in a household without a father.

A major task of our time is to get men to act in more socially responsible ways. We need to find new mechanisms to replace the trade-off that lay behind the traditional nuclear family. Over the past few decades, we have tried culturally to bolster the single-parent family, asserting myopically that, after all, the traditional nuclear family was a male-tyranny and the single-parent family may be just as good, perhaps even an improvement. Many single-parent families are no doubt doing a fine job, and they should be supported, but accumulating evidence of the negative effects of single parenting on children suggests that this view is far off base. The best family is the one instinctively favored by every child--the family with a caring mother and a functioning father present. With the gender revolution now a partial success as far as women are concerned, the needed revolution in the nineties and beyond is to readjust men to the new social conditions.

Despite the disadvantages of the traditional nuclear family for women, male responsibility in the era of the traditional family form was greater than it is today. Men worked harder to maintain their families and curtail their sexual exploits, they felt a stronger sense of family and community obligation. Yet we cannot go back; there is no undoing the revolutions that have brought economic security, public participation, and sexual freedom for women.

What must be salvaged is the nuclear family--not the traditional nuclear family. That is a difficult, but not unachievable, goal. We must strive for a nuclear family in which there is an enduring sense of family obligation on the part of both sexes, along with a strong desire to put children first. But it should be a nuclear family in modern form, in which there is a fifty-fifty division of power and decisionmaking between wife and husband, and a firm understanding that both women and men will share a common (though not necessarily identical) commitment to the work force over the course of their lives.

What could possibly hold men to such a family? A good answer is close companionship and understanding between the sexes at a level never before achieved on a mass scale. The new family meets one of the most basic of human needs--for intimate attachment to at least one other person. That, at least, is the carrot. There also needs to be a bigger stick. Margaret Mead once observed that no society exists anywhere in the world in which people have stayed married without enormous community pressure to do so. Such pressure has weakened considerably in recent years, and we should be seeking ways to increase the social insistence that men fulfill their social and family obligations.

Conclusion

Paul Popenoe was largely a man of the nineteenth century. We are about to enter the twenty-first century. It would be surprising, indeed, if everything he said were still relevant today, and it is not. His strong support for the traditional nuclear family is no longer justifiable. Yet he was right on target in his rock-bottom belief in the fundamental importance of the strong family for the good society. And he sensed, and welcomed, many needed family changes. In the conclusion to his *Conservation of the Family*, published in 1926, he predicted what the future family would look like. Although perhaps based as much on hope as on reality, his first five predictions at that time still provide an invaluable set of social goals. He said, "the family of the future will, I think, be marked by (1) much better mate selection, (2) much greater understanding, making for permanence of love, (3) more intelligent consideration of children, (4) greater concern for individual development, particularly of women, (5) more democracy."

These words were written well before he began his fifty-year career as a marriage and family counselor, but I do not think that he ever encountered anything in that career to cause him to revise them. Nor do I think there is any cause for us to revise them today. Indeed, at a time when our culture appears to be swinging in a more familistic direction, they are more relevant than ever.