

Creating a Sterile Reputation for Eugenics: The Human Betterment  
Foundation from 1926-1944

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**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements.....2

Introduction.....3

Chapter One:  
Showcasing Sterilization: Strategic Distribution of Content.....13

Chapter Two:  
A Corpus of Correspondence: Reactions to the Human Betterment Foundation.....33

Chapter Three:  
Choosing A Side: Science versus Social Policy.....50

Conclusion:  
A New Form of Human Betterment.....62

Bibliography.....67

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## Introduction

Beginning in 1907, over 50,000 people in the United States were sterilized as a result of sterilization laws. Many of these sterilizations took place against the subjects' will. The largest volume of these sterilizations took place in California. This paper focuses on the Human Betterment Foundation (HBF), a pro-eugenic sterilization organization founded in 1928 and located in Pasadena, California. The HBF performed research on the results of sterilization in California. They published their findings in scientific journals as well as in pamphlets, which they distributed to people all over America and the globe. Hitler's own racial cleansing plan used California as a model for sterilization plans and cited the statistics of the HBF to prove it.<sup>1</sup> This shows the renown of the Human Betterment Foundation as well as the effectiveness of California's sterilization law. This paper uses the HBF as a prism to reflect both the scientific and popular motivations for sterilization in America, as illustrated by their studies and pamphlets. Their pamphlets are a significant source of evidence for eugenic motivations because they were written for the American public and were proliferated all over the United States. The HBF's correspondences and the material they kept on file in their archives demonstrate their struggle to balance an identity between a strictly scientific organization and one with political objectives.

### Eugenic Beginnings

The eugenics movement began in England during the late nineteenth century by Sir Francis Galton. His objective for eugenics was to improve the genetic qualities of the

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Bruinius, *Better for All the World: The Secret History of Forced Sterilization and America's*

population in terms of health, intelligence, and what he termed as “moral character.”<sup>2</sup> It was thought at the time that genes determined whether a person was superior or inferior. Based on this understanding of genetics and Darwin’s idea of natural selection, there was a concern that the population of Britain and Western countries were genetically deteriorating. This deterioration was possibly due to perceived population shifts, where more “desirable” citizens were marrying later and having fewer children.<sup>3</sup>

In order to statistically prove his theory, Galton performed a study of eminent men, including scholars, scientists, and sportsmen. He calculated what percentage of their parents and offspring were successful, and found that the rate of success of these men’s ancestors and descendants was much higher than the rest of the population at large.<sup>4</sup>

Galton understood that genetics might not be the only influence on success, and that environment is also influential. He therefore conducted a similar study with adopted sons and showed that they did not achieve the same success rate as the biological sons of the previous study.<sup>5</sup>

After statistically establishing the idea of eugenics, Galton split the population into three groups: the “desirables” who were healthy and of high intelligence and moral character, the “passables” who were of average quality, and the “undesirables”<sup>6</sup> who were of poor quality.<sup>7</sup> This classification of people led to a division of eugenics into two categories, positive and negative. These types of eugenics were used to address the

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this paper there will be terms such as feeble-minded, undesirable and defective. These are the terms that were used at the time and in the documents. It is by no means reflective of the opinions of the author of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Lynn, *Eugenics: A Reassessment*, 10.

different classes of people. Positive eugenics was meant to encourage the reproduction of desirable people, and negative eugenics to prevent the undesirable from procreating.<sup>8</sup>

### American Eugenics

The eugenics movement soon gained traction in the United States, inspiring scientists like Charles Davenport. Davenport established the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York in 1910.<sup>9</sup> The Eugenics Record Office, led by superintendent Harry Laughlin, performed scientific eugenic research on identifying which sects of society were undesirable.<sup>10</sup> Organizations such as the Eugenics Record Office illustrate the fervor with which scientists studied eugenics.

Over the course of the twentieth century, eugenics had to shift and adapt as new sciences emerged and the genetic premise of eugenics was debunked. Daniel Kevles, a historian, divides the eugenic movement into two different stages of eugenics: mainline and reform. Mainline eugenics refers to the early days of American eugenics characterized by Davenport and other conservative supporters of eugenics, which remained popular until the First World War.<sup>11</sup> After WWI, Kevles claims that the science behind the mainline eugenics was questioned, and by the mid-thirties it was deemed flawed.<sup>12</sup> Those who opposed mainline eugenics helped convert eugenics towards social reform inspired by the concept of biological improvement.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>10</sup> Edwin Black. "War against the weak." *Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*. (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 52.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 164.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 170.

## Eugenic Applications

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century Americans implemented both positive and negative eugenic programs. An example of a positive eugenics program was the “fitter families” contests that were popular at state fairs. These contests determined the “desirability” of a family based on their health, status and family tree.<sup>14</sup> Similarly “better babies” contests assessed the fitness of babies. These contests were meant to encourage desirable people to procreate and take pride in their fitness. Negative eugenics, on the other hand, manifested in methods such as sterilization policies, marriage restrictions, and immigration laws. These programs were applied to prevent the propagation of the “unfit,” which could refer to specific races, people who were mentally ill, or those deemed feeble-minded.

Analyzing those who were targeted by negative eugenics reveals potential ulterior motives to the movement. Many Americans contended that immigrants were the cause of lower intelligence and quality, and immigration therefore became a eugenic concern.<sup>15</sup> There were a number of immigration laws, such as the 1882 Chinese exclusion act, that targeted specific races, “lunatics” or those who were presumed likely to become public charges.<sup>16</sup> Later laws, like the Alien Act of 1917, invoked eugenic ideals of inherited criminality and mental illness as reasons to prevent immigrants from entering the United States.<sup>17</sup> These immigration acts show how effectively eugenic theory permeated America and its policies.

## General Motivations For Negative Eugenics

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<sup>14</sup> Laura L. Lovett, “Fitter Families for Future Firesides: Florence Sherbon and Popular Eugenics,” *The Public Historian* 29 (2007): 76.

<sup>15</sup> Black, “War Against the Weak,” 185.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Ordovery, *American eugenics: Race, queer anatomy, and the science of nationalism*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ordovery, *American Eugenics*, 14.

Due to the political ramifications of the eugenic movement, historians have discussed the motivation for eugenic programs. Kevles posits that there were three main groups behind anti-immigration policies. The first group was labor organizations trying to protect their jobs, the second were nativists who worried about maintaining a distinctly American character, and the third were social workers who wanted to assist those in need.<sup>18</sup> Thomas Leonard claims that eugenics was so popular in the Progressive Era because it was rooted in science but provided opportunities for social reform and control through political means.<sup>19</sup> Leonard also contends that economics, such as labor laws, played a large role in eugenics.<sup>20</sup> Nancy Ordover suggests that nationalism, a loosely defined term, played a role in eugenics by trying to preserve the integrity of the American character.<sup>21</sup> Ordover further states that, “eugenicists, armed with charts, photographs, and even human skulls, were there to provide the visual and mathematical support that rendered racism scientifically valid and politically viable.”<sup>22</sup> Ordover, like Leonard, believes that eugenics was a method of using science to implement social control, though in a racist way. Historians have therefore explained eugenic policies as motivated by racial, economic and nationalistic factors.

### Eugenic Sterilization

This paper focuses on eugenic sterilization, the first of which took place in 1899 by Dr. Sharp in Indiana in order to reduce sexual over-excitation in delinquent boys.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas C. Leonard, “Retrospectives: Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, 217.

<sup>20</sup> Leonard, “Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era,” 213.

<sup>21</sup> Ordover, *American Eugenics*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 108.



Compulsory sterilization is particularly interesting because it was a time when the United States government invaded the privacy of its citizens in a direct and physical way. This is especially surprising because of America's focus on the values of freedom and liberty. By 1931 over thirty states had passed sterilization laws.<sup>24</sup> The prevalence of these laws show that compulsory sterilization was not an outlier, but an accepted practice adopted by more than half of the United States. Compulsory sterilization laws were even supported by the Supreme Court. Martin Pernick argues that *Buck v. Bell*, the case that legalized sterilization, portrays how the supposed well-being of the population was valued over the rights of the individual.<sup>25</sup> The Supreme Court's support of compulsory sterilization also demonstrates the prominence of this issue in American society.

Various states passed different forms of sterilization laws. Some required the recommendation of the medical superintendent and approval of the Director of the State Department of Institutions before sterilization could be coerced.<sup>26</sup> Though parents would often request for their children be sterilized, parental consent was not necessary for compulsory sterilization.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it was possible that a person could be institutionalized and sterilized without their consent, or the consent of their families.

Sterilization laws generally targeted two populations: criminals and the mentally unfit. The mentally unfit were characterized as feeble-minded or mentally insane. For example, though the laws originally targeted the feeble-minded, the 1913 version of the California sterilization law also included inmates of insane hospitals, prisons and "idiots"

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Haller, *Eugenics*, (Rutgers University Press: New Jersey, 1963), 157.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Pernick, "Eugenics and Public Health in American History," *American Journal of Public Health* 87 (1997): 1770.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Popenoe and E.S. Gosney, *Twenty-eight Years of Sterilization in California*. (Pasadena: The Human Betterment Foundation, 1938) 4.

<sup>27</sup> Wendy Kline. *Building a better race: Gender, sexuality, and eugenics from the turn of the century to the baby boom* (University of California Press, 2001), 57-58.

or those “afflicted with hereditary insanity or incurable chronic mania or dementia.”<sup>28</sup>

These were therefore the populations that were suspected of degrading the moral and intellectual character of Americans.

Sterilization as a response to this perceived decline in population quality has been the subject of much historical scrutiny. Historians have viewed sterilization, like eugenics in general, as a method of further marginalizing minorities and other races.<sup>29</sup> Hansen and King refute this belief by claiming that the whole of Western Europe was racist, and eugenic policy was no more racist.<sup>30</sup> Instead, Hansen and King suggest a few reasons for sterilization as a policy. They first propose that sterilization policies were an easy way for legislators to pass high profile legislation and lower public costs. The second theory is that sterilization was a way to bring women’s reproductive issues into political discourse. Finally, Hansen and King posit that it was a way to help institutions release more feeble-minded instead of caring for them.<sup>31</sup> Hansen and King also attribute the continued implementation and popularity of sterilization to the existence of superintendents and their desire to consolidate and maintain power.<sup>32</sup>

Another popular explanation for sterilization relates to women and sexuality. During the twentieth century there was a dramatic shift in sexual morality from the earlier concept of sexual self-control.<sup>33</sup> In this new version of sexual morality, white middle-class women seized sexual independence premised on pleasure rather than procreation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Lombardo, ed. *A century of eugenics in America: from the Indiana experiment to the human genome era* (Indiana University Press, 2011), 99.

<sup>29</sup> Leonard, “Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era,” 210.

<sup>30</sup> Randall Hansen and Desmond King, *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare in Twentieth-Century North America*. (Cambridge University Press, 2013) 18.

<sup>31</sup> Hansen and King, *Sterilized by the State*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Kline, 49.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

According to Wendy Kline, the concept of the feeble-minded woman as sexual predator was a eugenic construct. These women posed a threat to society due to their sexual delinquency and perpetuation of other sexual delinquents.<sup>35</sup> Sterilization policies empowered officials to determine who was fit to procreate and who was not, therefore recreating a form of reproductive morality.<sup>36</sup> Kline therefore believes that sterilization was a method of combatting the sexual revolution and repressing women who began to experience sexual independence.

There were other explanations for sterilization, like how it prevented the unfit from being parents or from passing down unfit traits to future citizens.<sup>37</sup> Sterilization was also considered a way to advance the race in a comprehensive and cost effective way.<sup>38</sup> Other opinions diverge on whether the sterilization procedure itself was therapeutic, a form of punishment, or a way to free patients from homes for the feeble-minded.

### Concentrating on California

California had the highest volume of sterilizations in the United States<sup>39</sup> and therefore is the ideal location to study eugenic sterilization. There were three sterilization laws passed in 1909, 1913 and 1917 that increasingly strengthened the state's power to execute compulsory sterilization.<sup>40</sup> Alexandra Stern posits that sterilization was so successful in California because of the regional emphasis on manifest destiny and nativism. She also claims that California had many educational, medical, civic, business and philanthropic groups to support sterilization, as well as powerful advocates like Fred

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>37</sup> Haller, "Eugenics: Hereditarian attitudes in American thought." 131.

<sup>38</sup> Kline, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Stern. *Eugenic Nation*, 85.

<sup>40</sup> Haller, *Eugenics*, 135.

Butler, Paul Popenoe and Dora Haynes.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, California had a number of homes for the insane and feeble-minded as well as foundations that supported sterilization, like the Human Betterment Foundation.

Interestingly, the results of California's sterilization statistics do not support many of the theories regarding sterilization. The ratio of sterilizations in California of men to women was roughly equal, which indicates it was not as clearly a gender issue as Kline suggests.<sup>42</sup> The sterilization statistics also failed to validate the opinion that sterilization was racial, because most patients were white and native born.<sup>43</sup> These results therefore demand a further analysis of what made sterilization so successful in California.

In particular there was one foundation, the Human Betterment Foundation, which sought to research the results of the numerous California sterilizations. Ezra Gosney, a prominent businessman founded the HBF in Pasadena, California in 1928. Their purpose was "to investigate the results and possibilities for human betterment by a safe, conservative application of the discoveries made by scientists, and to give this information to the public."<sup>44</sup> In their endeavor to better humanity, the HBF investigated, supported, and promoted the cause for eugenic sterilization. Their emphasis on the "conservative application" based on scientific discoveries governed their actions, and their publications were truly determined by the scientific data they gathered. The HBF were successful in proliferating their materials all over America and across the globe. They were recognized and esteemed enough to be used in Hitler's racial cleansing plan as statistical evidence supporting sterilization. Due to their involvement in the scientific

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<sup>41</sup> Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Hansen and King, *Sterilized by the State*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Kline, 58.

<sup>44</sup> Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today* (Pasadena: Human Betterment Foundation, 1938), 6.

study of sterilization and interest in sterilization policy, the HBF is a good case study in examining sterilization.

This paper will use the HBF as a lens to identify what motivations scientists and laymen had for supporting both voluntary and compulsory eugenic sterilization. The foundation also demonstrates the difficulty of being a scientific organization that has specific aspirations for social policy. The first chapter utilizes the scientific studies of the HBF to illustrate what questions interested them as scientists regarding the subjects of sterilization. These findings are compared to the information they put in the pamphlets they distributed. The arguments in favor of sterilization put forth in the pamphlets show what the foundation thought would be compelling to Americans. The second chapter reviews some of the correspondences to and from the foundation, highlighting the concerns and supporting arguments for sterilization. Finally, the third chapter analyzes documents the foundation kept on file as well as the HBF's responses to their correspondents. This data depicts the internal struggle of the foundation to solidify their identity as either a scientific or social organization. Ultimately, this paper shows the dangers that can arise when science is valued above all else, and how those actions are justified in the name of humanity.

## Chapter One

### Showcasing Sterilization: Strategic Distribution of Content

This chapter compares the scientific articles written by Paul Popenoe, director of the Human Betterment Foundation, with the official pamphlets and books distributed by the HBF. The scientific articles were meant to explore potential sources and patterns regarding the subjects of sterilization. The pamphlet “Human Sterilization Today” and book entitled *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California*, written and proliferated by the HBF sum up the main findings of these studies and organize the information to make a compelling case for sterilization. The scientific articles expose what motivated the scientists and officials to support sterilization and what questions regarding sterilization they were exploring. The book and pamphlet, on the other hand, indicate which arguments supporting sterilization they thought would resonate most with the American people.

#### Background of the Scientific Articles

The Human Betterment Foundation’s interest in sterilization was specific to patients’ demographics and the long-term effects of sterilization.<sup>45</sup> Many of Paul Popenoe’s scientific articles address both of these topics and were published by a wide array of journals.<sup>46</sup> The breadth of different journals willing to publish Popenoe’s articles indicates both the scientific field’s interest in the subject matter and the validity attributed to these studies.

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<sup>45</sup> Bruinius, *Better for All the World*, 272.

<sup>46</sup> The Human Betterment Foundation, *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California: A Critical Study of Results in 6000 Cases* (Pasadena: The Human Betterment Foundation, 1930) 1. It lists the following journals: *The Journal of Social Hygiene*, *the Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, *the Journal of Heredity*, *the Journal of Genetic Psychology*, *the Journal of Applied Psychology*, *the Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, and *the American Journal of Psychiatry*.

It is important to distinguish where the HBF chose to publish certain information. The articles printed in scientific journals were intended for the scientifically literate. This implies that the research Popenoe completed was scientifically sound because these studies were being read and evaluated by scientists and scholars of the field. It is particularly interesting that so many of Popenoe's articles were printed because he often makes unsupported claims to explain various phenomena. For example, in his article on voluntary sterilization Popenoe argues that there were three reasons women were voluntarily sterilized. First, they could not psychologically or economically handle having more children. Second, these women were of low intelligence and lived with their parents, and their parents volunteered them for sterilization to prevent pregnancy. Finally, Popenoe claims that social workers volunteered sexually delinquent women for sterilization to prevent defective offspring.<sup>47</sup> He does not cite any evidence to support these hypotheses. This is indicative of the lack of academic rigor expected in scientific studies.

One of the most significant aspects of Popenoe's studies is that he defines some of the more ambiguous eugenic terms. Throughout his articles he discusses the insane and feeble-minded separately, almost as entirely different types of patient. He divides the insane into five categories of illness: dementia praecox, commonly known as schizophrenia, manic depression, constitutional psychopaths, imbecility, and psychoses due to drugs or alcohol or syphilis.<sup>48</sup> More crucially, he defines feeble-mindedness. In his first article on the feeble-minded he writes, "feeble-mindedness as the term is used in law

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Popenoe, "A Study of Patients Coming to California State Institutions for Sterilization Only," In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California: A Critical Study of Results in 6000 Cases* edited by Human Betterment Foundation (Pasadena: The Human Betterment Foundation, 1930), 172-173.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Popenoe, "Eugenic Sterilization in California: The Insane," In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 266.

and in institutional practice is not a biological concept at all. It is a social concept.”<sup>49</sup> He later defines feeble-mindedness more specifically saying that, “if the term feeble-mindedness has any useful meaning at all, it refers to inability to get along successfully in the world on one’s own responsibility under ordinary circumstances.”<sup>50</sup> The significance of this definition will be addressed later in this chapter.

One final facet of sterilization Popenoe explains is the definition of voluntary sterilization. According to California’s sterilization law, compulsory sterilization was implemented on a case-by-case basis when the medical superintendent, the Director of the Department of Institutions, and the Director of the Department of Public Health all approved the procedure.<sup>51</sup> It was also common practice to write to the relatives or guardians of the patient explaining the situation in order to get written consent, but that was a method of preventing litigation against the state.<sup>52</sup> The patients themselves were not asked because they were considered incompetent in the eyes of the state.<sup>53</sup> It was the consent of the relatives that caused sterilization to be considered voluntary. If, however, the relatives refused to consent, the superintendent could continue with the procedure in the interest of the patient or the state.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Popenoe, “Eugenic Sterilization in California: The Feeble-minded,” In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 323.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Popenoe, “Eugenic Sterilization in California: The Number of Persons Needing Sterilization,” In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 407.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Popenoe, “Eugenic Sterilization in California: Attitude of the Patient’s Relatives Toward the Operation,” In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 271.

<sup>52</sup> Popenoe, “Attitude of the Patient’s Relatives Toward the Operation,” 271.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.



### Analyzing the Articles

In 1930 the HBF published a compilation of studies pertaining to sterilization that were published in the preceding years. Most of the articles were written by Paul Popenoe and provided a demographic overview of the sterilization process and clientele. In the first two articles, Popenoe discusses the types of patients that were sterilized: the insane and the feeble-minded. Throughout his many subsequent articles Popenoe examines the feeble-minded and the insane as two independent populations. When he discusses the traits of the sterilized patients, such as intelligence or ethnicity, he does so in separate articles for the feeble-minded and the insane. The consistent separation of these two categories indicates that the difference between them was significant, but that the same factors were important in studying each population. Perhaps the reason for this was that there were different motivations for sterilization for each of these populations.

Another way in which Popenoe classifies subjects of sterilization is by gender. In his article on the “insane”, he uses data from six different state hospitals for the insane, which he obtained from the Department of Institutions.<sup>55</sup> Until January 1<sup>st</sup> 1927 a total of 2,355 men and 1,596 women were sterilized in these hospitals.<sup>56</sup> Popenoe thought it important to note that two thirds of the male patients were single, while two thirds of the female patients were married.<sup>57</sup> He later attributes the gender discrepancy to the nature of the diseases. Men, he posits, are overwhelmingly admitted to state hospitals for dementia praecox. Sterilization was used as a therapeutic procedure for these men, as opposed to a cautionary procedure for women.<sup>58</sup> Popenoe does not address why there were more men

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<sup>55</sup> Popenoe, “The Insane,” 258.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 265.

overall than women, nor does he provide any other demographic information about the patients.

In his article about sterilization of feeble-minded, Popenoe collected data from the Sonoma State Home for the Feeble-minded in which there were 606 male patients and 448 females.<sup>59</sup> Again, he does not explain why there were more men than women, but distinguishes that the male patients were low-grade individuals who were homeless or vagrants, and were sent to these homes for their own good.<sup>60</sup> Women, on the other hand, were considered high-grade individuals who could get along in society, but were sent to homes because of their depraved behavior. According to Popenoe women were put in a home for the benefit of society, rather than the women themselves.<sup>61</sup> Popenoe's definition of feeble-mindedness entailed an inability to get along independently. Feeble-mindedness in the women who were sterilized was determined by the way they affected society around them rather than their innate abilities.

Popenoe's later publication summarizing 6,000 sterilizations, however, claimed that there was no significant difference in the number of men and women sterilized.<sup>62</sup> Though many historians, like Wendy Kline, have viewed sterilization as a way to stymie the sexual revolution,<sup>63</sup> the distribution of sterilizations does not support this hypothesis. While there was no significant gender disparity in the number of sterilizations, it is interesting that men and women seemed to be sterilized for different reasons. This separation of motivations may give credence to Kline's theory. According to these articles, Popenoe believed that women had the mental capacity to function in society, but

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<sup>59</sup> Popenoe, "The Feeble-minded," 321.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>62</sup> Popenoe and Gosney, *Twenty-eight Years of Sterilization in California*, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Kline, *Building a Better Race*, 48-49.

some consciously chose to behave inappropriately. Therefore, sterilization may have been a method of reigning in socially unacceptable people, namely the men who were unable to live up to their roles and the women who went beyond theirs.

Popenoe also addresses of nativity and race in sterilization. In a study of the insane Popenoe claims that, "it appears that sterilization is applied without any bias in respect of nativity."<sup>64</sup> Despite the lack of bias in his research results, Popenoe does, however, exhibit xenophobia in some of his articles. For example, he raises the point that other 'scientific' studies have shown that Latin races contribute more feeble-minded patients.<sup>65</sup> Although it appears Popenoe did believe nativity was an important factor in feeble-mindedness, his research on the sterilized feeble-minded found that most patients were born in California. He therefore claimed that there is no more defectiveness among the children of immigrants than the offspring of older American stock. This shows Popenoe's dedication to his scientific data trumped his personal beliefs.

Similarly, it is clear Popenoe held some racist beliefs but withheld policy recommendations when his data did not support it. While Popenoe's own research did not expose a racial trend in the subjects of sterilization, he makes a point to allude to the validity of that claim. In one study Popenoe claims that the percentage of school children who would be considered feeble-minded was so large because of the presence of African American and Mexican children. He suggests that if they looked solely at those populations the number of "deficients" would be even larger.<sup>66</sup> This statement seems to have been made as commentary rather than interpretation of hard statistical data. Ultimately, however, Popenoe's studies concluded that there was no discrimination based

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<sup>64</sup> Popenoe, "The Insane," 260.

<sup>65</sup> Popenoe, "The Feeble-minded," 325.

<sup>66</sup> Popenoe, "The Number of Persons Needing Sterilization," 406.

on race or nationality.<sup>67</sup> These comments after the data failed to show racial significance, indicate that Popenoe may have wanted his data to suggest that feeble-mindedness was connected to race so he could suggest policy accordingly. However, due to lack of evidence he was unable to do so. The results of Popenoe's statistical studies seem to defy previous historians' views that sterilization was used as a tool for racial discrimination.<sup>68</sup>

The studies published in the Human Betterment Foundation Collection also address the role of socioeconomic status as a potential factor in sterilization. In his article dedicated to analyzing the socioeconomic status of patients, Popenoe comes to the conclusion that a preponderance of sterilizations was performed on the economically dependent.<sup>69</sup> In a subsequent study he compares the parentage and occupations of patients' families and finds that most of the "mentally defective" come from the middle class.<sup>70</sup> This study, however, concluded that sterilizations should not be determined by socioeconomic status.<sup>71</sup> Similar to the articles on race and ethnicity, it appears that these studies were performed with the intention of instigating policy reform. The outcomes of these studies imply that Popenoe was trying to narrow down potential populations for sterilization, but his commitment to scientific evidence prevented this from manifesting in any way due to the lack of sufficient substantiation. In this case, this conclusion contradicts previous historian's assertions that sterilization was used to marginalize and oppress immigrants and minorities. Perhaps, because the HBF was premised on scientific

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<sup>67</sup> Popenoe, "The Feeble-minded," 330.

<sup>68</sup> Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 85.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Popenoe, "Eugenic Sterilization in California: Economic and Social Status of the Sterilized Insane" In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 31-32.

<sup>70</sup> Paul Popenoe, "Eugenic Sterilization in California: Social and Economic Status of the Feeble-minded" In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 309.

<sup>71</sup> Popenoe, "Economic and Social Status of the Sterilized Feeble-minded," 314.

data, they were hesitant to promote any policies that were not firmly rooted in scientific and statistical data.

One group of individuals who Popenoe poses as potential future subjects of sterilization are those with physical defects like blindness, deafness or those born with physical handicaps.<sup>72</sup> Popenoe extends the argument so far as to suggest that cancer patients may be considered potential subjects but “at present” it is not worthwhile to include them.<sup>73</sup> The concept of including this population is curious because these conditions are not necessarily predicated on genetics. This only emphasizes the question of what purpose sterilization was meant to serve.

In an article on law and sterilization Popenoe offers some answers to this question. He claims that eugenic sterilization occurs for one of three reasons: as punishment for criminals, a therapeutic treatment for criminals and mental defectives, and “probably most important, eugenic- an effort to improve the race by preventing persons likely to become criminals or defectives or public charges from being born.”<sup>74</sup> Sterilizing those with physical “defects” would be a method of improving the race by removing them. Despite the uncertainty regarding the genetic heredity of this population, the threat of “defectiveness” was enough to warrant consideration for sterilization.

Although patients had no voice in whether they would be sterilized, Popenoe sent out questionnaires to previous patients inquiring about their health after the operation.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Popenoe, “The Number of Persons Needing Sterilization,” 409.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Popenoe, “The Law and Human Sterilization,” In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 556.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Popenoe, “Eugenic Sterilization in California: Attitude of Patients toward the Operation,” In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 281.

Of the 821 letters sent, 173 responses (21%) were received<sup>76</sup>, 132 (16%) of which revealed that the patient was satisfied or pleased with the operation.<sup>77</sup> The number of responses does not seem sufficient to make blanket statements about whether the patients were satisfied with the operation. Popenoe uses this in his book on the results of sterilization to legitimize sterilization because the procedure did not appear to negatively impact the patients or their families. It is noteworthy that in the questionnaire sent to patients, they inquired about their comparative health before and after the procedure, what benefits they derived, and if there has been a change in their sexual lives.<sup>78</sup> The study did not reveal any qualitative responses but divided the responses up into positive and negative options.

A recurring part of Popenoe's articles is the mention of the Department of Institutions in providing assistance and data for his analyses, but also the concept of state intervention. In many of his articles, Popenoe begins by giving Ezra Gosney credit for financing and directing the study and crediting the California State Department of Institutions for their "hearty cooperation," or that of the superintendent of the Sonoma State Home when relevant.<sup>79</sup> Popenoe repeatedly emphasizes the role of these state officials and departments and argues in one of his articles that, "in view of the great numbers of affected persons, it is concluded that the state must take an immediate and active interest in voluntary as well as in compulsory sterilization."<sup>80</sup> This suggestion that the state increase their involvement in sterilization could be driven by a desire for clearer

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<sup>76</sup> It is important to note that there is potentially a selection bias in who responded to these questionnaires. It is possible that only those who appreciated the procedure chose to reply.

<sup>77</sup> Popenoe, "Attitude of Patients toward the Operation," 282.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Popenoe, "Eugenic Sterilization in California: Success on Parole after Sterilization," In *Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California*, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Popenoe, "Number of Persons Needing Sterilization," 410.

regulation, or as Hansen and King suggested an effort for state officials and superintendents to gain more power and authority.<sup>81</sup> Sterilization, therefore, could have been an avenue to increase state power over the citizen.

### Scientifically Rationalizing Sterilization

Throughout his articles Popenoe puts forth various explanations for eugenic sterilization. Some motivations he explains blatantly, such as sterilization as a therapy for diseases like dementia praecox or to prevent attacks of insanity provoked by pregnancy.<sup>82</sup> The reasons for sterilizing the feeble-minded diverged between protecting the patient because they could not care for themselves, and protecting the state because of their bad behavior.<sup>83</sup> In later studies he writes that there are certain people, “whose children would be a liability rather than an asset to future generations, because of their inherited natures.”<sup>84</sup> In this instance, Popenoe asserts that sterilization is a method of enhancing future Americans by preventing potential liabilities. This might also suggest that eugenics sought to minimize liabilities rather than enhance humanity. This concern was part of the three aforementioned reasons Popenoe gave for sterilization, by preventing those who would potentially become public charges, criminals or defectives.<sup>85</sup>

Popenoe further acknowledges that at the current rates of reproduction, the number of male “deficients” would diminish, but the volume of female “deficients” would remain stable.<sup>86</sup> This element of population control, and the fact that he calculated how many children are necessary to propagate a trait, indicates a broader concern than

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<sup>81</sup> Hansen and King, *Sterilized by the State*, 19.

<sup>82</sup> Popenoe, “The Insane,” 265.

<sup>83</sup> Popenoe, “The Feeble-minded,” 323.

<sup>84</sup> Popenoe, “Number of Persons Needing Sterilization,” 405.

<sup>85</sup> Popenoe, “The Law and Sterilization,” 556.

<sup>86</sup> Popenoe, “Fecundity of the Insane,” 73.

the immediate threat of mental defectives. The concept of looking towards the future was reiterated by the fact that some of the patients were infertile and therefore did not require sterilization. Popenoe writes, "this fact simplifies the problem of eugenic sterilization for as soon as it is possible to work out methods by which at least a part of the naturally infertile half can be identified, it will be unnecessary to sterilize those, and the saving of time and expense can be applied to extension of sterilization among those who do require it." In this quote he lists two separate issues. First is the issue of preventing bad offspring, which is rendered irrelevant in infertile patients. The second is economic, in his explicit desire to reduce unnecessary expense and time. The hesitation to mass sterilize, however, suggests a nuance to the motivation for sterilization. Popenoe rejected sterilization based on race, nativity or socioeconomic status and does not commit to one reason for sterilization. Rather, he reveals many motivations, all of which are intended for the public good, whether economically or socially. He only suggests policy when his scientific data supports the idea, however it is clear based on his relationship with the Department of Institutions and his suggestions to make sterilization more state regulated, that the role of government was important to him in the future of sterilization.

These studies were published in scientific journals and addressed to an intellectual reader. The various articles published within the Human Betterment Foundation Collection address different aspects of the sterilization process from the different perspectives of involved parties, to the demographics of the sterilized. Many of these articles raise different motivations for sterilization, including those that sought to protect the patient and society from themselves, or to create a better future of Americans.



## Pamphlets and Books

As opposed to Popenoe's journal articles, the HBF pamphlets and Popenoe's and Gosney's book *Twenty-eight Years of Sterilization in California* were meant for public consumption.<sup>87</sup> These publications were printed and proliferated eight years after Popenoe's journals, once he and Gosney had narrowed down and consolidated the important information from their research. The information and commentary that Popenoe and Gosney shared through these sources provide insight into what motivations for sterilization they believed would resonate with the American public.

In their pamphlet "Human Sterilization Today," the HBF emphasizes the protective nature of sterilization for the "afflicted and their families, to society, and to posterity," and denies it as a punitive measure.<sup>88</sup> Sterilization, as they describe it, is in the interests of everyone, the patients, the physicians and society at large. The pamphlet attempts to distinguish eugenic sterilization from punishments of the past, such as castration, and establish sterilization as a modern scientific procedure.<sup>89</sup> As Gosney's and Popenoe's book states:

These operations, especially that for the male, must not be confounded with the mutilations practiced in an earlier day, such as those by which slaves were emasculated to furnish guardians for Oriental harems and boy singers until recent times were castrated before adolescence in order to provide male soprano voices for Roman Catholic cathedral choirs. In contrast with these crude and brutal procedures the modern sterilization operation neither mutilates no injures the patient.<sup>90</sup>

This illustrates how the HBF felt the need to humanize the sterilization process and differentiate sterilization from punishments of old. Mentioning the Roman Catholics may

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<sup>87</sup> From this point on, the pamphlet's author will be referred to as the Human Betterment Foundation and the book *Twenty-eight Years of Sterilization in California* will be referred to as Gosney and Popenoe.

<sup>88</sup> Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today*, 1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>90</sup> Popenoe and Gosney, *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California*, 4.

be significant because Catholics were known to be opposed to sterilization.<sup>91</sup> By exposing their disreputable past, Gosney and Popenoe attempt to delegitimize the claims of the Catholics against them. This passage underlines the message that sterilization is not used as a punishment. They even go so far as to describe the procedures and projected timelines of how long the patient would be incapacitated.<sup>92</sup> The pamphlet further defends the HBF in their assurances that mass sterilization is not a goal of the foundation or eugenics in general.<sup>93</sup> Another method used to bolster the legitimacy of sterilization is the confirmed constitutionality of compulsory sterilization by the Supreme Court.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Gosney and Popenoe address concerns that sterilization will lead to increased promiscuity and spread of diseases, because according to their studies sexual delinquents were actually less promiscuous after sterilization.<sup>95</sup> From the amount of evidence used to legitimize sterilization, it is clear that the HBF felt it needed to persuade the American people to support sterilization, implying that sterilization policy was not already universally accepted.

The pamphlet further humanizes the sterilization process by explaining that the operation is usually performed with the consent, or even upon request of the patient or their family.<sup>96</sup> The consent of the patient is highlighted when they write, “the attitude of sterilized patients reflects this clearly, their expressions of gratitude for this protection often being pathetic in their earnestness.”<sup>97</sup> This condescending illustration of the patients’ enthusiasm for the procedure reassures the reader that sterilization could not

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<sup>91</sup> Haller, "Eugenics," 131.

<sup>92</sup> Popenoe and Gosney, *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California*, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today*, 4.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Popenoe and Gosney, *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California*, 35.

<sup>96</sup> Popenoe and Gosney, *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California*, 18.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

possibly be so terrible. However, if this was premised on the questionnaires Popenoe discussed in his articles, the number of responses he received does not seem sufficient to make conclusions. Having established the scientific legitimacy of sterilization, Gosney's and Popenoe's book, as well as their pamphlet, elucidate other considerations to eugenic sterilization.

One argument the pamphlet emphasizes is the economic benefits of sterilization. The pamphlet claims that the tax burden for the mentally diseased and feeble-minded is growing, and though institutional care for the feeble-minded is minimal, their presence in society is expensive in direct costs, lowered efficiency, crime and delinquency.<sup>98</sup> Gosney and Popenoe elaborate on the additional costs of the feeble-minded when describing the issue of overcrowding. Because there was not enough space in homes for the feeble-minded, some patients were placed in private institutions, which Popenoe and Gosney claim cost the taxpayers an additional \$30,000 annually.<sup>99</sup> This is an exorbitant amount of money to spend on private institutions. In fact, they focus on one disease, dementia praecox, as costing the United States one million dollars per day, and assert that the disease is hereditary.<sup>100</sup> After stating the various monetary costs that the feeble-minded and mentally diseased inflict upon the American taxpayer, Gosney and Popenoe display sterilization as a cost effective and scientifically sound solution. They estimate that if the rates of sterilization continue, California alone will save more than two million dollars per year, which they suggest be used to care for other "defectives."<sup>101</sup> This argument is repeated in their condensed pamphlet.<sup>102</sup> They follow this economic argument by infusing

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<sup>98</sup> Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today*, 2.

<sup>99</sup> Popenoe and Gosney, *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California*, 18.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>102</sup> Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today*, 4.

the argument with American nationalism and humanism by claiming that the costs of feeble-mindedness are not limited to money, but result in lowered standards of education, citizenship, industrial efficiency and human suffering.<sup>103</sup> This addition might serve to balance the economic reasoning. The seemingly unsympathetic economic motivation for sterilization needed to be contrasted by an inspiring and emotional one.

Aside from the emphasis on the monetary burden of the feeble-minded and mentally diseased, these documents explain the various diseases that are involved in the general categories of those who were subjected to sterilization. Although discussed within the bounds of the monetary expense of caring for these groups of people, Gosney and Popenoe underline the struggle with caring for the mentally diseased and feeble-minded. Specifically, they lament the lack of adequate provisions for the feeble-minded.<sup>104</sup> However, this sympathetic statement is counteracted by their assertion that modern civilization protects the helpless, which inhibits nature from solving the “problem of survival of the unfit.”<sup>105</sup> These contradicting values contribute a sense of confusion to the book, in its endeavor to establish the foundation as strictly scientific but also illustrate the humanity in sterilization. In order to protect American society at large from crime and defectiveness, which was costing the taxpayers and detracting from the American ideal, sterilization posed a scientific and, as Gosney and Popenoe attempt to claim, humane solution.

Similar to Popenoe’s scientific articles, *Twenty-eight Years of Sterilization in California* also addresses the racial and ethnic makeup of patients. While Gosney and Popenoe state that most of the patients sterilized were American born, the proportion of

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 14.

foreign-born patients was relatively high. They wrote this was to be expected because foreigners were typically old and susceptible to insanity.<sup>106</sup> They do not, however, provide a citation or any form of proof for this information. It is interesting that the pamphlet, which was a more concise version of the book, does not mention race, ethnicity or immigrants in their promotion and explanation of sterilization. Perhaps because there was limited space, they did not include anything that was not scientifically supported. The study of race and ethnicity in Popenoe's scientific articles as well as the reference in *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California* indicate that this was a potential motivation for sterilization policies. The absence of patient demographics in the pamphlet suggests that there were no significant conclusions based on these characteristics, and as a scientifically based organization they could not claim otherwise.

In their book, Gosney and Popenoe often divide demographic categories of the sterilized patients into statistics about men and women. Instead of giving a percentage of total patients who were foreign or native-born, they describe how 61% of men and 69% of women were born in America.<sup>107</sup> They also note the different percentage of men and women afflicted by the various diseases plaguing subjects of sterilization.<sup>108</sup> Gosney and Popenoe even compare the wages male and female patients earned after the procedure.<sup>109</sup> The comparison of males and females in these different realms does not always seem necessary. When contrasting the age of patient's commitment to institutions, the authors reveal the importance of separating men and women. They claim that men are admitted earlier on average than women because women only pose problems in their community

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>107</sup> Popenoe and Gosney, *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California*, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 13-15.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

once they reached puberty and become sexual offenders.<sup>110</sup> This reasoning resonates with some of Popenoe's conclusions in his scientific studies. Women posed a danger to the community in their sexuality, as opposed to men who Popenoe earlier claimed to be helpless and useless.<sup>111</sup> Despite the rates of sterilization being equivalent in men and women, the reasoning for sterilization in the book and pamphlet reflect that of the articles. This seems to support historians, like Kline, who claim that sterilization was a reaction to a sexual revolution.

The repercussions for the American people are more emphasized in the pamphlet and book than in Popenoe's studies. While Popenoe published studies on the fecundity of the insane and feeble-minded, a concern for the growing population of feeble-minded and insane was not consistently emphasized. In contrast, the "Human Sterilization Today" pamphlet begins by claiming that families that send children to state homes for the feeble-minded multiply faster than the rest of the population.<sup>112</sup> The idea of population growth compounded with the deterioration of the American people seemed to be an effective motivation, as the pamphlet succinctly states, "the generally admitted trend of the population toward degeneracy is real and vital. The protection of these unfortunate defectives and their potential children, as well as posterity, is the people's problem. They must decide it. They should have all the material facts before making that decision."<sup>113</sup> This quote not only states the problem with the increase of "degenerates" in the American population, but also places the implementation of a solution in the hands of the reader. The pamphlet empowers the reader to be a part of the solution. This empowerment,

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>111</sup> Popenoe, "The Feeble-minded," 323.

<sup>112</sup> Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today*, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 3.

however, is accompanied by a sense of responsibility to the American nation. They must be equipped with all the essential facts, which the pamphlet conveniently provides. With this pamphlet in hand, readers were encouraged to find further information by purchasing other HBF publications and by passing on the pamphlet to their neighbors to discuss.<sup>114</sup>

In an example of serving a higher purpose for the American people, Gosney and Popenoe describe a situation in a San Quentin where prisoners voluntarily sterilized themselves because they did not want to have children who would be raised indecently without a fair chance at life, due to their hereditary limitations.<sup>115</sup> This occurrence epitomizes the type of sacrifice the HBF was seeking from the American people. From these texts it is apparent that the Human Betterment Foundation was asking American citizens to educate themselves and act accordingly in supporting sterilization, by raising awareness or by submitting themselves to it.

Both the scientific articles and other materials created by the HBF ascribe significance to the economic burden placed by the insane and feeble-minded on society, and consequently the economic benefits of sterilization. Providing an actual projected numerical expense makes the burden visceral and personal to the reader. This became increasingly relevant as the book was published in 1938, well into the Great Depression. This meant that resources were scarce and population size may have been a more relevant concern to readers.

While the scientific articles Popenoe published emphasize the role of government, the pamphlet and the book that the HBF proliferated lack this argument. The absence of

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 4,8.

<sup>115</sup> Popenoe and Gosney, *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization in California*, 16.

Popenoe's assertion that the state be more involved in sterilization<sup>116</sup> in both "Human Sterilization Today" and *Twenty-Eight Years of Sterilization* seems intentional. The pamphlet and book assign responsibility to the American people themselves rather than the government. The purpose of including this argument in the scientific journal is to accumulate scientific support to encourage making policy, whereas the purpose of the pamphlet and book is to inspire the American people to support and act on sterilization policy when they encounter it.

These HBF sources illuminate some of the arguments made in favor of sterilization. Prominent among them is the economic relief sterilization provides for future Americans. The increase in female sexual expression may have also played a role, as evidenced by the differing rationalization for sterilization in men and women. It seems that the HBF would have liked to have racial, ethnic or socioeconomic reasons for sterilization, but due to a lack of scientific substantiation they did not make any such claims. One of the main conclusions of the book and pamphlet was that sterilization is necessary to improve the future American, and it is the responsibility of all Americans to contribute to the cause. Comparing the formal HBF documents with the scientific articles reveals the process of determining which claims they could, in good conscience, make about who should be sterilized. The articles explore many demographics with the purpose of finding specific targets for sterilization, and place a lot of faith in governmental supervision. The book and pamphlet illustrate that they needed to convince the American people both of the scientific legitimacy and humanitarian goals of sterilization before they could be convinced to support sterilization. Interestingly, compulsory sterilization was already in effect in California, so perhaps Gosney and Popenoe were trying to build

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<sup>116</sup> Popenoe, "Number of Persons Needing Sterilization," 410.



enough support for sterilization to warrant an increase the role of government supervision of sterilization.

## Chapter Two

### A Corpus of Correspondence: Reactions to the Human Betterment Foundation

The Human Betterment Foundation and the material they disseminated impacted people all over America and the world at large. As a result people would write to them to request information, seek advice on procedures or even laws, and either express their support or hesitations with eugenic sterilization. Examining these correspondences is another method of discerning who supported sterilization and for what purposes. This chapter is therefore broken up into three sections. The first section analyzes those who wrote to the HBF seeking information, looking at who they were and establishes that the foundation was a well-known and trusted source. The second section reviews letters from people who wrote to the foundation looking for advice on sterilization or marriage counsel. This will reveal what concerns Americans had regarding sterilization. The third section of this chapter examines and compares the rationale behind the letters of support and dissent for the HBF. This chapter uses the correspondences of the Human Betterment Foundation to reveal the mindset of Americans when considering voluntary and compulsory sterilization.

#### Academic Curiosity

In the Human Betterment Foundation's archive there are a tremendous number of postcards from Americans and foreigners requesting copies of the pamphlet "Human Sterilization Today" discussed in the last chapter.<sup>117</sup> These came from students, teachers,

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<sup>117</sup> Section II Boxes 5-11, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation, Archives, California Institute of Technology.

librarians and a multitude of unidentified persons. In addition to the postcards, there were numerous letters to the foundation from students studying sterilization and health. Tom Massey, for example, a student in California, wrote to the HBF requesting information for his research paper on eugenic sterilization.<sup>118</sup> The number of similar letters reinforces the notion that the HBF was a recognized and trusted source for reliable information about sterilization. They were so well known, in fact, that Simon Nielson, a student at Dartmouth University wrote to them in 1941 that in his philosophy course they used a book entitled *Ethics and Social Policy*, which refers to their pamphlet "Human Sterilization Today." He found their pamphlet interesting and wrote to ask for more information.<sup>119</sup> This shows how the HBF's ideas permeated fields outside of eugenics and were disseminated through diverse channels like philosophy texts. This incident shows the relevance of eugenics and sterilization extended beyond the scientific realm.

In addition to philosophy and eugenics, many students requested information for different academic purposes. Several letters mentioned academic endeavors such as research papers, or as Miss Yvonne Leughton wrote "any other literature that will be of value to me in my pre-medical course."<sup>120</sup> This demonstrates how sterilization had become integrated into the medical realm. Leughton's request also illustrates how, in addition to their recognition specifically for sterilization, the HBF became an authority in the scientific community in general.

It was not, however, only students who appealed to the Human Betterment Foundation for information. There were numerous letters and postcards from colleges and

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<sup>118</sup> Box 6.5, Letter from Tom Massey, 10/18/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>119</sup> Box 8.2, Letter from Simon Nielson, 11/13/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>120</sup> Box 6.4, Letter from Miss Yvonne Leughton, 12/27/1942, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

public libraries requesting pamphlets and books.<sup>121</sup> Having these materials as resources in libraries across America demonstrates how the foundation's publications were both academic and accessible. In addition to libraries, many teachers wrote to them asking for educational materials. For example, Edythe Saylor, an instructor in health education at Alabama College, was teaching future instructors of health and requested material from the HBF to aid her in her course.<sup>122</sup> The Human Betterment Foundation was therefore influential in the training of teachers. Dr. Helen Judy Bond, the head of the department of Home Economics at Columbia University Teacher's College, also asked for copies of their pamphlet to distribute in her class.<sup>123</sup> She did not specify that she wanted to teach their material in her course, however her request to proliferate their pamphlets indicates that she was familiar with their message, trusted their sources and wanted to share their material.

Formal teachers were not the only ones to use the pamphlets. Mrs. Louise Mead wrote to the HBF that she was teaching a course on sex character education for many local mothers and wrote it would be "well worth while" to pass out their pamphlet.<sup>124</sup> In this situation the HBF pamphlets were used to educate parents rather than as a prophylactic measure for future parents, showing that this information was significant to everyone. The courses for which information was requested ranged from home economics, to hygiene and sexual education. This further confirms that sterilization was applicable in numerous subjects.

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<sup>121</sup> Box 6.6, Elizabeth McCloy librarian of Occidental College, 2/8/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>122</sup> Box 5.6, Letter from Edythe Saylor, 9/20/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>123</sup> Box 5.8, Letter from Dr. Helen Judy Bond, 6/2/1944, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>124</sup> Box 6.5, Mrs. Louise Mead, 1/18/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

It is noteworthy that the letters from teachers and students came from all over the United States, from both men and women. They wrote from small city colleges<sup>125</sup> as well as prestigious institutions like Columbia University and New York University.<sup>126</sup> This diversity of educated individuals further bolsters the relevance and standing of the Human Betterment Foundation in the academic world.

Another channel through which the HBF gained recognition was through news articles, such as the one written by Dr. Lovell in the LA times. Dr. Philip Lovell wrote a column on "Care of the Body" and in one of his articles he printed a letter from the Human Betterment Foundation on sterilization.<sup>127</sup> Dr. Lovell prefaced the article by sharing that he was in favor of sterilizing the unfit, criminal and insane.<sup>128</sup> In response to this article the HBF received numerous letters citing Dr. Lovell as the source introducing them to their work.<sup>129</sup> This avenue of publicity complemented the academic recognition the foundation gained through their scientific publications.

Dr. Lovell's article also introduced the topic of voluntary sterilization. Many people wrote to the HBF discussing voluntary sterilizations, such as Pauline Perrine who wrote inquiring about voluntary sterilization of people with physical or mental defects. She asked, "are such operations, for individuals of normal mentality, legal only of passed upon by state boards or investigators, or may they be performed at the will of the

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<sup>125</sup> Box 6.9, Letter from Miss Dorothy Shirk, 5/1/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>126</sup> Box 9.5, Postcards from Columbia University and New York University, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>127</sup> Philip M. Lovell, "Care of the Body." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 13, 1940. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/165174438?accountid=10226>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Box 6.3, Letter from Frank Keeley, 4/17/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

patient?"<sup>130</sup> Voluntary sterilization was the topic of many letters, especially from men inquiring about the effects of vasectomy. Many were concerned that having a vasectomy would make them effeminate or gain weight.<sup>131</sup> These letters show how seriously Americans considered vasectomy as a voluntary procedure.

News articles citing the HBF were different means of reaching the general American public. The balance of scientific and cultural forums in which Americans could, and did, access Human Betterment Foundation information illustrate its popularity, relevance, and reliability.

### Seeking Advice

Because the Human Betterment Foundation was considered an upstanding organization they received copious amounts of letters asking for advice regarding feeble-mindedness, sterilization, birth control, and voluntary vasectomy. These questions came from people considered both fit and unfit. The rationale for these questions therefore varied based on circumstance.

Several letters to the foundation expressed concern for family members or neighbors who were unfit and asked for the foundation's opinion on the matter. One example was Mrs. Farleigh, an Australian, who had written the foundation a number of times, and suspected her daughter-in-law had dementia praecox because she was prone to violent outbursts. She therefore requested information on the disease and asked whether it

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<sup>130</sup> Box 6.7, Letter from Pauline Perrine, 10/29/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>131</sup> Box 6.3, Letter from Frank Keeley, 4/17/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

is infectious.<sup>132</sup> This letter demonstrates the widespread concern over mental disease and its impact on society. Some letters were less concerned about the wellness of the unfit person in question. Miss Louana Siler, a student at the College of the Pacific, wrote to the foundation because she found out a former classmate of hers, who she determined to be feeble-minded, had a child. She wrote that she suspects this woman's husband is also feeble-minded and asked "is there any way in which that couple could be legally sterilized? They are too ignorant to successfully use birth control methods... I am very anxious to prevent children from being born whose ultimate goal is such an institution."<sup>133</sup> The institution she refers to is the Stockton State Hospital, which was for the mentally diseased. Louana Siler essentially informed on her neighbor because she thought this woman should not have children and that the child was destined to be mentally diseased. This illustrates a concern for the future children and the desire to prevent citizens who would require institutionalization but also an idea that some people are unfit to parent.

Family and neighbors were not the only ones to seek advice from the HBF. Some individuals who considered themselves unfit wrote asking for information or advice. Albert Hyder wrote to the foundation saying that he was considering sterilization because of his epilepsy and asked if the procedure was dangerous and when he would be able to resume sexual activity.<sup>134</sup> This letter is interesting because Hyder's concern was about propagating unfit offspring rather than his inability to parent. Furthermore, he voluntarily submits himself to this procedure. He admits his condition, one that does not inhibit his

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<sup>132</sup> Box 5.12, Letter from Mrs. Farleigh, 7/19/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>133</sup> Box 6.9, Letter from Louana Siler, 6/7/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>134</sup> Box 10.17, Letter from Albert Hyder, 10/27/1942, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

ability to think or function in society, and takes it upon himself to prevent the propagation of this trait. Another man, John Wallis, admitted that his wife had a, "family history unfavorable for child bearing wishes to submit to sterilization in place of his wife who has the bad history." Wallis inquired if he could reverse the surgery in the event that his wife dies and he remarries.<sup>135</sup> Wallis, like Hyder, views sterilization as a solution to potentially objectionable offspring rather than to problematic parents. Neither Hyder nor Wallis explicate whether it would be unfavorable for them to have kids for themselves personally or for society in general. The fact that people took it upon themselves to prevent offspring is significant in proving the degree to which Americans subscribed to eugenic philosophy. However, these letters fail to identify the precise motivation for voluntary sterilization of the unfit.

The HBF also received multiple letters regarding voluntary vasectomy from those who considered themselves fit. In these letters, the writer would not address physical or mental defects, but would invoke the cost of child rearing in their inquiries about sterilization. For example, J.C. Booth had read about sterilization in the LA Times and requested further information because he and his wife already had three kids and did not want any more. He wrote that they had "fulfilled our duty towards ourselves and society," and based on his salary of twenty-five dollars a week they could not afford more children.<sup>136</sup> Booth's phrasing is interesting because it suggests that there was a duty towards society to procreate, and, in fact, positive eugenic initiatives did encourage the fit to breed. It is also notable that Booth included his weekly earnings in an attempt to

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<sup>135</sup> Box 6.12, Letter from John Wallis, 10/18/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>136</sup> Box 5.17, Letter from J.C. Booth, 10/14/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.



further justify his desire for sterilization. This letter contributes two considerations to voluntary sterilization, the first is the concept of a societal obligation to procreate and the second is the economic burden of caring for children.

These two concepts were repeatedly raised in other letters. Professor Arnold Wright of the Department of Sociology at Kentucky State College asked, “is there a program for normal families who already have enough children?”<sup>137</sup> Again the concept of “enough children” is brought up as a motivation for sterilization. It is possible that economic constraints were connected to a fulfillment of obligation, as a letter from Victor Huack indicates. Huack wrote to the HBF explaining that he and his wife are both intelligent individuals, she completed college and he has one year remaining. They do not, however, have a lot of money and therefore do not want kids yet. He asks if they know of any natural preventative.<sup>138</sup> This letter is particularly revealing because Huack identifies himself and his wife as desirable parents due to their intelligence, but because of financial constraints they are not ready and willing to have children. By writing “yet,” however, he concedes that it is an eventual goal once their financial situation has improved. Whether having children is a goal for themselves or society is not specified, however these letters, and the many others like them, divulge that economics were an important impetus for voluntary sterilization.

In addition to letters about voluntary vasectomy from those who could not afford more children or considered themselves unfit, there were a number of other letters that sought guidance about marriage and sterilization for personal reasons. Betty Balcom

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<sup>137</sup> Box 8.5, Letter from Arnold Wright, 9/24/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>138</sup> Box 8.16, Letter from Victor Huack, 2/6/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

wrote to the HBF informing them that she is engaged to a man, who is brilliant mentally and physically but his ears are small and look upside down. She asks what the foundation's opinion is on whether their children could be degenerate.<sup>139</sup> This letter shows that the Human Betterment Foundation's authority was not limited to sterilization, because she asks for their expert medical and eugenic opinion. Balcom's concern reflects a preoccupation with birth and heredity that likely stem from eugenic ideals. Another woman with similar concerns about physical features was Edna Arrowood. Edna wrote the HBF asking if one needed to be socially diseased in order to be sterilized, because "I am very small in stature otherwise I'm in good health would you advise an operation to prevent childbirth?"<sup>140</sup> This letter highlights how important it was to Americans to reproduce wisely. A woman who has none of the mental defects that concerned eugenicists doubted her right to have children simply because she was short. This further demonstrates the sincerity with which society accepted **sterilization as a eugenic solution**.<sup>141</sup>

These letters from all over the country, and the world, show how widely eugenic concerns permeated society. Though many invoked financial reasons for requiring sterilization, it is curious that the authors of these letters did not mention any racial matters. Though there was a racial element to the eugenics movement in America, none of the letters addressed to the HBF raised race as a reason for sterilization. Popenoe addressed the idea that there were studies showing certain races to be inferior, yet not a single letter suggests that sterilization laws take race into consideration, or even that an

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<sup>139</sup> Box 5.17, Letter from Betty Balcom, 4/8/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>140</sup> Box 9.13, Letter from Edna Arrowood, 12/30/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>141</sup> It is important to note that the socioeconomic, racial and heredity of those who wrote to the HBF are unknown, so it is unclear whether only certain populations found this material compelling.

individual be sterilized because of it. Perhaps because the HBF wrote in their book that sterilization should not be determined based on race or ethnicity, those writing to them refrained from making such arguments.

Ultimately, the number and content of letters from all over America with questions from doctors, lawyers, students, teachers and other citizens show the broad applications of sterilization. There was even an inmate at San Quentin Prison, J.F. Conroy, who wrote to the foundation claiming that he was considering sterilization and wanted to know if he would be able to have intercourse five years after the procedure.<sup>142</sup> Conroy did not claim to have any defect and the idea of sterilization seems to be voluntary. His primary concern about vasectomy seems to be his ability to have intercourse, presumably once he is released from prison. While this letter does not reveal any specific motivations for voluntary sterilization, it does show that vasectomy was relevant even in jails. These letters show different motivations for sterilization for various Americans, ranging from eugenic to economic.

#### Supporting v. Opposing the HBF

As the volume of letters demonstrates, the HBF was a known entity in America and the world, and as such they sent their materials to their supporters as well as those who wrote in opposition to their mission.<sup>143</sup> Ezra Gosney would write to superintendents and other state or legal officials to inquire about various sterilization laws. For example Gosney wrote to Dr. Pace, the superintendent of Utah State Hospital, asking why Utah

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<sup>142</sup> Box 5.18, Letter from J.F. Conroy, 5/19/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>143</sup> Box 6.14, Letter to Dr. Weir of Victoria, Canada, 5/19/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

does not apply their sterilization law. Gosney offered three hypotheses: that there were some complications in the law, that they needed further legal clarification, or that officials feared to act on the law because of potential reactions.<sup>144</sup> Dr. Pace replied that while those were good reasons, they do not believe in eugenic sterilization, but prefer to implement selective sterilization.<sup>145</sup> Gosney promptly replied that the HBF does not support mass sterilization, rather they promote selective sterilization, “on the basis that they are clearly unfit for parenthood.”<sup>146</sup> In this response, Gosney claims that the purpose of sterilization is to prevent undesirable parents and says nothing about the desirability of the children. This interaction, however, also shows that there was hesitation towards sterilization based on the idea that it could be implemented on a mass basis.

Others had similar hesitations to sterilization programs. In response to receiving their pamphlets, Professor Louis Evans from the Indiana sociology program replied:

While it tells a rather convincing story, I believe it **falls far short of the whole** story and tends to minimize some of the serious problems and factors which must be taken into account if a real understanding of the situation is to be had. Especially is it defective in that it does not give proper consideration to psychological and emotional factors involved. **I am sorry to say also that some of** those charged with the administration of Indiana laws relating to this subject have not been too aware of these same factors with some very unwholesome results.<sup>147</sup>

This letter exhibits a concern with the concept of sterilization because it fails to take into account other factors, and is narrow-minded in its goal. Professor Evans protests against the narrative that the HBF weaved in favor of sterilization, underlining the fact that it is

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<sup>144</sup> Box 4.3, Letter from Ezra Gosney to Dr. Pace, 2/8/1936, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>145</sup> Box 4.3, Letter from Dr. Pace, 2/12/1936, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>146</sup> Box 4.3, Letter from Ezra Gosney to Dr. Pace, 2/14/1936, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>147</sup> Box 7.13, Letter from Louis Evans, 10/15/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

conveyed as a story. He concludes that contrary to the findings of the HBF, there have been negative results to sterilization.

Another individual who disagreed vocally with the mission of the HBF was Professor Bronson Price of Ohio State University. Professor Price had referred to eugenic sterilization as a form of social demonology. This prompted the HBF to request that he clarify his intent, insisting that he could not possibly have meant that because so many scientists support sterilization.<sup>148</sup> They also asked how he could question a foundation whose “line of work which seeks to prevent the birth of those to whom life, if born, would be a tragedy.”<sup>149</sup> Contrary to Gosney’s earlier claim to Dr. Pace, the HBF justifies sterilization on behalf of the future children, rather than the ineptitude of the parents. The HBF further claimed that segregating the feeble-minded was worse than sterilization because it prevents procreation, but also deprives them of all freedom.<sup>150</sup>

Professor Price replied that this was not a worthy reason for sterilization and posited that releasing people from institutions would not yield positive results. He added that there were better initiatives for the eugenics movement than promoting sterilization laws. Price concluded that he uses their pamphlets in his courses to point out the errors in their focus on the social welfare aspects of eugenics.<sup>151</sup> Professor Price accuses the foundation of being more focused on social welfare than eugenics and of misunderstanding societal needs. The correspondences between the HBF and Professor Price continued heatedly and Price wrote that their pamphlets contain “bogies, scare

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<sup>148</sup> Box 9.17, Letter to Bronson Price, 7/25/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>149</sup> Box 9.17, Letter to Bronson Price, 8/24/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>150</sup> Box 9.17, Letter to Bronson Price, 8/24/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>151</sup> Box 9.17, Letter from Bronson Price, 10/6/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

statistics, and appeals to tax dodgers.”<sup>152</sup> The charges against the Human Betterment Foundation and their retaliatory replies highlight their struggle to be accepted as a scientific authority when their agenda was geared towards social policy. Professor Price questioned their policy as well as the science supporting it. He also denigrates stating the economic benefits of sterilization. In their replies, the foundation defends itself by referring to the extensive list of teachers using their materials, citing the scientists who support their data, as well as defending their position based on financial feasibility.

The hesitation to resort to sterilization was first mentioned by Dr. Leak, the superintendent of Connecticut State Hospital in 1928. He wrote that they have not done much work on sterilization because, “I am inclined to believe that more good can be done by reaching people prior to the time they come into the hospitals, and perhaps training them to adjust themselves so as to become better citizens”<sup>153</sup> While Dr. Leak did not question the scientific validity of eugenics and eugenic sterilization, he does doubt sterilization as a tactic for dealing with the problem of having “defective” members of society.

In addition to questions of their validity and methods, some wrote the foundation complaining about their anti-Roman Catholic rhetoric. Miss Emma Jayne Bernholz wrote the foundation stating her qualms. While she admitted that compulsory sterilization seems humanitarian, she questions the assumption that man can confiscate a god given right and asks, “the end is wholly desirable, but are the means ethical?”<sup>154</sup> The only

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<sup>152</sup> Box 9.17, Letter from Bronson Price, 12/22/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>153</sup> Box 28.7, Letter from Dr. Leak, 5/11/1928, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>154</sup> Box 9.1, Letter from Emma Jayne Bernholz, 12/8/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

hindrance to sterilization, according to this opinion is its ethics, which implies that voluntary sterilization would have been considered acceptable.

The arguments against eugenic sterilization were that it was either unethical, not scientifically legitimate, or that there was a better way to address America's eugenically unfit population. The accusations against the HBF itself concerned the way they constructed a narrative that was tailored to scare Americans. In their responses to these allegations, the HBF demonstrated the scientific validity of their information, the global acceptance they received, and reiterated their position that sterilization is the best and most humane way to deal with the unfit.

Though there were numerous letters that conveyed hesitations towards the science or ethics of a sterilization program, there were even more letters in support of their endeavors. Some explained why they supported sterilization, like Mr. Machi from New Jersey who lauded the foundation, "for the placement of the **human race on a higher standing, both morally and physically.**"<sup>155</sup> This praise reflects eugenic ideals and demonstrates that some Americans were genuinely excited about sterilization as a way to perfect mankind. Another enthusiast, Elam Hummer from Pennsylvania went so far as to say "I am thoroughly convinced that the only antitheses for war is work along the lines in which I believe you are engaged. Namely, criminal sterilization. The universe will progress and the grade of humanity must progress with it. If the knife is not used, nature decrees the gun."<sup>156</sup> Mr. Hummer's exuberance for sterilization policies is such that, in the midst of World War II, he views sterilization as a prophylactic measure for future

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<sup>155</sup> Box 9.2, Letter from Mr. Machi, 5/23/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>156</sup> Box 10.4, Letter from Elam Hummer, 6/17/1943, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

war. He also mentions an evolutionary imperative for sterilization. If they do not advance mankind themselves, the course of nature will do so in a more detrimental way. This statement also seems to imply that the war was somehow a product of man's failure to prevent the propagation of criminals.

Not only did the HBF receive letters of support, they also received advice on how to advance their cause. J.F. Page, from the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College department of Sociology and Rural Life wrote to them explaining that the way to get laws passed is with public support, which can only be obtained through understanding. He therefore proposed that the foundation attempt to get an institution featured in a motion picture. He wrote that California was particularly suited to begin this movement because of the film industry, the presence of the Human Betterment Foundation, and because they have already been so successful in their sterilization program.<sup>157</sup> This suggestion is significant both because it comes from a Professor, someone who held some modicum of intellectual authority, and because it acknowledges that sterilization did not yet have public backing. It insists, however, that if people understood they would support it.

Citizens and academics were not the only ones to support sterilization and identify obstacles to the cause. Dr. E. Lee Porter, the superintendent of Chester County Institution in Pennsylvania, wrote to the HBF expressing his support for their work, and asked what could be done to combat the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>158</sup> There were numerous other

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<sup>157</sup> Box 4.12, Letter from J.F. Page, 11/4/1942, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>158</sup> Box 10.5, Letter from Dr. E. Lee Porter, 5/1/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.



superintendents who wrote thanking the HBF and offering their assistance.<sup>159</sup> The anti-Catholic sentiment mentioned by Dr. Porter was echoed in a number of other letters. Marion Norton from the Sterilization League of New Jersey wrote the HBF stating that supporters of sterilization should join against their opponents, namely the Catholics.<sup>160</sup> These correspondences show that the Catholic Church was the biggest opponent to sterilization legislation.

The letters showing both support and opposition to eugenic sterilization exhibit the various populations involved. Based on the letters of dissent, those who opposed sterilization were Catholics and some academics who questioned the scientific basis of sterilization. The advocates for sterilization ranged from superintendents, to professors and regular citizens. Many of these letters supported sterilization because it was perceived as the next step in human progress.

All of the letters to the HBF requesting information, asking for advice, showing support, or questioning their values and methods, show their range and efficacy in reaching the American population. The identities of the writers are important because they show the scope of which populations the HBF reached, and who was thinking about eugenic sterilization. While there is no information about race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, some correspondents identified themselves as students, teachers, doctors, lawyers, men, and women. Therefore, though the demographic information of the writers is limited, it is clear there were many intelligent people grappling with the concept of eugenic sterilization. The content of the letters further indicate that interest in

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<sup>159</sup> Box 28.6, Letter from Dr. Thomas F. Joyce, 4/18/1934, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>160</sup> Box 9.3, Letter from Marion Norton, 4/9/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

sterilization was for both compulsory and voluntary procedures, and for eugenic and financial reasons. The eugenic reasons for sterilization fluctuated between whether the parent was unfit or if it was the fate of the offspring that was problematic. This fluctuation is exhibited by both the HBF itself and those who corresponded with them. Ultimately, the various correspondences of the Human Betterment Foundation illustrate the concerns of the American people regarding sterilization in its different forms.

## Chapter Three

### Choosing A Side: Science Versus Social Policy

The letters written to the Human Betterment Foundation ranged greatly in content and tone. Because they addressed such a diverse array of topics, from medical questions to policy queries, the HBF had to formulate a way to respond while maintaining their identity as an organization. The mission of the HBF was clarified in their pamphlets, “to investigate the results and possibilities for human betterment by a safe, conservative application of the discoveries made by scientists, and to give this information to the public.”<sup>161</sup> However that does not encompass giving out medical, legal, marriage or policy advice. Therefore, the replies of the HBF reveal how they conceived their role as an organization once their studies were published and proliferated. This chapter examines how their replies to correspondence and the documents they kept on file contribute to the HBF’s attempt to balance between a scientific and social identity.

#### Are We Medical Men?

Because the letters addressed topics ranging from medical questions about sterilization to birth control and policy questions, the way that the HBF replied to these letters indicates how they perceived their role within these realms. In their replies to letters asking medical questions about sterilization they would often reply that they “are not medical men here, but investigators and educators.”<sup>162</sup> Another common reply to medical questions regarding sterilization was that they do not look at individual cases;

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<sup>161</sup> Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today*, 6.

<sup>162</sup> Box 5.20, Letter to Clarence Earle, 1/4/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation, Archives, California Institute of Technology.

rather they look at the results of sterilization at large.<sup>163</sup> This response demonstrates a hesitation to claim authority for the actual practice of sterilization. However this reluctance was tempered by their uninhibited recommendations of specific doctors to perform sterilizations.<sup>164</sup> The HBF's desire to be involved is evident by their willingness to refer their correspondents to physicians or to different organizations. A number of people wrote to them asking about birth control, and they replied that they only study sterilization, but to ask The American Institute of Family Relations<sup>165</sup> or the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.<sup>166</sup> While birth control was not in their area of expertise, they did not have to refer people to other organizations or doctors. These referrals were not part of their role as investigators and educators of sterilization, and therefore expanded the boundaries of their mission.

Frank Reid, the secretary of the HBF, noted that he kept a list of possible replies to people inquiring about topics aside from the results of sterilization. These replies varied for different questions, some refer the writer to the American Institute of Family Relations or to the Birth Control Federation of America, others reiterate that the foundation deals with, "the subject of eugenic sterilization of the unfit as practiced in California and the other states of the Union."<sup>167</sup> Despite these various replies in which the foundation defines their area of expertise, there were times that they would provide a medical answer. For example, in response to Betty Balcom who had written to them

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<sup>163</sup> Box 5.17, Letter to Mr. Theodore Smith, 6/15/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>164</sup> Box 5.16, Letter to Mrs. Earl Anderson, 5/22/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>165</sup> Box 6.7, Letter to Mrs. Pacheco, 2/28/1944, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>166</sup> Box 8.6, Letter to John Pettit, 7/8/1944, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>167</sup> Box 3.2, Notes Taken from Frank C. Reid's Correspondence on Sterilization, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

asking about whether she should marry her fiancé whose ears were upside down, the foundation said they did not think that would be a genetically inheritable quality.<sup>168</sup> Another example is when Mrs. Nichols wrote to them asking if having trouble sleeping could be a result of vasectomy. The foundation replied that it is not, and that side effect is merely a fable.<sup>169</sup> The inconsistency of whether they would give advice or not, shows their desire to be more than simply a scientific research foundation. This illustrates a desire to be involved in the application of their studies. Their inability to commit to being a foundation that only discusses the results of sterilization shows how the identity of the HBF fluctuated.

The ambiguity of their identity as a foundation is further confused by their responses to people regarding voluntary sterilization. According to their mission they study the sterilization of the unfit, not voluntary sterilization. The volume of questions about voluntary sterilization and their responses giving physician references and book recommendations, reveal that the HBF was interested in this type of sterilization as well. This further indicates that the foundation's mission was obscured by their enthusiasm to promote any type of sterilization.

### Are We Policy Makers?

Another area in which the Human Betterment Foundation claimed to be apart from, and yet were heavily involved in, was the policy of sterilization. Though some of Popenoe's scientific studies implied suggestions for policy, the foundation itself never

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<sup>168</sup> Box 5.7, Letter to Betty Balcom, 4/9/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>169</sup> Box 15.4, Letter to Mrs. Nichols, 6/14/1939, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

put forth any formal proposals. In reply to a letter from Emma Haines, the HBF clearly stated, "This foundation does not take any part in the promotion of legislation on sterilization in any state."<sup>170</sup> However their involvement and curiosity about different sterilization laws seems to contradict this statement. Gosney himself wrote, "I am quite strongly of the opinion that compulsory sterilization should be provided for, and also that the law should provide for sterilization by consent, at least, for non-institutional persons who are found to be of a type unfitted for parenthood."<sup>171</sup> In addition to repeating the sentiment that sterilization prevented unfit parents, this serves as further evidence that the HBF thought sterilization policies were important and necessary.

The foundation was in contact with a number of politicians and lawyers about different state sterilization laws.<sup>172</sup> Ezra Gosney was even in touch with doctors in other countries, like Japan, to discuss potential laws abroad.<sup>173</sup> In particular, the HBF was concerned with the California sterilization law, often disparaging it's weakness. In a series of correspondences with Thomas Joyce, the superintendent of the Pacific Colony, regarding a lawsuit against sterilization in their colony, the HBF wrote, "of course we all recognize the vulnerable nature of the old law, and we are wondering just what your course of procedure will be. It is a pity we cannot get a really good law on the statute books of California."<sup>174</sup> Despite not being involved in promoting any laws, they were open about their reservations regarding the strength of the law. In another letter they

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<sup>170</sup> Box 10.4, Letter to Emma Haines, 2/3/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>171</sup> Box 7.6, Letter to Dr. Devilbliss, 6/11/1941, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>172</sup> Box 5.9, Letter to Governor Atkins of Arkansas, 2/12/1943, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>173</sup> Box 8.3, Letter to Dr. Iso Abe in Japan, 12/21/1936, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>174</sup> Box 4.3, Letter to Thomas Joyce, 7/11/1940, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

lament that, "the California Law is antiquated in form and never was satisfactory from the standpoint of scientific requirements."<sup>175</sup> In this statement they relate the weakness of the law to its inability to meet the needs of science. The results of their scientific studies therefore seem to mandate a political response in the form of more powerful laws.

Though some responses of the HBF officially refused to give medical or policy advice, others demonstrated that they were proponents of tougher sterilization laws and did give advice. Through these actions the HBF exceeded their role as they defined it as disseminating the results of their studies. There appears to be a strategy to claiming no political agenda. Once they established that they were not politicians, they were able to inquire about and critique policies. Interestingly, while they claimed that the policies were not stringent enough, they did not suggest specific changes in language or programs. This insinuates that while the HBF were obviously familiar with the various sterilization laws and knew their flaws, they did not want to deviate too far from the scientific domain. Refraining from putting forth solutions reflects a tension between wanting change and an unwillingness to spearhead it. The HBF refused to be categorized as medical men or politicians, yet their work was inextricably linked to these realms.

### Finding Meaning in the Files

The documents and statistics the HBF kept on file illuminate the tension of defining an identity torn between being a scientific organization that addresses social issues and one that directly raises them. The documents from outside sources or that addressed questions not directly relevant to their research, illustrate where their interests

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<sup>175</sup> Box 9.2, Letter to Bernice Howard, 3/20/1942, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

truly lay. The files and articles they stored, possibly for reference or inspiration, indicate the questions and aspects of sterilization that concerned them.

Many of the papers that the Human Betterment Foundation saved suggest possible motivations for sterilization. Their interests however, did not always align with hard scientific facts and it is therefore interesting to examine what information they kept, but did not publish. In one of the articles found in their archives, “The Progress of Human Sterilization” which did not have an author, the article claims that sterilization benefits the state and taxpayer as well as the sterilized patient and their families.<sup>176</sup> Listing the patient as a seemingly additional benefactor implies that their importance was secondary to the state. The author continued to write, “But when a nation is dying at the top and growing only at the bottom, the average level of fitness is certain to decline; leadership to become rarer, deficiency and dependency to increase. No nation can survive such a trend.”<sup>177</sup> It appears that the increase of “deficient” citizens **threatens the state not only in** the fitness of the population, but also in their ability to be self-reliant. This article also listed immigrants as a source of low intelligence **impacting the future of America.**<sup>178</sup> The article does not cite their claims, so it is unclear whether these claims are statistically supported or merely conjecture. However, the fact that the HBF kept this article shows that they were interested in these arguments about **the decline of the American, the inferiority of the immigrant, and the role of the state in eugenics.**

There were other documents that displayed xenophobia and a distaste for immigrants. The Second Report of the Sub-Committee on Selective Immigration of the

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<sup>176</sup> Box 4.1, “The Progress of Human Sterilization,” page 2. E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 23.



Eugenics Committee of the United States, recommended limiting immigration and only admitting those “of the same racial stocks as those which originally settled and developed the country founded its institutions, framed its constitution and today still make up the bulk of its population.”<sup>179</sup> This report combines anti-immigration sentiment with the desire to form racist policy. However, this is a political document rather than a scientific one, which makes its presence in the HBF archives curious. It is possible that the HBF had this document because of a relationship with the Eugenics Committee, it is also possible, however, that they sympathized with this message but lacked the scientific evidence to support such policies or address them in their pamphlets. Though they do mention race and ethnicity in their scientific studies, they do not raise them in their pamphlets. Their one comment about race may have been premised on a “Human Facts” bulletin, which claimed that there is more mental disease in foreign born than native stock.<sup>180</sup> Thus, the HBF may have kept some scientific documents to support their already existing positions.

Among other documents that the foundation kept on file was a list of the average savings that sterilization of the feeble-minded contributed to the state. According to the computation, the state saved over a million dollars annually from sterilizing the feeble-minded.<sup>181</sup> Though they used this information in their pamphlet and books, it is not directly relevant to the results of sterilization on the patient. It therefore shows that the

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<sup>179</sup> Box 7.2, Second Report of the Sub-Committee on Selective Immigration of the Eugenics Committee of the United States of America, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>180</sup> Box 19.2, Human Facts News and Feature Service, “More Mental Disease Among Foreign Than Native Stock,” 11/13/1935, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>181</sup> Box 13.6, Computation of Savings to the State of California by Sterilization of the Feeble-minded Committed to the State Homes for Feeble-minded, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

financial burden of the feeble-minded was an important aspect for the HBF when considering sterilization, or at least when trying to convince Americans of its importance.

In addition to articles and reports proposing policies, the HBF also kept scientific documents. One such article was on “Changing Concepts of Feeble-mindedness” by Dr. Pratt published by the National Committee for Mental Hygiene in 1926. In this article Dr. Pratt explains that in the past feeble-mindedness was a result of inheriting defects, and that the feeble-minded were not suited to live in communities or be parents. Dr. Pratt continued to expound that feeble-mindedness was previously thought to be a result of faulty germ plasm, but now is known to be connected natal or even post-natal conditions that affect the brain.<sup>182</sup> This bulletin undermines some of the premises of eugenics and consequently eugenic sterilization if the goal was to prevent “unfit” offspring.

Next to Dr. Pratt’s article, however, is a letter by Dr. Hicks, a state psychologist, refuting Pratt’s ideas. Hicks argues that feeble-mindedness is the inability to function and perform one’s duties, and that the feeble-minded are a menace.<sup>183</sup> Hicks further claims that women’s promiscuous behavior is partially to blame for the propagation of defective people, but does not cite any scientific origin for that statement or for his opinions on feeble-mindedness. He concludes that he neither supports nor opposes sterilization but recommends further study of the matter.<sup>184</sup> It is possible that this letter was the inspiration for the Popenoe’s defining feeble-mindedness as the inability to function and perform one’s duties in society, as Popenoe’s article defining feeble-mindedness was published two years later in 1928. The existence of these documents in the archives implies that

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<sup>182</sup> Box 14.2, Dr. George Pratt, “Changing Concepts of Feeble-mindedness,” 1/1926, National Committee for Metal Hygiene, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>183</sup> Box 16.2, Letter from Vinnie Hicks, former State Psychologist for Rhode Island to Dr. Frank Williams, 4/18/1926. E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

they have some significance because they were considered important enough to keep. This article and the response of psychologists and doctors to the scientific origin of feeble-mindedness demonstrate the HBF's commitment to scientific evidence. However the murky and ambiguous nature of the "defect" of feeble-mindedness allowed them to take the side of Hicks in his interpretation of it as a menace.

Despite being a scientific foundation seeking to investigate the results of sterilization, the HBF researched other topics relating to sterilization. One of the documents they compiled was a list of states with sterilization laws, and alongside that were reasons for non-enforcement. Many states are listed as not having enough information, indicating that these reasons were researched to some degree. Other states are listed as being afraid of responsibility or litigation, while others accused of apathy or opposition.<sup>185</sup> If the HBF were truly only concerned with the results of sterilization, then the reasons for non-enforcement of sterilization laws would be irrelevant. They also had a digest of state sterilization laws comparing state laws and their components. The aspects they compared were whether the law provided for compulsory and voluntary sterilization, whether a board or court hearing was required before the operation, and whether there was a right to appeal.<sup>186</sup> Though sterilization laws themselves may have been relevant to studying sterilization, the HBF clearly stated in their pamphlet that their goal was to "investigate the possibilities for race betterment by eugenic sterilization, and to publish the results."<sup>187</sup> Why states had certain variations of the law or whether they enforced it do

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<sup>185</sup> Box 15.5, Human Betterment Foundation, "Reasons So Far As We Know For Non-Enforcement Or Slight Enforcement Of Sterilization Statutes," E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>186</sup> Box 15.5, "Digest of State Sterilization Laws," 8/1/1934. E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>187</sup> Human Betterment Foundation, *Human Sterilization Today*, 6.

not respond to the ability of sterilization as a procedure to better the human race. The preoccupation with the different forms of sterilization laws, and why they were or were not enforced, shows how the HBF did not in reality limit themselves to the results of sterilization.

The involvement of the HBF in sterilization laws and their enforcement was not limited to accumulating research and synthesizing it. The foundation sought out state officials to inquire about their sterilization laws, as they did with the governor of Arkansas.<sup>188</sup> They also responded to queries about forming new sterilization laws, like in their correspondence with Dr. Partle, a superintendent in Alabama.<sup>189</sup> This active engagement in the formation and development of sterilization laws extended the role of the Human Betterment Foundation from a strictly scientific organization to one engaged in public policy. Again, they never made actual recommendations for how to improve laws, they merely requested and provided information. They lamented the lack of enforcement or stringency of sterilization laws but did not specify what exactly they desired in a law. This displays their interests beyond the immediate statistical effects of sterilization on the subjects of sterilization, but a hesitation to be directly involved in policy-making.

Not only did the HBF assemble information on where the law was being enforced, but they also took an active interest in protecting the right to enforce sterilization. The HBF replied to lawyer J.M Golden regarding the Anne Cooper Hewitt case. Golden had sought their advice regarding the case because he was defending the physicians who

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<sup>188</sup> Box 5.9, Letter to Governor Atkins of Arkansas, 2/12/1943, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

<sup>189</sup> Box 5.6, Letter from W.D. Partle, 1/4/1942, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

sterilized Anne Cooper Hewitt. Golden wanted to refer Dr. Gilman, the president of the County Medical Society of San Francisco who was serving as an objective witness in the case, to the HBF to learn about sterilization.<sup>190</sup> The HBF was therefore involved even in the legal repercussions of sterilization.

Based on the correspondences of the HBF to lawyers, politicians, doctors and other citizens it is clear that the authority of the foundation extended beyond the parameters of the results of sterilization. They were plied for information about how the process of vasectomy works and its repercussions in terms of health. Supporters of sterilization used them as a resource to construct an acceptable sterilization law or to protect the enforcers of compulsory sterilization. In addition to their correspondences, the information that the HBF accumulated and either utilized or kept on file show that while they only published information about sterilization, they were very much interested in how sterilization laws manifested and were formed.

These examples of how the Human Betterment Foundation went beyond the scope of their mission reveals how they struggled to remain a solely scientific organization. Eugenics as a scientific field seemed to be intertwined with policy because it involved social categorization. Despite this connection to social policy, the foundation continued to market itself as a strictly scientific organization based on statistical and scientific evidence. This identity, however, is inconsistent with the way they conducted their correspondences and research. Their interest in the various sterilization laws across America, as well as the globe, show that their scientific studies were tailored to support an ulterior motive: to promote sterilization laws and increase sterilization in America.

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<sup>190</sup> Box 11.9, Letter from J.M. Golden, 5/23/1936, E. S. Gosney Papers And Records Of The Human Betterment Foundation.

This explains why they inquired so frequently about the enforcement of sterilization laws and the financial benefits to the taxpayer. They needed to be current with the sterilization laws in various states and compile an accurate and compelling argument to garner public support. Though they were scientifically conservative in their publications, these actions demonstrate that the HBF was not entirely accurate in its self-portrayal as a scientific organization.

## Conclusion

### A New Form of Human Betterment

At the conclusion of WWII the term eugenics gained negative connotations due to the Nazi party, their extremist policies, and ultimately the Holocaust.<sup>191</sup> The negative qualities of the eugenics movement are rooted in its false scientific premise and the intrusive regulations that followed.<sup>192</sup> Eugenics, however, evolved to avoid the negative implications of Nazi applications. Kevles discusses this development in his description of reform eugenics. In reform eugenics, the emphasis shifted from genetic heredity to the social environment. Therefore, equality of education, housing, medical care, and opportunity became the focus of the movement.<sup>193</sup> It is apparent from this change in the manifestation of eugenic ideology that eugenics, as a method of improving the human race, is not inherently bad. As scientists have decoded the human genome and found genes associated with specific traits and diseases, eugenics has been able to yet again, take a new form.

Equipped with the science to determine genes for specific diseases, it has become protocol for doctors to test pregnant patients for severe diseases, such as Tay Sachs or Lesch-Nyan, which would make the future child's life short and full of suffering. Often, if the results are positive, the parents will elect to abort the fetus in order to prevent such suffering.<sup>194</sup> The election to prevent such diseases could be interpreted as eugenic action.

Another way in which genetic advances have created opportunity for eugenic action is through preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD). In PGD, doctors test eggs for

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<sup>191</sup> Michael Selgelid. "Moderate eugenics and human enhancement." *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2014): 3-12.

<sup>192</sup> Selgelid, "Moderate eugenics and human enhancement," 6.

<sup>193</sup> Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 173.

<sup>194</sup> Selgelid, "Moderate eugenics and human enhancement," 6.

specific genes and traits. This is often used in conjunction with in vitro fertilization (IVF), when a fertilized egg is implanted in a woman. Doctors can check the eggs for desirable traits or undesirable diseases before selecting an egg for implantation. Scientists have categorized this process into positive and negative eugenics. In negative eugenics, PGD is used to prevent serious diseases and disabilities, while in positive eugenics, PGD is used to select for traits that are unrelated to disease or disability.<sup>195</sup> An example of positive eugenics might be to select for traits such as higher intelligence or even eye color. In general, where policy permits PGD, it is normally limited to negative eugenic uses. This distinction between positive and negative eugenics in PGD is a moral rather than laboratorial practice difference.<sup>196</sup>

Consideration of the moral implications of scientific advances has influenced the way modern historians analyze events of the past. Though their goal was to advance humanity, the earliest proponents of eugenics did not consider the morality of their actions because they were focused solely on the science of their pursuits. As eugenics developed into reform eugenics and again into its modern form, morality has played an increasingly prominent role. Reform eugenics placed a high value on equality of social opportunities, and the current manifestation places an even greater focus on morality. Scientists and philosophers alike debate the moral standing of eggs and embryos, and based on this deliberation determine the ethics of PGD. This is a stark contrast to the eugenics of the twentieth century, in which the privacy and rights of citizens were disregarded for what was considered the greater public good. The Human Betterment Foundation sought to research and disseminate information on potential ways to improve

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<sup>195</sup> Mark Walker. "Eugenic selection benefits embryos." *Bioethics* 28, no. 5 (2014): 214.

<sup>196</sup> Walker, "Eugenic Selection Benefits Embryos," 215.



mankind. Unfortunately, they believed the first step in this process was compulsory sterilization. Despite their good intentions, organizations like the HBF pursued oppressive and immoral eugenic programs. The evolving influence of morality has colored the way historians view early eugenics, disparaging the inequality exercised against specific genders, races, and those with disabilities, rather than the erroneous science. Today, public policy must answer to both science and morality.

There appear to be three contending values in crafting modern social policies about genetic advances. There is the utilitarian value of being able to use science in order to advance mankind. If it is possible to make people smarter and healthier, why should that be hindered? There is also a value of liberty, of being able to procreate as one desires. The last value that comes into conflict with the other two, is that of equality. If it were possible to scientifically create genetically superior children, it would widen the gap between future generations of different socioeconomic classes. Not being able to afford to genetically select traits would put one at a disadvantage. The HBF seemed to value liberty and utilitarianism in their support of both voluntary and compulsory sterilization... While they did not support mass sterilization, it was because of their commitment to science rather than to morality or equality. Since then, morality has pervaded the scientific realm and influenced the way both modern and past science is perceived.

Another key difference between early and modern eugenics is the role of government. Part of the intrigue of the twentieth century eugenics movement was the involvement of government in regulating and violating the rights of individuals in the interests of the state. This same issue is reinterpreted in the modern conception of eugenics. It has been argued that the new abilities of genetic testing require increased

government regulation that considers the moral implications of potential policies.<sup>197</sup>

There are distinct benefits to genetic testing in preventing diseases, enacting prophylactic measures, or understanding based on DNA what medications might be most effective.

However, with these new capabilities come the dangers of a new form of positive eugenics, which threaten equality and biodiversity.

The role of government, therefore, is crucial in determining the direction of new genetic advances. This is ironic because it is precisely the involvement of government in creating sterilization and other eugenic policies that contributed to the condemnation of eugenics as a scientific concept. Ultimately, the same moral question of when it is possible to restrict the individual rights of citizens in the interests of the greater population is reflected both with the sterilizations of the twentieth century and genetic testing today.

The American eugenics movement is fascinating because of its role in balancing science and social policy. Legal restrictions on marriage and immigration in addition to compulsory sterilization laws are drastic manifestations of social policies informed by flawed science. The Human Betterment Foundation serves as an example of the struggle to balance being a foundation dedicated to scientific research and one that is involved in enacting and enforcing policy. Furthermore, the name of the organization lends itself to a moral valuation. Though they were a scientific foundation and based their research on false premises, their ultimate goal was to improve humankind. Thus the HBF reflects the continuing phenomenon of morality as a consideration in the scientific realm. This

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<sup>197</sup> Kathy L. Hudson, "Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis: Public Policy and Public Attitudes." *Fertility and Sterility* 85, no. 6 (2006): 1638-1645.

philosophical debate of individual rights versus the public well being is integral to public health policy and will persist as long as both liberty and equality are valued in America.

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