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## Mormon Scholars and Mormon Families in Family Studies: A Brief Retrospective

*David C. Dollahite, Loren D. Marks,  
and Heather Howell Kelley*

FAMILY STUDIES IS MORE AN INTERDISCIPLINARY HYBRID than a stand-alone discipline. Specifically, the field integrates research methods, approaches, and interests from sociology, psychology, human development, and marriage and family therapy—and (to lesser degrees) other fields, including history, economics, anthropology, public policy, and medicine. A defining feature of family studies is a focus in its research, theory, clinical practice, and educational efforts on relationships and processes between family members. Whereas sociology examines what happens in society and psychology focuses on what happens in the individual mind, family studies strives to capture families and family relationships in an ecological context.

This article begins with a historical sketch of Latter-day Saints who were foundational in establishing or elevating the field of family studies. After noting those significant contributions, we will highlight key findings about Mormon families that have emerged from empirical studies conducted by Mormon as well as non-Mormon social scientists.

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## Mormons in family studies

The inception of family studies as a discipline corresponded closely with the launch of the umbrella professional organization, the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR), established in 1938. Regarding the early and formative years of family studies, Pam Monroe,<sup>1</sup> president of NCFR from 2004 to 2007, has quipped, “The three most important people in the history of family studies are Reuben Hill, Reuben Hill, and Reuben Hill.”<sup>2</sup> Hill served an LDS mission and then moved from a convictional to a cultural approach to Mormonism, yet his influence on family studies in both LDS and non-LDS spheres is difficult to overstate. He introduced foundational ideas including “family stress” and (with Evelyn Duvall) family development theory,<sup>3</sup> which heavily influenced family studies. Hill had a long and distinguished career spanning the middle and latter half of the twentieth century, but even more important, he became the generative mentor and academic father/grandfather for a disproportionate number of prominent and productive family scholars,<sup>4</sup> including many subsequent NCFR presidents.<sup>5</sup>

Of the first forty-nine presidents of the NCFR,<sup>6</sup> at least five were active Latter-day Saints (Harold “Hal” Christensen,<sup>7</sup> Blaine Porter,

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1. Monroe (who is not LDS) was the longest-tenured president in NCFR history, serving for nearly four years due to the illness of the late Gay Kitson, who preceded Monroe in the presidency.

2. Pam Monroe, personal communication with Loren Marks, July 20, 2016. In an interview with the authors on July 15, 2016, Wes Burr shared the same perspective, referencing both Hill’s ideas and the legacy of his students who went on to prominence.

3. Wes Burr interview with the authors, July 15, 2016. Hill told Wes Burr, then Hill’s student, that the core ideas behind family development theory were stimulated by the Mormon theological concept of eternal progression.

4. Even today, many leading family scholars have intellectual genealogical indebtedness to Hill.

5. Hill never occupied the NCFR presidency himself but did serve as president of the (much larger) International Sociological Association from 1970 to 1974.

6. NCFR, Board and Governance, accessed September 15, 2016, <https://www.ncfr.org/about/board-and-governance/ncfr-board-directors/ncfr-past-presidents>.

7. Wes Burr identified Harold Christensen as a “substantial person” and as the early pioneer of Mormon family studies (MS thesis, 1936), preceding the era of Reuben

Carlfred Broderick, Wesley Burr, and Brent Miller). Thus more than 10 percent of NCFR presidents through the early 1990s were active Latter-day Saints, an overrepresentation by several-fold. Indeed, three LDS NCFR presidents were elected during the sixteen-year period from 1975 to 1991, an era identified by some as the peak of Mormon influence and engagement in NCFR. However, over the past twenty-four years, none of the last sixteen NCFR presidents have been Latter-day Saints.

In 2013, NCFR leadership issued a formal statement regarding same-sex marriage. This was a departure from previous practice since, while the field has always wrestled with definitions of the family and what impacts changing family structure have on individual and relational well-being, the NCFR had avoided position statements on political matters. Many LDS family scholars subsequently distanced themselves in the wake of perceptions of escalating advocacy. Though deeply rooted historically, the connection between the NCFR and LDS scholars is now viewed by many Mormon family scholars with whom we have spoken as somewhere between tenuous and irreparably damaged. Several Mormon family scholars who severed ties moved on and found replacement professional organizations, but others continue to mourn the loss of their first professional love and are pained by the schism. However, the growing distance from NCFR as a professional organization has not translated into LDS disengagement with the field as a whole. Brigham Young University's School of Family Life features, in terms of faculty size, one of the largest full-time family studies faculties in the world (at thirty-five). Further, in terms of productivity, BYU's School of Family Life faculty have averaged nearly one hundred peer-reviewed publications annually over the last three years,<sup>8</sup> making it one of the most prolific research programs of its kind. Faculty include nationally renowned experts in marriage and family

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Hill's ascension and prominence. Christensen taught briefly at BYU before spending most of his career at Purdue.

8. 2013–2015 data provided by Dean Busby, director of BYU's School of Family Life, August 26, 2016. In historical contrast, the BYU Family Studies program (then Child Development and Family Relations) had produced a mere handful of mainstream social science publications before 1973 (Wes Burr interview with authors, July 15, 2016). In 1973 BYU commenced its era of empirical publication with two articles published in

therapy, parenting, child development, mate selection, media influence, sexuality, work and family balance, addiction, religion, emerging adulthood, and other foci and subfields.

Historically, the Mormon family studies professorate was leavened among leading universities around the United States. Reuben Hill and all five Mormon scholars who served as presidents of NCFR studied or taught in prominent programs *away* from BYU at some point (i.e., Cornell, Harvard, Iowa State, Minnesota, North Carolina, Penn State, Purdue, and Wisconsin)—with three, including the late Carlfred Broderick (USC), spending their careers elsewhere. Indeed, Pam Monroe has posited that perhaps the greatest collective influence exerted by Mormon family studies scholars has been their willingness to mentor, train, and generatively invest in non-LDS scholars<sup>9</sup> (typically away from BYU), thereby perpetuating the model of the field's exemplar, Reuben Hill. However, as the second decade of the twenty-first century winds down, there is no nationally recognized LDS family figure like Carlfred Broderick at the University of Southern California (or elsewhere on the West Coast). Further, there are virtually no Mormon family studies scholars in prominent eastern research universities.<sup>10</sup> Reasons for this diminished dispersion are complex but include an apparent reluctance of many family studies departments to include active Latter-day Saints on their faculty, on the one hand,<sup>11</sup> and concerted efforts by BYU to

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the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*—one by Boyd Rollins and one by Wes Burr—a focus that has intensified and risen exponentially over the subsequent four decades.

9. Pam Monroe, personal communication with Loren Marks, July 20, 2016.

10. There are a few LDS family scholars at leading midwestern universities, including Jerrica Mohlman Berge and Steven Harris at Minnesota, David Schramm at Missouri, and Cassandra Dorius and Clinton Gudmunson at Iowa State. There are also many throughout the South, but representation is scant on the East and West Coasts. It should be noted, however, that family studies programs (as an offshoot of the home economics field) were never as strong on the coasts as in the heartland of America.

11. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and Its Members*, ed. James T. Duke (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 21. As a leading social scientist of religion, Rodney Stark (who is not LDS), has denounced what he has identified as explicit anti-Mormon bias among many fellow social scientists.

gather (some have said “poach”) leading, actively LDS family scholars to the School of Family Life, on the other.

### Family studies research on Mormons

We conducted two literature searches for the portion of this essay addressing research on Mormon families. Our first search focused on the frequency of publications about Mormons in major family studies journals compared with other major religions. We selected the following ten family studies journals for this section: *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Family Relations*, *Family Process*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Marriage and Family Review*, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, and *Family Perspective* (defunct). We used the EBSCO databases to search these journals. Our results from this search can be seen in table 1.

In June and July 2016 we conducted the second search with the intent to find and analyze all relevant social science studies on Mormon families. This search utilized the EBSCO databases as well but was not limited to family studies journals. References in those studies as well as Google Scholar’s “cited by” function led to additional relevant studies. We chose to include only articles published in social science journals and opted to exclude articles published in Mormon-centered

TABLE 1. Hits in EBSCO within 10 family life journals

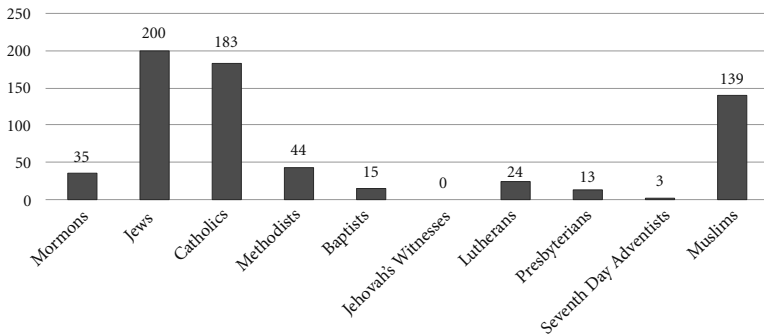
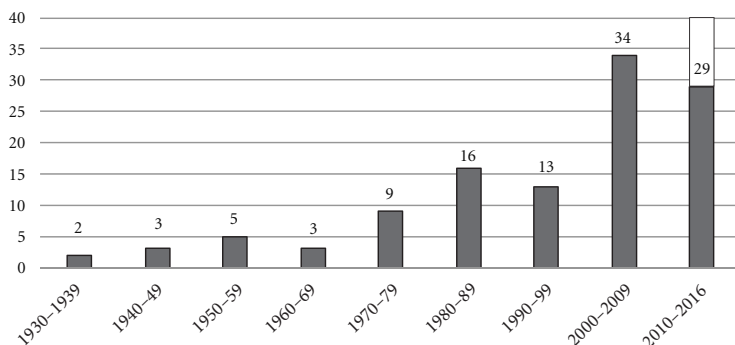


TABLE 2. Number of articles by publication date



outlets, such as *BYU Studies* and *Dialogue*. Our focus was contemporary empirical studies, not literature reviews or papers exploring Mormon families historically. While most of our sources were peer-reviewed journal articles, we did include several book chapters that featured original research and were published by respected academic presses.

Included in our search were articles dating to the 1930s, a period corresponding with the formation of the discipline. With these restrictions, we found and analyzed 114 documents. Table 2 depicts the number of articles found and reviewed by publication decade.<sup>12</sup>

Of the varied aspects of family life explored in the extant studies, we chose to focus on five: dating and courtship, marriage, fertility, parent-child relationships, and youth religious development in a family context. Given space limitations, we are able to provide only brief mention of a few of the more recent and relevant studies.<sup>13</sup>

In general, the findings indicate that active LDS couples, parents, families, and youth enjoy many of the same benefits that others of devout

12. As with any search of this scale, our results are not exhaustive. The bar on the far right represents only a portion of the current decade (2010–2016). The projection for the full decade is forty or more articles addressing Mormon families by 2019, the highest total ever.

13. Interested readers are welcome to contact the first author of this article for a full bibliography.

faith receive from religious involvement (e.g., greater marital stability and quality, increased health and longevity, closer parent-child relations, and numerous prosocial outcomes for youth, among many other benefits). Mormons experience several of the same stressors and challenges faced by other religious families who take their faith seriously (e.g., time and money costs, some degree of separation from secular society, struggles with feelings of guilt and inadequacy). Latter-day Saints also enjoy some distinctive benefits and challenges based on highly familial Mormon theology and culture.

While homosexual relationships and the LGBTQ community are of increasing importance to the broader field of family studies, our search did not yield any articles published in family studies or other social science journals that specifically addressed the intersection of LGBTQ and Mormon identities in relation to Mormon family life. A few articles address issues of sexual identity among Mormon individuals, but they do not provide empirical data that specifically address family relationship issues.<sup>14</sup>

### *Dating and courtship*

While research on Mormon dating and courtship is limited, there are some empirical studies that examine dating during adolescence and emerging adulthood. We address both.

*Dating during adolescence.* The LDS Church strongly discourages dating before the age of sixteen. A primary purpose is to reduce opportunities for premarital sexual relations. Miller, McCoy, and Olson found that there was indeed a strong correlation between avoidance

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14. Angie Dahl and Renee V. Galliher, "The Interplay of Sexual and Religious Identity Development in LGBTQ Adolescents and Young Adults: A Qualitative Inquiry," *Identity* 12/3 (2012): 217–46; John P. Dehlin et al., "Psychosocial Correlates of Religious Approaches to Same-Sex Attraction: A Mormon Perspective," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 18/3 (July 2014): 284–311; John P. Dehlin et al., "Sexual Orientation Change Efforts among Current or Former LDS Church Members," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 62/2 (2015): 95–105; Jeanna Jacobsen and Rachel Wright, "Mental Health Implications in Mormon Women's Experiences with Same-Sex Attraction: A Qualitative Study," *Counseling Psychologist* 42/5 (2014): 664–96.



of premarital sex and the age that Mormons begin dating.<sup>15</sup> Of the “late daters” (sixteen years or older), only 10 percent engaged in sexual intercourse, whereas 50 percent of the “early daters” (fourteen years or younger) engaged in sexual intercourse—a fivefold increase in premarital sexual activity. Overall, Mormon teens were significantly less likely to report having had sexual intercourse (18 percent) than non-Mormons (53 percent).<sup>16</sup>

Not only does their faith affect *when* they date, but, for Mormon youth, their faith may also affect *whom*. Markstrom-Adams found that 83 percent of Mormons in her sample reported that there were barriers to dating non-Mormons.<sup>17</sup> The top two barriers reported were (1) “unacceptable beliefs, values, standards, and moral conduct of non-Mormons” and (2) the report that “many Mormons desire to marry within their faith.”<sup>18</sup> This last value and other indicators seemed to show that Mormons, even as adolescents, view dating relatively seriously and as “a precursor to marriage.”<sup>19</sup> Conversely, in a more recent national study on religious adolescents’ dating habits, Bartkowski, Xu, and Fondren did not find a significant LDS reluctance to date people of other faiths. This may be partially attributed to the lack of Mormon dating options outside highly populated Mormon areas.<sup>20</sup>

*Dating during emerging adulthood.* Scott investigated a prominent dating site (ldsingles.com) for single LDS adults<sup>21</sup> and found LDS values

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15. Brent C. Miller, J. K. McCoy, and Terrance D. Olson, “Dating Age and Stage as Correlates of Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behavior,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 1/3 (1986): 361–71.

16. Miller, McCoy, and Olson, “Dating Age,” 361–71.

17. Carol Markstrom-Adams, “Attitudes on Dating, Courtship, and Marriage: Perspectives on In-Group Versus Out-Group Relationships by Religious Minority and Majority Adolescents,” *Family Relations* 40/1 (1991): 91–96.

18. Markstrom-Adams, “Attitudes on Dating,” 93.

19. Markstrom-Adams, “Attitudes on Dating,” 95.

20. John P. Bartkowski, Xiaohe Xu, and Kristi M. Fondren, “Faith, Family, and Teen Dating: Examining the Effects of Personal and Household Religiosity on Adolescent Romantic Relationships,” *Review of Religious Research* 52/3 (2011): 248–65.

21. David W. Scott, “Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Find Me a Mate: A Cultural Examination of a Virtual Community of Single Mormons,” *Journal of Media and*

regarding relationships and marriage embedded into the core of the site. As part of their demographic profile, users were required to state how regularly they attended church, if they were temple worthy, and whether or not they had served an LDS mission.<sup>22</sup>

In his study of newly married Christian couples, Uecker found that of all the Christian denominations, Mormons were reportedly the least likely to have engaged in premarital sex, with 43 percent of his sample waiting until marriage (a much different figure than Miller and colleagues' teen-based report twenty-two years earlier).<sup>23</sup> Of the Mormons who had engaged in premarital sex, they were far less likely to have had sex with someone other than their (future) spouse. With regard to premarital sex, it is also important to note that most Mormons do not cohabit, but rather transition directly from single life to marriage.<sup>24</sup>

### *Marriage*

In this section, we address empirical social science findings related to marital and family values, gender roles, LDS interfaith marriage, and marital processes.

*Marital and family values.* A frequently studied Mormon value has been the law of chastity, with studies across time indicating that Latter-day Saints have relatively traditional attitudes and behaviors concerning nonmarital sex.<sup>25</sup> In other examinations of LDS values, Bahr compared and contrasted 2,005 Utah Catholics, Protestants, and

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*Religion* 1/4 (2002): 201–16.

22. Scott, "Matchmaker," 201–6.

23. Jeremy E. Uecker, "Religion, Pledging, and the Premarital Sexual Behavior of Married Young Adults," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 70/3 (2008): 728–44.

24. Daniel T. Lichter and Zhenchao Qian, "Serial Cohabitation and the Marital Life Course," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 70/4 (2008): 861–78.

25. Jason S. Carroll et al., "Marital and Family Orientations among Highly Religious Young Adults: Comparing Latter-Day Saints with Traditional Christians," *Review of Religious Research* 42/2 (2000): 193–205; David C. Dollahite and Loren D. Marks, "Teaching Correct Principles: Promoting Spiritual Strength in LDS Young People," in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen Marie Yust et al. (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 394–408; Thomas B. Holman and John R. Harding, "The Teachings of

Mormons and found Mormons to be less accepting of nontraditional family role definitions than non-Mormons.<sup>26</sup> Mormons also reported more “family centeredness” in their attitudes but did not differ in preferences about the division of family labor.<sup>27</sup> Another study of values comparing Catholic, Protestant, and LDS participants found that among the more than four thousand college students surveyed, the “highly religious” groups (from each denomination) reported less materialistic views, favored more traditional female roles in the family, and placed greater relative importance on marriage and children.<sup>28</sup>

*Gender roles.* The twenty-first century has yielded a small but growing body of research examining perspectives on gender among Mormon women and men.<sup>29</sup> Beaman’s study entitled “Molly Mormons, Feminists and Moderates” was based on life history interviews with twenty-eight LDS women and found significant variation in how mothers navigated and negotiated boundaries involving participation in the paid labor force, relations within their families, and interaction with and perspectives on the church (and the priesthood), among other issues.<sup>30</sup> In a second study related to gender, Chen analyzed depictions of mothers in the LDS Church’s multimillion-dollar “I’m a Mormon” ad campaign and reported that the “ads reaffirm, not defy, the ‘traditional’ gender

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Nonmarital Sexual Abstinence and Members’ Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors: The Case of Latter-Day Saints,” *Review of Religious Research* 38/1 (1996): 51.

26. Howard M. Bahr, “Religious Contrasts in Family Role Definitions and Performance: Utah Mormons, Catholics, Protestants, and Others,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21/3 (1982): 200–217.

27. Bahr, “Religious Contrasts,” 200–217.

28. Larry C. Jensen and Janet Jensen, “Family Values, Religiosity, and Gender,” *Psychological Reports* 73/2 (1993): 429–30.

29. Patti A. Freeman, Birgitta Baker, and Ramon B. Zabriskie, “Traditional Marriages, Non-Traditional Leisure: Leisure and Fathering in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” in *Fathering Through Sport and Leisure*, ed. Tess Kay (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 164–82; Joylin Namie and Hillary Timmons, “Faith and Feeding the Family: Latter-day Saint Fathers and Foodwork,” *Food & Foodways: History & Culture of Human Nourishment* 22/4 (October 2014): 247–67.

30. Lori G. Beaman, “Molly Mormons, Mormon Feminists and Moderates: Religious Diversity and the Latter Day Saints Church,” *Sociology of Religion* 62/1 (2001): 65–86.

roles for women as they emphasize (stay-at-home) motherhood above all other identities.”<sup>31</sup> In another study, Lafkas utilized a qualitative approach and examined and conveyed the challenges faced by Mormon women with divorced parents as these women interfaced with LDS gender-role doctrines.<sup>32</sup> Lafkas noted that “traditional gender roles are often upended with divorce, creating situations inconsistent with Mormon doctrinal ideals,” thereby creating cognitive dissonance.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as noted elsewhere, “a key challenge for [many] American churches in the 21st century will be to find a balance between supporting the standard of marriage-based families that is idealized . . . [while simultaneously and sensitively] addressing the pluralistic family realities that confront them.”<sup>34</sup>

*LDS interfaith marriage.* Same-faith marriages have been found to be significantly more stable than interfaith marriages across a variety of religions.<sup>35</sup> As early as the 1960s, social scientists were specifically examining LDS divorce rates and noting significant differences between temple and non-temple marriages in Utah.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, Latter-day Saints provide examples of both the most stable *and* least stable marriages. Howard Bahr, with a Utah-based sample, found that “the divorce rate for

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31. Chiung Hwang Chen, “Diverse Yet Hegemonic: Expressions of Motherhood in ‘I’m a Mormon’ Ads,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 13/1 (2014): 31.

32. Sara McPhee Lafkas, “Gender Role Perceptions of Mormon Women from Divorced Families: An Adult-Developmental Analysis,” *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research* 7/2 (2012): 80–97.

33. Lafkas, “Gender Role Perceptions,” 80.

34. David C. Dollahite, Loren D. Marks, and Michael A. Goodman, “Families and Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Communities,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Families: Considering the Past, Contemplating the Future*, ed. Marilyn Coleman and Lawrence H. Ganong (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 411–31.

35. Evelyn L. Lehrer, *Religion, Economics, and Demography: The Effects of Religion on Education, Work, and the Family* (London: Routledge, 2009); Jonathan R. Olson et al., “Shared Religious Beliefs, Prayer, and Forgiveness as Predictors of Marital Satisfaction,” *Family Relations* 64/4 (2015): 519–33; David G. Schramm et al., “Religiosity, Homogamy, and Marital Adjustment: An Examination of Newlyweds in First Marriages and Remarriages,” *Journal of Family Issues* 33/2 (2011): 246–68.

36. Harold T. Christensen and Kenneth L. Cannon, “Temple ‘Versus’ Nontemple Marriage in Utah: Some Demographic Considerations,” *Social Science* 39/1 (1964): 26–33.

certain interfaith combinations [was] as much as nine times higher than that for other combinations.”<sup>37</sup> The lowest divorce rates were recorded for Mormon same-faith marriages (same-faith Catholic marriages were very stable as well), but the highest divorce rates were for interfaith marriages involving Mormons.<sup>38</sup> The striking (up to ninefold) increase in divorce rate involving interfaith LDS marriages noted by Bahr was Utah-based and rightly caveated as such. However, research by prominent non-LDS demographer Evelyn Lehrer has since buttressed and nuanced Bahr’s 1980s findings. Lehrer found, based on a nationally representative data set (NSFH) of 9,643, that the five-year divorce rate in LDS-LDS couples was 13 percent, “the most stable” of the marriage combinations examined.<sup>39</sup> However, the five-year divorce rate among interfaith marriages with one LDS partner was more than triple that rate (40 percent)—one of the least stable combinations of marriage in the study.<sup>40</sup> We are left with the apparent reality that LDS marriage represents both the most stable and (one of the) least stable unions when studied nationally, depending on whether both spouses are LDS or not.

*LDS marital processes.* For decades, Mormons have typically had the highest rates of marriage and fertility when compared with Catholics, Protestants, and those without religious preferences.<sup>41</sup> Nationally

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37. Howard M. Bahr, “Religious Inter marriage and Divorce in Utah and the Mountain States,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20/3 (1981): 251.

38. Bahr, “Religious Inter marriage,” 251; Brent A. Barlow, “Notes on Mormon Interfaith Marriages,” *The Family Coordinator* 26/2 (April 1977): 143–50. In a small, nongeneralizable study in Florida, Barlow found that “about one-third” of non-Mormon spouses later converted to Mormonism. We suspect that this figure is well above current conversion rates.

39. Evelyn L. Lehrer, “Religion, Human Capital Investments, and the Family in the United States,” IZA Discussion Paper, no. 4279, Department of Economics, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2009, 23, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1434613](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1434613).

40. Lehrer, “Religion, Human Capital Investments”; Evelyn L. Lehrer and Carmel U. Chiswick, “Religion as a Determinant of Marital Stability,” *Demography* 30/3 (1993): 385–404.

41. Tim B. Heaton and Kristen L. Goodman, “Religion and Family Formation,” *Review of Religious Research* 26/4 (1985): 343–59.

representative data also indicate that Mormons marry significantly younger than other religious groups, with the exception of conservative Protestants.<sup>42</sup> Less, however, is known about the processes in LDS marriage after the wedding.<sup>43</sup>

Some insights have been gained from the national American Families of Faith Project, based on in-depth, qualitative interviews with 201 highly religious families (26 of whom were LDS, none of those from Utah). The project has yielded more than fifty peer-reviewed works, almost all of which have included reports from LDS families as well as from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim families.<sup>44</sup> A few notable highlights related to marital processes from the project have included reports that (1) a “shared family vision” is vitally important in promoting marital quality, stability, and shared meaning; (2) it is important not only to marry someone of the same denomination, but to marry a spouse with a “matched faith” or similar level of religious commitment; (3) strong marriages find ways to unite during the challenges that inevitably arise; and (4) faith in general and prayer specifically can be a valuable resource for resolving conflict.<sup>45</sup> While the preceding findings are based on the broader 201-family sample, two findings from analyses of only the LDS families have included (1) the reported power of a belief in eternal marriage and eternal family,<sup>46</sup> and (2) the pervasiveness and influence of “couple prayer” in LDS marriage.<sup>47</sup>

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42. Xiaohe Xu, Clark D. Hudspeth, and John P. Bartkowski, “The Timing of First Marriage: Are there Religious Variations?” *Journal of Family Issues* 26/5 (2005): 584–618.

43. Michael A. Goodman et al., “Religious Faith and Transformational Processes in Marriage,” *Family Relations* 62/5 (2013): 808–23.

44. For additional findings, reports, and resources, see <https://americanfamiliesoffaith.byu.edu>.

45. Nathaniel M. Lambert and David C. Dollahite, “How Religiosity Helps Couples Prevent, Resolve, and Overcome Marital Conflict,” *Family Relations* 55/4 (2006): 439–49.

46. Michael A. Goodman, David C. Dollahite, and Loren Marks, “Exploring Transformational Processes and Meaning in LDS Marriages,” *Marriage & Family Review* 48/6 (2012): 555–82.

47. T. G. Hatch et al., “The Power of Prayer in Transforming Individuals and Marital Relationships: A Qualitative Examination of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim

Costs, challenges, and struggles related to involvement in the LDS faith have also been noted. The amount of time, energy, and money required by Mormon activity are substantial when compared with other faiths.<sup>48</sup> Yet, as sociologists Stark and Finke document, LDS persons “grade” their faith at a significantly higher level than most—seemingly indicating that the perceived benefits are worth the high costs.<sup>49</sup> These costs involve requested service in church callings, potentially including intensive service in the lay ministry.<sup>50</sup> A recent qualitative study examined LDS bishops and their wives and found that while bishops reported experiencing increased empathy towards their wives, there were also pronounced difficulties including (1) wives feeling “left behind” spiritually, (2) challenges of negotiating issues of confidentiality, and (3) a variety of stressors at both individual and marital levels.<sup>51</sup>

### *Fertility*

There is a long-established and persisting link between religion and fertility patterns.<sup>52</sup> Because pronatalism is an especially salient part of Mormon theology, many scholars have been particularly interested in the high fertility rates of Mormons. Numerous studies have investigated not only the number of children in Mormon families but also the reasons, perceptions, and pressures related to fertility in Mormon culture. In this

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Families,” *Review of Religious Research* 58/1 (2016): 27–46.

48. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

49. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

50. Loren Marks and Brent D. Beal, “Preserving Peculiarity as a People: Mormon Distinctiveness in Lived Values and Internal Structure,” in *Revisiting Thomas F. Odeas’ “The Mormons”: Persistent Themes and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Cardell K. Jacobson, John Patrick Hoffmann, and Tim B. Heaton (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), 258–85.

51. Deena D. Strong, “Clergy Marriages: Couple Perceptions of Marital Adjustment as the Husband Serves as a Bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2010), <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/2442/>.

52. Heaton and Goodman, “Religion and Family Formation.”

section, we will briefly address Mormon fertility rates and the variables, both within and outside Mormon culture, that affect Mormon fertility.

Mormon fertility rates have consistently stayed above the average of nonreligious groups and above those of most other religious groups.<sup>53</sup> Although these rates remain well above the national average, they are gradually declining. Thornton noted that Utah fertility rates in 1970, while still high compared with those for the rest of the nation, were only 40 percent of what they had been in 1860.<sup>54</sup> While there are other factors that contribute to this statistic, such as the growing acceptance of birth control and the increase of non-Mormons in Utah over the years (approximately 30 percent by 1970 but 40 percent in 2010), the trend is still reflective of shrinking Mormon family size.<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that the number of children desired by young LDS women has stayed fairly constant at 4.6 children over the past seventy years, but the number of children born has greatly decreased, from 3.3 in 1985 to 2.6 in 2012 (still the nation's highest fertility rate).<sup>56</sup> We next discuss reasons why the desired number has not typically been realized.

*Secular factors affecting Mormon fertility.* Higher socioeconomic status has been associated with higher fertility rates among Mormons. Christensen found that finances were the number-one reason (LDS) students gave for limiting their desired family size.<sup>57</sup> Heaton found

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53. Heaton and Goodman, "Religion and Family Formation"; Arland Thornton, "Religion and Fertility: The Case of Mormonism," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1979): 131–42; Michael B. Toney, Banu Golesorkhi, and William F. Stinner, "Residence Exposure and Fertility Expectations of Young Mormon and Non-Mormon Women in Utah," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47/2 (1985): 459–65.

54. Thornton, "Religion and Fertility."

55. Thornton, "Religion and Fertility."

56. Harold T. Christensen, "Mormon Fertility: A Survey of Student Opinion," *American Journal of Sociology* 53 (1948): 270–75; Heaton, "Religion and Family Formation"; Pew Research Center, "Mormons and Family Life," accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/01/12/mormons-in-america-family-life/>; Charles F. Westoff and Raymond H. Potvin, *College Women and Fertility Values* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

57. Harold T. Christensen, "Courtship Conduct as Viewed by Youth," *Journal of Home Economics* 40/4 (1948): 187–88.



higher income to have a positive effect on Mormon fertility, as did Stanford and Smith, who found that while increasing income was associated with fewer children for non-LDS women, it was “slightly positive” for inactive LDS women and “decidedly positive” for active LDS women.<sup>58</sup>

In general, education has a negative effect on fertility. However, many studies have returned mixed results on the effect of education on Mormon fertility.<sup>59</sup> While it is difficult to definitively determine the effect of education on Mormon fertility, what is clear from these studies and others is that the variables that affect Mormon fertility vary across place and time.<sup>60</sup>

*Religious factors affecting Mormon fertility.* The strong stance of the LDS Church against premarital sexual intercourse contributes to Mormons marrying significantly younger than the general population—and contributes to high LDS fertility.<sup>61</sup> Much emphasis is also put on marrying within an LDS temple, a choice that scholars have linked with higher fertility. Heaton, the most prolific author on Mormon fertility, explains the effect of temple marriage on fertility by stating that temple marriages reflect a long and deeply held “acceptance of a pronatalist theology.”<sup>62</sup> Temple marriages are also reflective of high religiosity and activity—and LDS faith-community involvement likely indirectly promotes fertility by providing couples with a reference group of families who also value the pronatalist teachings of the LDS Church. Indeed, continued

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58. Tim B. Heaton, “How Does Religion Influence Fertility? The Case of Mormons,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25/2 (1986): 248–58; Joseph B. Stanford and Ken R. Smith, “Marital Fertility and Income: Moderating Effects of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Religion in Utah,” *Journal of Biosocial Science* 45/2 (2013): 245.

59. Heaton, “How Does Religion Influence Fertility?”; Lowry Nelson, “Education and the Changing Size of Mormon Families,” *Rural Sociology* 17/1 (1952): 335; Heaton, “Religion and Family Formation.”

60. Tim B. Heaton, “Religious Influences on Mormon Fertility: Cross-National Comparisons,” *Review of Religious Research* 30/4 (1989): 401–11; Brian L. Pitcher, Evan T. Peterson, and Phillip R. Kunz, “Residency Differentials in Mormon Fertility,” *Population Studies* 28/1 (1974): 143–51.

61. Xu, Hudspeth, and Bartowski, “Timing of First Marriage.”

62. Heaton, “How Does Religion Influence Fertility?” 256.

activity in the church and access to Mormon reference groups have perhaps the largest effect on Mormon fertility.<sup>63</sup> While LDS theology and involvement promotes bringing children into a family, these factors also seem to influence child-rearing styles and parent-child relationships.

### *Parent-child relationships*

A good deal of research has explored various aspects of the parent-child relationship and parenting processes in Mormon families. A series of studies by Hui-Tzu Grace Chou and colleagues addressed different aspects of the parent-child relationship. In a study on the possible effect of birth order on religiosity, Chou and Alison found that earlier-born Mormon college students showed a higher level of religiosity than later-born children.<sup>64</sup> Chou, Esplin, and Ranquist found that frequency of prayer among LDS young adults was associated with the type of attachment to parents they reported (from their childhood), although other factors, such as general religious activity, were more influential.<sup>65</sup> Chou and Uata found that the image of God (as loving, forgiving, trustworthy, and available) held by Mormon male college students in the United States was influenced by the style of parenting they reported their parents practiced.<sup>66</sup>

Two studies by Rachel Loser and colleagues addressed links between family and religious involvement for LDS families. In 2009 Loser, Hill, Klein, and Dollahite found that Mormon parents reported that their family religious rituals provided benefits including stronger relationships, more family togetherness and unity, increased communication, less

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63. Heaton, "How does Religion Influence Fertility?"; Stanford and Smith, "Marital Fertility and Income"; Westoff and Potvin, "College Women and Fertility."

64. Hui-Tzu Grace Chou and Sanni Alison, "Impact of Birth Order on Religious Behaviors among College Students Raised by Highly Religious Mormon Parents," *Archive for the Psychology of Religions* 36/1 (2014): 105–17.

65. Hui-Tzu Grace Chou, Janell Esplin, and Shelby Ranquist, "Childhood Attachment to Parents and Frequency of Prayer during the College Years," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 16/8 (2013): 863–75.

66. Hui-Tzu Grace Chou and Dominique Uata, "The Impact of Parental Discipline on the Image of God," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 15/7 (2012): 677–88.

contention, more kindness, and better parenting.<sup>67</sup> In a different study, Loser, Klein, Hill, and Dollahite found that Mormon parents reported that their religion was integral to their familial, structural, and social systems and deeply integrated into their daily lives.<sup>68</sup>

Merrill, Salazar, and Gardner found that parental positions of responsibility in the LDS Church and frequent family discussions about faith and religious practice were more potent predictors of avoidance of drug usage among Mormon young adults than other factors such as church attendance, discussions about doctrine, and fears about harming the family's reputation.<sup>69</sup> Marks and Dollahite studied Mormon parents alongside parents from other faiths and found that highly religious parents identified meaningful religious practices that involved both costs and benefits associated with them.<sup>70</sup>

A number of studies have explored the challenges experienced by Mormon families that include a child with special needs (developmental and physical delays, disabilities, and illnesses). Marshall and colleagues found that despite the physical, emotional, financial, and relational challenges, many LDS parents of special needs children described this challenge as a profoundly spiritual experience.<sup>71</sup> In a series of studies, Dollahite and colleagues explored the experiences of Mormon fathers of children with special needs. They reported a number of themes, including the conclusion that most of those fathers would not "change" their special needs child nor deny family members the kind of spiritual growth and

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67. Rachel W. Loser et al., "Perceived Benefits of Religious Rituals in the Latter-day Saint Home," *Review of Religious Research* 50/3 (2009): 345–62.

68. Rachel W. Loser et al., "Religion and the Daily Lives of LDS Families: An Ecological Perspective," *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 37/1 (2008): 52–70.

69. Ray M. Merrill, Richard D. Salazar, and Nicole W. Gardner, "Relationship between Family Religiosity and Drug Use Behavior among Youth," *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal* 29/4 (2001): 347–57.

70. Loren D. Marks and David C. Dollahite, "'Don't Forget Home': The Importance of Sacred Ritual in Families," in *Understanding Religious Rituals*, ed. J. Hoffman (New York: Routledge, 186–203).

71. Elaine Sorensen Marshall et al., "'This Is a Spiritual Experience': Perspectives of Latter-day Saint Families Living with a Child with Disabilities," *Qualitative Health Research* 13/1 (2003): 57–76.

compassion that reportedly developed as a result of their being in a family with a child with special needs.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the LDS faith community was a cherished and invaluable resource to these families—but conversely, when “brothers and sisters” in their ward family let them down, it was “disappointing and hurtful . . . [and] seemed to elicit greater frustration and pain than failures by secular [institutions].”<sup>73</sup> As with divorce rates, it seems that the LDS religion and family experience can often include highs and lows that vary both above and below typical experience.

### *Youth religious development in a family context*

A number of studies have explored youth religious development in the context of religious family processes—and these studies often include LDS families with adolescents.

Agate, Zabriskie, and Eggett studied LDS parents and youth and found that both family religiosity and family leisure had a significant positive relationship with family functioning.<sup>74</sup> Chadwick and Top studied more than 2,100 LDS youth along the East Coast and found that religiosity was inversely related to delinquency but that peer influence had even greater impact on delinquency than family and religious factors.<sup>75</sup> Merrill, Folsom, and Christopherson studied the influence of

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72. David C. Dollahite, “Fathering for Eternity: Generative Spirituality in Latter-day Saint Fathers of Children with Special Needs,” *Review of Religious Research* 44/3 (2003): 237–51; David C. Dollahite, Loren D. Marks, and Michael M. Olson, “Faithful Fathering in Trying Times: Religious Beliefs and Practices of Latter-day Saint Fathers of Children with Special Needs,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 7/1 (Fall 1998): 71–93; David C. Dollahite, Loren D. Marks, and Michael M. Olson, “Fathering, Faith, and Family Therapy: Generative Narrative Therapy with Religious Fathers,” *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* 13/3 (2002): 259; Loren D. Marks and David C. Dollahite, “Religion, Relationships, and Responsible Fathering in Latter-day Saint Families of Children with Special Needs,” *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships* 18/5 (2001): 625–50.

73. Marks and Dollahite, “Religion, Relationships, and Responsible Fathering,” 636.

74. Sarah Taylor Agate, Ramon B. Zabriskie, and Dennis L. Eggett, “Praying, Playing, and Successful Families: An Examination of Family Religiosity, Family Leisure, and Family Functioning,” *Marriage & Family Review* 42/2 (2007): 51–75.

75. Bruce A. Chadwick and Brent L. Top, “Religiosity and Delinquency among LDS Adolescents,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32 (March 1993): 51–67.

family religiosity on adolescent substance abuse and found that family church attendance and religiosity among parents during participants' adolescent years served as protective factors against substance use in LDS youth but not among youth in other religions or for those with no religious preference.<sup>76</sup>

The American Families of Faith Project includes in-depth qualitative interviews with twenty-six Mormon families (all from outside Utah). As part of this project, Emily Layton and colleagues investigated how youth of various faiths, including Mormons, developed their religious and spiritual identity. The study focused on what anchored youth to their faith (e.g., connections with God, parents, religious leaders, and peers) and how they developed strong religious identity in childhood and adolescence.<sup>77</sup>

From these data, Dollahite and colleagues investigated how youth from various faith communities (including the LDS community) engaged in religious conversations with parents, as well as the kinds of religious sacrifices Jewish, non-Mormon Christian, Muslim, and Mormon youth make for religious reasons.<sup>78</sup> These studies found that LDS youth are similar to youth from other faiths in many ways but that they also manifest differences. For example, in the study of sacrifices made by youth for religious reasons, Latter-day Saint youth made a broader range of sacrifices for religious reasons than most youth from other

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76. Ray M. Merrill, Jeffrey A. Folsom, and Susan S. Christopherson, "The Influence of Family Religiosity on Adolescent Substance Use according to Religious Preference," *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal* 33/8 (2005): 821–35.

77. Emily Layton, David C. Dollahite, and Sam A. Hardy, "Anchors of Religious Commitment in Adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 26/3 (2011): 381–413; Emily Layton, Sam A. Hardy, and David C. Dollahite, "Religious Exploration among Highly Religious American Adolescents," *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research* 12/2 (2012): 157–84.

78. David C. Dollahite and Jennifer Y. Thatcher, "Talking about Religion: How Highly Religious Youth and Parents Discuss Their Faith," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 23/5 (2008): 611–41; David C. Dollahite et al., "Giving Up Something Good for Something Better: Sacred Sacrifices Made by Religious Youth," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 24/6 (2009): 691–725.

faiths. This is consistent with data reported from a national, mixed-method study of teenagers.

A number of non-LDS social scientists have written extensively about Mormon youth based on data from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) conducted by Christian Smith. One study of 3,370 teens (including Mormon youth), conducted by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, found that LDS youth were relatively highly involved with and committed to their faith.<sup>79</sup> The study compared youth from various faiths on a variety of spiritual and religious variables. Below is a summary of the findings from their book *Soul Searching*.

1. Mormon teens are the most likely among all US teens to hold religious beliefs similar to those of their parents (p.35).
2. Seventy-one percent of Mormon teens attend church at least weekly (p. 38).
3. Mormon teens rate the importance of their faith shaping daily life and major life decisions higher than other youth (p. 40).
4. Mormon and black conservative Protestants teens are the most likely to hold traditional, biblical religious beliefs (p. 44).
5. Mormon teens were highest in having a very moving or powerful spiritual experience and highest in reporting they had “ever experienced a definite answer to prayer or specific guidance from God” (p. 45).
6. Mormon teens were the most likely to report that they denied themselves something as a “spiritual discipline” (p. 46).
7. Mormon teens appear to pray the most often (p. 47).
8. Mormon teens reported being the most involved in religious youth groups and were the most likely to claim to be leaders in their youth groups (p. 53).

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79. Christian R. Smith and Melinda L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

9. Families of Mormon teens appear to talk about religious and spiritual matters the most (p. 55).
10. Mormon, black Protestant, and conservative Protestant teens are most likely to pray with their parents (p. 55).
11. Mormon teens (23 percent) are most likely to frequently express their faith at school (p. 59).
12. Mormon and Jewish youth reported noticeably higher levels of pressure and teasing from peers than did non-Mormon Christian teens (p. 59).
13. The number of nonparent adults who played a meaningful role in a teenager's life was noticeably higher for Mormons (p. 61).
14. Mormon youth were the highest percentage (83 percent) reporting that they anticipated attending the same type of faith community when they were twenty-five years old and the lowest percentage (2 percent) to say they anticipated attending "a different kind of congregation" (p. 66).

In her book-length study *Almost Christian*, Kenda Creasy Dean, professor of youth, church, and culture at Princeton Theological Seminary (and an ordained Methodist minister), also examined data from the NSYR.<sup>80</sup> In her chapter "Mormon Envy: Sociological Tools for a Consequential Faith," she discussed the strength of LDS family life and faith communities in helping youth religious development. She concluded:

It may be difficult for a "gentile" or non-Mormon to read Mormon views on God, community, vocation, and eschatology without raising an eyebrow—but it is just as difficult to read the data on Mormon teenagers without feeling a hint of awe.<sup>81</sup>

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80. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

81. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 59.

Dean suggested that Mormonism provides LDS teens with “a consequential faith” characterized by a substantive doctrine of God, a community of consequence (which for Mormons is family), a morally significant universe, and being asked to contribute themselves to God’s ultimate transformation of the world. Dean explained:

Chief among these faith-promoting variables is the religiosity of Mormon parents. Since Mormons are known for tightly knit, intact, and religiously devoted families—and since we know that teenagers mirror their parents’ faith to a high degree—it stands to reason that Mormon communities would have higher-than-average rates of religious devotion among teenagers.<sup>82</sup>

Dean went on to encourage pastors and youth ministers of all faiths to try to learn from the ways that the LDS faith—and LDS families in particular—work with their youth to help them develop deep religious and spiritual identities.

## Conclusion

Respected University of Southern California scholar Vern Bengtson (not LDS) and colleagues have reported the following in their landmark, four-generation study of religion and family life:

The most successful programs fostering intergenerational connections and the nurturing of families have been instituted by Mormons, of which a prime example is their Family Home Evening [on] Monday nights. The LDS parents and bishops we spoke with attributed the success of their faith in religious transmission to activities such as this [Family Home Evening] that integrate family and faith and emphasize family growth and development. They have certainly been successful—in our sample . . . eight out of ten

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82. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 59.



Mormon parents share with their young adult children affiliation with the Mormon faith. (pp. 202–3)<sup>83</sup>

Bengtson's study found that the highly familial faith of Mormons provided a number of benefits for LDS individuals who embraced the faith, as well as challenges for family relationships resulting from inter-generational changes and differences in levels of faith involvement.

In connection with ongoing emic/etic and insider/outsider discussions in social science, it is noteworthy that although often portrayed as a “peculiar people” from the fringe, Mormon scholars have heavily influenced family studies from its inception to the present<sup>84</sup>—as currently evidenced by the BYU School of Family Life's research productivity. Even so, it is non-Mormon “outsiders” who have given the empirical knowledge base its most valuable recent insights regarding Mormon families. A systematic and objective scholar would likely observe that the pervasively secular field of family studies has reaped much of worth from Mormon scholars, and that perceptive non-LDS scholars have offered Mormons many insights regarding their own families' strengths

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83. Vern L. Bengtson, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 202–3.

84. The field of Mormon family studies has arrived at a place where non-LDS scholars regularly invite LDS scholars to write about Mormon families for edited collections that address family life in a variety of faiths. For example, David Dollahite and Loren Marks have been invited by various non-LDS editors to write chapters for edited volumes that focus on families from various faiths: David C. Dollahite, “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” in *Social History of the American Family*, ed. Marilyn Coleman and Lawrence Ganong (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 236–38; David C. Dollahite and Loren D. Marks, “The Mormon American Family,” in *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations*, 5th ed., ed. R. Wright et al. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2012), 461–86; David C. Dollahite, “Latter-day Saint Children and Youth in America,” in *Children and Childhood in American Religions*, ed. D. S. Browning and B. Miller-McLemore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 102–18; David C. Dollahite, “Latter-day Saint Marriage and Family Life in Modern America,” in *American Religions and the Family: How Faith Traditions Cope with Modernization*, ed. Don S. Browning and David A. Clairmont (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 124–50; Dollahite and Marks, “Teaching Correct Principles,” 394–408.

and weaknesses. Our hope is that in both the larger discipline of family studies and in the niche of Mormon family studies, the insider and outsider groups will be wise enough to realize that both groups are needed for optimal examination, discovery, learning, and progress.

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