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Toward a Social Science of Contemporary Mormondom

Howard M. Bahr and Renata Tonks Forste

We have three main objectives: first, to sketch what we believe to be the essential characteristics of a responsible social science of the Mormon people and their cultures; second, to assess the social science of modern Mormondom through a review of the existing literature, and to highlight gaps—where they exist—between what is and what might or ought to be; third, to suggest some objectives and approaches that might help to move the social science of Mormonism and Mormondom from a prolonged infancy into a more robust childhood.¹

MORMON CULTURE AND EMPIRICAL SCIENCE

Contemporary Mormondom consists of a people and their cultures. The people are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, together with their children under the age of baptism. A broader definition would include all people who consider Mormonism as their religious preference, whatever their membership status.

The term culture refers to a people’s artifacts, ways of doing things, ideas, and beliefs. Cities, transportation networks, tools, technologies, and consumer goods of all sorts are cultural artifacts. Culture embraces people’s notions about other people and about the earth and the cosmos and their modes of transmitting these beliefs and practices to others. Culture includes heritage: material objects and ecological organization, sacred shrines and special days, inherited proscriptions and priorities. Mormon temples, visitors’ centers, meetinghouses, and office buildings are contemporary cultural artifacts. So are the historical bases of Mormonism preserved in books of scripture and history.

An adequate depiction of contemporary Mormon people and cultures must include the scientific and literary explanation of the past and of how the present came to be. However, to keep our task manageable and to avoid trespassing on the historians’ turf, the focus

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of this paper is limited to the people and culture of contemporary Mormondom, that is, Mormon culture and behavior in the 1970s and 1980s. We do not define studies of Mormons published before 1970 as contemporary.

Viewing Mormondom from a social science perspective, we are not as concerned with the ultimate "truth" about the Church and its members as with those attributes of LDS people and their social life that may be observed and interpreted by Mormons and non-Mormons alike. Presumably, most social facts about Mormondom are accessible to anyone who applies appropriate measurement techniques, whether these be questionnaires, observations of church meetings, analyses of videotapes of general conferences, or compilations of vital statistics.

Social science, as we conceive it, involves an interplay among at least three elements: a body of knowledge, a set of techniques, and a social/historical context. The knowledge embraces information of more or less apparent accuracy about what exists—how things are thought to be—and about how the components of "reality" are thought to be interrelated. The techniques are accepted procedures for observation, inference, search, and verification. Scientific knowledge is information accumulated by the application of accepted rules of systematic observation and proof. Segments of the body of scientific knowledge are continually revised, and in theory all of it is subject to replication, reassessment, and reinterpretation. However, fads, customs, and power relationships affect the definition of problems and the collection, interpretation, and dissemination of scientific findings. Some things are rarely, if ever, questioned, and persons who challenge accepted facts or widely shared assumptions may be labeled as misguided, foolish, or even dangerous.

The most favorable social context for science is a free society where the community of interested persons—amateurs and professional scientists, dilettantes and specialists, common citizens and Nobel laureates—all have access to the accumulated evidence supporting accepted generalizations. Indeed, among the essential characteristics of the scientific method is the attribute of "communism," which in this context refers to the obligation of scientists to communicate their findings to each other and to interested people generally. The term is shorthand for an ethic that treats scientific knowledge as belonging to everyone; it is not the property of any individual, school, organization, or nation.

In practice this ethic of universal access is sometimes honored in the breach. Scientific work is often competitive and may be biased in favor of powerful, respected institutions and scientists. Even so, the ideal of communism is perhaps the most critical standard of empirical science. Without open communication of findings and procedures, verification
is impossible. In the words of a recent book on social science research methods:

The scientific approach is the ultimate democratic approach. It assumes that everyone has a right to the answers. Confronted with the questions, What is so? and How do you know? the scientists are obligated to transmit their knowledge (findings) clearly and often to spell out their implications. . . . They are obligated to describe their methods clearly enough that the doubter can follow step-by-step and arrive at his or her own conclusions in the matter. The importance of this essential democratic ethic in science cannot be overstated. Whereas the keepers of the mysteries in other knowledge systems—the priests, the wise ancients—were repositories of sacred, often secret knowledge and rituals, the high priests of science are bound by the ethics of the scientific method to make the “recipes” for their hard-won knowledge public.3

In accordance with this principle, we limit the “social science of Mormondom” to studies of the Mormon populations, however defined, that have yielded findings available to the public. In the strict—and ideal—sense, proprietary studies, whether conducted by governments, business concerns, or private organizations, are not part of contemporary scientific knowledge unless descriptions of methods used and results obtained are available to public scrutiny.

We share the perspective of the “sociology of knowledge” that people’s images of what is, as well as so-called “facts” or “realities,” determine their actions. People never confront reality whole or unbiased; their senses and experiences condition their perceptions of what is real, of what causes what, of what is going on. To a degree, we all live in private worlds: no one shares our unique experience and its effects on our perceptions and interpretations of life. If our private worlds become too private, people call us crazy, insane, or out-of-touch. If our private worlds seem to agree with those of most other people—if our “objectivity” matches that of our peers—we are regarded as good, practical people, validating the “common sense” of others, sanely in the mainstream. Nowadays that mainstream is increasingly defined by systematic observation. More and more, “reality” is shaped by empirical science.

There is a place in the development and continued expansion of scientific knowledge for impressions and intuitions, for playful conceptualizing, imaginative application of metaphor, and combining old ideas in new ways. Indeed, theorizing about the world around us with a sensitive imagination is an essential step to understanding. However, our illuminating insights are apt to be most useful if at some point we stop intuiting and do the systematic observation necessary to validate or refute them.

The character of good scientific work changes with the maturity and sophistication of a discipline. Early in the social science of
Mormondom, there was need for scholars such as Thomas O’Dea, who produced an insightful body of work on Mormon society based largely on personal experience and the creative assembling of example and illustration. O’Dea tied his view of Mormonism to the historical themes and currents of his own time in a way that helped his readers see things they might otherwise have missed. O’Dea may well have been, as Robert Michaeelsen affirms in a posthumous tribute, “the first social scientist systematically to describe Mormonism as a religious movement.” His framework and observations continue to be useful sensitizing devices. In 1966 Leonard Arrington wrote that O’Dea’s writings were the best treatment of Mormonism by a non-Mormon then available, and contemporary book-length treatments of Mormonism are invariably held to O’Dea’s standard.

O’Dea, as a pioneer, is not held to the same rules of evidence that must be required of his would-be scholarly descendants. Michaeelsen speculates about how O’Dea might have responded to data that did not support his ideas about the impact of modernity on Mormonism:

He would have raised questions about the adequacy of quantitative data for assessing vitality relative to the challenge of modernity. He was not primarily a data-oriented sociologist. He sought to go beyond data or to understand it in a larger context.

The same kind of scientific impressionism and bold theorizing three decades later does not merit the same acclaim. There comes a time in the evolution of knowledge when it is not enough to explain by hunches and to illuminate by metaphor. At some point exploratory work must yield to system, quantification, and verification.

The necessity of this development is not yet recognized in all quarters, however. It is still high praise to be cited as “belonging with O’Dea.” Thus Klaus Hansen’s Mormonism and the American Experience was described by an enthusiastic reviewer as a book that “ranks with O’Dea’s The Mormons as a classic of Mormon scholarship. Hansen has done more than any other scholar to help us place Mormonism in its broadest context.” To another reviewer, Mark Leone’s Roots of Modern Mormonism is “the most penetrating and provocative analysis by a social scientist of Mormonism since O’Dea’s now classic The Mormons.” It is notable that one can be penetrating and provocative, even “brilliant . . . and suggestive” and still lack evidence for one’s insights. For another reviewer of Leone’s book warns the unwary about how shallow Leone’s “brilliance” may be:

Assertions offered as truth . . . tumble out in every chapter and are used to support one another in the absence of evidence. To be generous, we might call such claims “concluding hypotheses” . . . The ethnographic observations of contemporary Mormon religious practices are so few and so meager that it is surprising that any scholar would seek to explain so much with so little.
include education, the economic order, political institutions, family and kinship, the military, and religion. The term social structure refers to the relationships among such essential societal functions. Part of the knowledge base of a mature social science of Mormondom would be a delineation of LDS social structure in varying national and developmental (that is, preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial) contexts.

A second way to identify strengths and weaknesses in existing work is the method of grounded theory, in which research literature is arranged among the "natural" categories into which it seems to fall, without being forced into a preconceived system. Identifying themes in a body of literature, as Mauss did in a recent essay on sociology and Mormon subculture, illustrates this approach. Mauss found that until about 1950, the scholarly literature on Mormons was mainly concerned with social geography, rural sociology, agricultural economics, the family, and fertility. After 1950 some new themes surfaced, including the impacts of modernization and secularization, the public images of Mormonism, politics and the Church, ethnic relations, gender roles and sexism, types and consequences of religiosity, and Mormonism's international expansion. Notable by their absence were studies of stratification, parent-child relationships, deviance, divorce, conversion, and defection.

A third means of assessing comprehensiveness of inquiry is John Sorenson's list of ten "emergent levels," which provides a framework for categorizing all data about human activity and also for relating activities to each other systematically. Sorenson claims that "the ten levels form a hierarchy, from 'higher' to 'lower.'" By referring to these "levels," we can see that some of the most important topics (or levels) necessary to a mature social science of Mormondom remain unexplored. The ten levels are:

10. Ideology (explanations of why things are as they are)
9. Values (judgments of what is desirable)
8. Knowledge (description of how things are)
7. Communicative symbols (language, in the broadest sense)
6. Social organization (interaction patterns)
5. Population distribution (population in its spatial aspect)
4. Demography (population in its temporal distribution)
3. Technology (external means for energy processing)
2. Human biology (somatic features and processes)
1. Natural environment (the residual environment)

Sorenson argues that there is a culture of Mormonism apart from the American culture, and that "the distinctiveness of the Mormons is ultimately based upon their unique worldview." If there were representative data on Mormons in a variety of cultural settings, it would be possible to test the utility of Sorenson's hierarchy of levels of human activity as well as his notions about what makes Mormons distinctive.
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Even so, among students of Mormonism, the market for explo-
work continues to be much larger than seems justified by the ap-
tility of the work. People identified as social scientists contin-
 publish works about Mormons in which impressions, intuitions,
hypotheses are stated as facts.

There is some utility to “sensitizing theory,” a term some
applied to unsystematic observation and unsupported conceptualiz-
Such writing may guide the reader to things otherwise unnoticed
there is also danger in impressionistic and intuitive analysis of
representative experience: it may point in wrong directions and
to faulty conclusions because we were beguiled into looking at th
in one way rather than another. Glib generality and the omnip-
overstatement impede understanding at least as often as they pro-
it. Both the scientific and the popular literature on Mormons si
from overconfident generalization from insufficient data, proo
authoritative testimonial, and affirmation based on personal, o
unreplicable, experience. There are exceptions, but most of th
everyone—including the Mormons themselves—seems to know at
Mormondom are grounded so shallowly in evidence that we can
distinguish matter from myth.

We may applaud the pioneers who “go beyond data.” We can
acclaim a subsequent generation of scholars who continue to do
If we credit O’Dea and some other early students of Mormondom w
having shown us “where to dig,” an appropriate motto for mod
students of Mormonism might be: “No more surveying; it’s time
the shovels.”

SOME STANDARDS OF SCOPE, EMPHASIS, AND METHOD

One way to evaluate research literature is to construct a model
ideal type of what a proper social science of Mormondom might lo
like. For instance, we can list major social institutions and process
and inquire how each occurs in Mormon society, how the Mormo
differ, if at all, from other ethnic or religious groups, and how th
institutions of the wider society impinge on Mormondom and ar
resisted, ignored, or adopted.

Among the processes essential to the continuity of a society an
socialization (how people learn the right ways of doing things)
differentiation (how people vary in characteristics, opportunities
achievements, and possessions, and also how such variation comes to
be), and social control (how people react to deviant behavior). In
addition to such processes, there are complex patterns of belief and
behavior associated with the critical tasks a society must do to survive.
The “institutions” to be considered in any thorough account of a people
A fourth way to gauge the stature of the social science of Mormondom is to look at existing studies in relation to the geographic or ecological scale, especially as it applies to geographic scope and member density. As shown in table 1, the geographic continuum ranges from studies of individual congregations or neighborhoods to studies of the entire Church, worldwide. There is also a member density continuum, which ranges from situations where Mormons are a statistical majority to the more common contexts in which they are a tiny minority. It seems likely that the religiosity and life-styles of Mormons are influenced in many ways by the religious composition of their immediate neighborhoods, urban areas, and regions. Similarly, it is probable, though it has not been demonstrated, that the influence of Mormons on the non-Mormons they live among (or, conversely, the influence of the non-Mormons on Mormons) varies with the proportionate size of the Mormon population. We suspect that contexts where Mormons are a statistically insignificant part of the population differ vastly from higher-density contexts.

### TABLE 1. TYPOLOGY OF GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE—MEMBER DENSITY CONTEXTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Scope</th>
<th>Member Density (% of Population LDS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50+ %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sublocal (wards, schools, neighborhoods)</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local (towns, stakes)</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro, Multilocval (counties, metropolitan areas)</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State or Province</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional (multistake, multiprovince)</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicontinental</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchwide, Worldwide</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Starred (*) cells are null cases given the present size and distribution of the LDS population.

Using only four categories for the member-density continuum and nine levels of geographic scope generates the typology of thirty-six cells shown in table 1. Given the present distribution of the LDS population, twenty-five of the cells represent realistic possibilities. The point of the table is to demonstrate that there are more than a score of geographic/density contexts in which the patterns of LDS belief and practice are enacted. Accordingly, researchers need to be very specific about the geographic scope and limits to generalizability of findings from samples representing only one or two of the twenty-five possible contexts.

It is possible that some things are unaffected by ecological scale and density, but until that possibility is demonstrated in fact, research
on Mormondom which does not control for the effects of these variables cannot be assumed to apply to more than one twenty-fifth of the contexts in which Mormons live. In fact, as we will soon see, most research on contemporary Mormondom represents only three of the possible contexts (cells a, b, or e in table 1).

A fifth way to assess progress toward a social science of Mormondom is to ask whether researchers have viewed their data from the most fruitful perspectives. C. Wright Mills calls "the sociological imagination" the "quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities." 16 In Mills’s view, social science at its best is the study of biography and history and their intersection in social structure. He takes pains to stress that the sociological imagination is not limited to sociologists: "This quality of mind is found in the social and psychological sciences, but it goes far beyond these studies as we now know them." 17

The proper role of the social scientist, Mills says, whatever his or her discipline, is to ask and try to answer questions of social structure, historical place, and human variety. The analysis of social structure necessarily involves identification of a society’s essential components and their relationships and examination of how the society differs from other societies in space and time and how its characteristics presage continued change or stability. The historical issues requiring attention include how a society changes over time, its place within historical movements, and how its location in a particular period affects its character. Among the issues of individual variety necessary to an appropriate social analysis are the identification of the characteristics of men and women in the society, an understanding of how they came to be that way, how they are changing, the kinds of "human nature" they reveal, and an assessment of what meaning their variety and their society have for other peoples and other times. 18

Mills’s charge to the social scientist is an ambitious one. Historians of Mormonism have made substantial progress toward meeting Mills’s standards, while most of the rest of us have been laboring in dead ends or turning out work of limited or unknown generality. In fact, the type of social science Mills prescribes is so far beyond present standards in the sociology and psychology of Mormondom as to intimidate. Perhaps his vision is most useful if it reminds us to pay attention in all our work to the three essential contexts: social structure, historical place, and individual variety.

Despite his disdain for "abstracted empiricism"—counting for counting’s sake without concern for theoretical or historical relevance—Mills insists that proper social science is empirical, conducted openly and with an eye to replication and verification by others:
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The classic practitioner verifies a statement by detailed exposition of whatever empirical materials are relevant. . . Of course it is true that we are never certain; in fact, that often we are "guessing," but it is not true that all guesses have an equal chance of being correct. Classic social science . . . is, among other things, an attempt to improve the chances that our guesses about important matters may be right.

Verification consists of rationally convincing others, as well as ourselves. But to do that we must follow the accepted rules, above all the rule that work be presented in such a way that it is open at every step to the checking up by others. There is no One Way to do this; but it does always require a developed carefulness and attention to detail, a habit of being clear, a skeptical perusal of alleged facts, and a tireless curiosity about their possible meanings, their bearings on other facts and notions. It requires orderliness and system.19

Time and again, Mills urges social scientists to try to understand human variety. His emphasis is especially relevant to those who would understand a church whose members enact their religiosity in wards and branches scattered over the world. Only a handful of the available studies are comparative in the sense that they describe findings and explore their implications for Mormons in different nations.

Sixth, and finally, researchers of contemporary Mormondom must conduct their work according to the standards of proper research technique. These are too numerous to consider in detail here, but we wish to single out three specific issues of procedure critical to our assessment of the research literature. These are the issues of generalizability, replicability, and comparison/triangulation.

Generalizability refers to the degree to which a research finding can be accepted as representative of some population. Maximum generalizability is obtained in census enumerations or in summaries of the day-to-day registry of vital statistics, where the population base is an entire population. In most cases, however, enumerating or observing an entire population is far too expensive, and so researchers try to study representative subpopulations or samples. If probability sampling is used, it is usually possible to specify within fairly narrow limits how close the characteristics of the sample are to the characteristics of the population from which the sample was drawn. Even if researchers are unable to specify the statistical relationship between a sample and some wider population presumably represented by the sample, if the characteristics of the respondents are reported in detail it may be possible to match some of them to the known characteristics of the larger population and thereby obtain a rough estimate of how biased the nonrepresentative sample may be. However, if the characteristics of a nonrepresentative sample are not spelled out in detail, then it is impossible even to estimate how the persons studied may differ from a larger population.
In summary, there are at least four levels of generalizability that we may use in assessing research on LDS populations. They are, in descending order (from best to worst):

1. Enumeration or observation of the entire Church.
2. Assessment of carefully specified samples, whose relationship to the entire Church, or some segment of it, is known and given.
3. Assessment of partially described samples, whose relationship to the entire Church, or to segments of it, is unspecified or unknown but in principle possible to estimate.
4. Assessment of poorly described samples, whose relationship to any larger population is unspecified and unknown and impossible to estimate.

As for replication, if research procedures are described in sufficient detail, direct replication—repeating a study, or portions of it, to check the findings of the earlier work—is often possible. If a research report does not include a systematic description of procedures, replication may be impossible. Often a writer on Mormondom will make some generalizations about Mormon people or beliefs, and not identify the basis for the generalization. Such statements may serve as hypotheses for testing, but in the absence of "hard" supportive data or account of the procedures generating the findings, they cannot be accepted as valid or factual.

Finally, there is the issue of cumulation and triangulation. Comparitive studies that include data from different populations, or from the same population over time, are preferable to one-shot studies that stand alone. Triangulation refers to the procedure of bringing several research techniques to bear on the same scientific problem, and cumulation has to do with assembling the findings of previous studies or the work of several researchers in such a way as to assess the consistency of results or the degree of consensus among investigators in interpreting what the findings mean.

Reflecting back on the six standards of scope, emphasis, and procedure, we can identify several types of "knowledge" in terms of the consistency and quality (including attention to replication and triangulation) of the relevant research evidence. For convenience, we divide the continuum of empirical support for propositions about Mormondom into four categories:

1. "Facts": propositions accepted as accurate and valid (consistently supported by evidence of good quality);
2. "Probabilities": propositions that seem to be accurate and valid (supported by considerable evidence, but generalizability open to question);
3. "Possibilities": propositions that may be accurate and valid (supported by little evidence, or by evidence of poor quality or of limited generality);
4. "Unknowns": propositions with little or no basis in empirical research (unsupported assertions).
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Following a description of our literature search, we will identify several propositions of types 1 and 2 ("facts" and "probabilities") that apply to contemporary Mormondom.

THE LITERATURE SEARCH

We did not try to produce a definitive bibliography on social science and Mormondom. That has already been done, twice in 1984, by Armand Mauss.20 Our selective survey of the literature was greatly simplified because we were able to start with the Mauss bibliographies. We began with a working list that consisted of the articles and books cited by Mauss that had been published after 1969, that treated contemporary Mormons, and that seemed to draw upon quantitative data. Pieces that seemed to meet these three criteria were inspected and abstracted.

The abstracting procedure included special attention to sampling techniques, if any, and modes of data collection. As we went along, we checked and extended the working bibliography by reviewing the references section of each article or book. We also checked the Social Science Citation Index for the 1970–84 period, examining the topic entries under "Mormons" and "Latter-day Saints," and reviewing the entries in the Citation Index listed as citing Thomas O'Dea's book, The Mormons. Theses and dissertations by BYU students in sociology, psychology, and family science (formerly child development and family relations) between 1970 and 1984 were scanned to see if LDS people had been subjects or respondents in the graduate research projects. Also, we scanned the issues of Dialogue and BYU Studies published since 1970. Finally, we included some articles from official LDS periodicals because such pieces were sometimes the only public releases of data from research projects sponsored by the Church.

Our final list of articles and books containing empirical data of some kind on contemporary Mormons ran to over 250 titles. Our findings and conclusions in the following pages derive from classifications of these works by topic, research procedures, and findings.

From our review of these works, we discovered that most published research on Mormons does not pass the test of truth in labeling. Much of what passes as the social science of Mormondom is in fact a social science of Utahns, of LDS college students, or of respondents in a few atypical wards and branches. To express reservations about the generalizability of findings from studies of LDS college students is not to say that such studies are without merit. But BYU students are not representative of LDS college students, and the latter are not representative of LDS young adults in the U.S. or elsewhere, let alone of LDS adults in general.
The social science of modern Mormondom is, with a few notable exceptions, a patchwork of conjecture and speculation, of impression and uncontrolled observation. It is long on imaginative conceptualization and insight by metaphor, but short on systematic observation and probability sampling. Finally, most of the available empirical grounding anchors a social science of the "traditional" culture and behavior of Utahns, rather than of the majority of contemporary Mormons who live elsewhere.

An essential first step toward a minimal scientific depiction of contemporary Mormondom is to know what the people are like. Are they old or young, rich or poor, married or divorced, farmers or factory workers? It is at this first basic question—what are the characteristics of contemporary Mormons?—that our hope for a responsible social science founders. The available information about even the most basic attributes of today's Mormons—their educational attainment, their labor force status, their family status—is scanty indeed. There are two exceptions to this bleak picture, both topics on which there has been considerable good comparative work. These bright spots are the study of Mormon fertility and the analysis of Mormon/non-Mormon differentials in mortality and morbidity, especially in rates of cancer.

*Mormon Death and Disease Rates*

There is more good research on Mormon/non-Mormon differences in disease and death rates than on any other topic. Much of the research is based on large samples, and there is considerable triangulation, with some articles reporting consistent results from data collected in different ways and at different times. The parameters of twenty-one recent studies of morbidity and mortality among Mormons are summarized in table 2.

As may be seen in column 8 of the table, the chief liability of these studies is that the research is usually limited to two states, Utah and California. Even so, the populations represented in the studies are large, typically over one thousand cases and occasionally between five thousand and twenty thousand. The populations at risk, from which the deaths or officially recorded cases of disease are drawn, are much larger. Note in the descriptions of research methods (column 7) that there are many data sources, including national and state death records, LDS church death records, state disease registries, telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, and state birth records.

There are some useful side benefits from the research on religious differences in diagnosed cases of cancer. The statewide control-sample populations interviewed by Lyon, West, and their associates provide
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>How Selected</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Generalizability</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enstrom</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>4,865</td>
<td>California Mormons</td>
<td>Died</td>
<td>1970–72 LDS death records matched against Annual Mortality File</td>
<td>California</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Utah Mormons</td>
<td>Died</td>
<td>1950–70 LDS death records matched against state mortality records</td>
<td>Utah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enstrom</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>California Mormons</td>
<td>Died of cancer</td>
<td>1968–72 LDS death records</td>
<td>California</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enstrom</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1,352</td>
<td>California high priests</td>
<td>Died</td>
<td>1968–75 LDS death records matched against California Mortality Files</td>
<td>California males</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1,856</td>
<td>Utah high priests and seventies</td>
<td>Died</td>
<td>1970–75 LDS death records matched against National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) national mortality tape</td>
<td>Utah males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enstrom</td>
<td>1980a</td>
<td>12,569</td>
<td>California Mormons</td>
<td>Died</td>
<td>1968–75 LDS death records matched against California Mortality Files</td>
<td>California</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4,592</td>
<td>Utah Mormons</td>
<td>Died</td>
<td>1970 LDS death records matched against NCHS national mortality tape</td>
<td>Utah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enstrom</td>
<td>1980b</td>
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<td>Utah high priests</td>
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<td>1970–75 LDS death records matched against NCHS national mortality tape</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>8,000</td>
<td>California high priests and wives</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>1979 Mail questionnaire, health and dietary practices</td>
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<td>1967–75 LDS death records matched against vital statistics (mortality) records, Alberta</td>
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<td>6,108</td>
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<td>Skolnick et al.</td>
<td>1981</td>
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<td>Women in Utah Cancer Registry and genealogy file</td>
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<td>(1,502 malformations recorded)</td>
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*Some reports draw upon several samples or data sets; unless otherwise noted entries in the table are for the largest of the samples or populations studied. Some smaller samples/data sets are not cited specifically in the table.

*Not reported.
some of the little available data on the dietary habits and histories of sexual experience among random samples of Utah adults.\textsuperscript{22}

These studies of Utah and California populations, along with some evidence from Alberta, Canada, yield the largest cluster of documentable "facts" about Mormon people available in the contemporary research literature. Among the generalizations receiving sufficient support in a variety of studies to justify considering them "facts" are the following:

1. Dietary habits, including reference to smoking, are "better" or more healthful among Mormons than in the general population of non-Mormons in Utah and California.
2. Rates of mortality from and reported incidence of most cancers are lower among Mormons than non-Mormons.
3. Mortality rates for many other diseases, some of them not directly linked to diet or smoking, are also lower among Mormons than among non-Mormons.
4. Mortality from and reported incidence of most cancers and of many other diseases are lower among highly active or "practicing" Mormons than among other Mormons.

There are numerous other "facts" regarding specific types of cancer, mortality rates by cause of death, and so on that the interested reader may find in the studies summarized in table 2. Most of the findings, either because they have not been fully replicated or because there are qualifications to be explored (for example, life expectancy for Mormon men is considerably longer than for other men; there is a similar Mormon/non-Mormon differential for women, but the differences are much smaller), do not yet merit designation as "facts."

Even so, it may be useful to mention a few of these "probabilities," or generalizations that require further research before they can be fully accepted. For convenience in reference, we have assigned numbers to propositions of "fact" status, and letters to those of "probability" status.

A. \textit{It is probable that} among Utah women, Mormons have had fewer different sex partners than non-Mormons.\textsuperscript{23}
B. \textit{It is probable that} among Utah women, Mormons have fewer miscarriages than non-Mormons.
C. \textit{It is probable that} among Utah women, birth defects are less common among the children of Mormon women than among those of other women.

\textbf{Fertility}

One other topic, Mormon fertility, has spawned enough good empirical work to justify some generalizations of "fact" stature. Most research on Mormon fertility in the U.S. has compared Utah rates, or official Church reports of LDS birthrates, to fertility rates of other states
or of the U.S. as a whole. Unlike the U.S. census, the Canadian census includes items on religion, and there it is possible to trace variations in LDS fertility over the past five decades from national census data. In addition to these demographic analyses, there have been numerous studies of local or nonrepresentative populations that have produced findings in line with the studies of census data. On the basis of the work cited in table 3, the following conclusions are warranted:

5. Both historically and in contemporary Canada and the U.S., Mormon women have higher than average fertility.
6. The fertility of Mormon women is influenced by many of the same factors that influence changes in national and regional fertility, so that trends in national rates are mirrored in LDS fertility trends, although the absolute rates for Mormon women remain higher than for non-Mormon women.

That Mormon women in the U.S. and Canada have high fertility is well documented. The reasons for their higher fertility are not so well understood. Studies of LDS attitudes about and practice of birth control are usually hampered by small, nonrepresentative samples. Nevertheless, the consistent finding in the nonrepresentative studies, also supported in the responses of the small subsample of LDS women interviewed in some national fertility surveys, is that LDS women are as aware of contraceptive technology as are other women and that they are as likely to have practiced contraception at some time in their lives. Their higher fertility apparently derives from personal values or social pressures favoring large families rather than from beliefs that birth control per se is wrong. And thus the generalizations read:

D. It is probable that contemporary LDS women are as likely as other women to practice birth control or child spacing at some time during their childbearing years.
E. It is probable that the high fertility of LDS women is not attributable to their ignorance of or unwillingness to apply—given “appropriate” circumstances—the contraceptive technology available in their society.

National surveys

The best studies of national samples of Mormons published to date are releases from a 1981 demographic survey of Mormons in the U.S. and Canada conducted by the Church. The sampling frame was the computerized membership file maintained at Church headquarters. Most of the data was collected by mail questionnaire, but follow-up methods included sending interviewers in person, interviewing by telephone, and asking local ward bishops having the potential respondents’ membership records to supply what information they could from personal knowledge and inspection of the records. In all, information was obtained for 81 percent of the sample, including
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<td>Bahr et al.</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>College-educated, mothers of 7+ children, child born in 1977</td>
<td>All mothers meeting specific selection criteria, 1977 county birth records</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Depth interviews</td>
<td>Utah county, but only to the 41 respondents</td>
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<td>Bowers &amp; Hastings</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>&quot;Contrived population&quot; of ever-married women graduates of Univ. of Utah, 1940-41</td>
<td>Persons listed in 1941 commencement program with current address available in alumni association records</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Mail questionnaire</td>
<td>1941 Univ. of Utah women graduates, but only the 165 women respondents</td>
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<td>Bush</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>Various samples and populations, censuses and vital church records, historical documents and published research; summarizes ten surveys of LDS attitudes toward birth control, 1953-72, including two of Univ. of Utah students, six of BYU students, and one of BYU graduates</td>
<td>1850-1975</td>
<td>Analysis of historical records, documents</td>
<td>&quot;The Mormons&quot; as variously defined in source documents (largely Utahs)</td>
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<td>Chadwick</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>Utah, regional, and national health statistics on fertility and abortion</td>
<td>1970-78</td>
<td>Analysis of vital statistics</td>
<td>Women in Utah, Mountain States, United States</td>
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<td>Hastings et al.</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>Discussion of Mormonism and birth planning summarizes six surveys, including two of BYU and three of Univ. of Utah students/alumni; all but one nonrandom or nonreplicable.</td>
<td>1941-69</td>
<td>Analysis and summary of prior studies</td>
<td>BYU/Univ. of Utah students/alumni, but only respondents</td>
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<td>Heaton &amp; Calkins</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>Once married, currently married, white LDS women in National Fertility Surveys; three samples of 70, 117, and 71 women</td>
<td>1965, 1970</td>
<td>Secondary analysis of national surveys</td>
<td>LDS married women, U.S.</td>
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<td>Henripin</td>
<td>1972</td>
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<td>Canadian women, including LDS, in four national censuses</td>
<td>1931-61</td>
<td>Analysis by religion of census data</td>
<td>LDS women in Canada</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>Adult women, 84 percent LDS</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unnamed suburb</td>
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<td>Miller</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Young married LDS women and their mothers and grandmothers</td>
<td>From two rosters of young married LDS, one for a univ. neighborhood, the other a nearby rural area; 102 third-generation LDS women generated 35 three-generation sets; 27 produced completed questionnaires</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Mail questionnaires</td>
<td>Cache Valley young married LDS women, but only to respondents</td>
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<td>Young married LDS women and their mothers and grandmothers</td>
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<td>795</td>
<td>BYU Students</td>
<td>Randomly drawn from 1963 student roster; 1,874 names yielded 1,810 potential</td>
<td>Mail questionnaire</td>
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<td>1974</td>
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<td>LDS couples, descendents of four &quot;original</td>
<td>Listed in LDS genealogical records 1900-60 and born between 1800 and 1940</td>
<td>Analysis of genealogical</td>
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<td>372</td>
<td>Married women aged 24–48; graduates of</td>
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<td>Mail questionnaire</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td></td>
<td>People listed in U.S. and Canadian</td>
<td>Available historical and demographic data</td>
<td>Demographic analysis;</td>
<td>Utah; LDS married women,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>censuses; included in U.S. vital</td>
<td></td>
<td>secondary analysis</td>
<td>U.S.; LDS, worldwide;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>statistics (birthrates); public data on</td>
<td></td>
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<td>LDS in Canada</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fertility of wives of LDS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>General Authorities; LDS respondents in</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>National Fertility Surveys, 1963 and 1970</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Van Dyck &amp; Brockett</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td></td>
<td>Utah women aged 25–44, girls aged 10–14</td>
<td>Represented in Utah vital statistics on fertility and pregnancy</td>
<td>Analysis of State</td>
<td>Utah females aged 10+</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Health Statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis sus data</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>Married white women in Utah</td>
<td>Represented in U.S. census data</td>
<td>Analysis of U.S.</td>
<td>Utah white married women</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>census</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Does not apply; many different samples or populations.

²Generalization unwarranted due to (1) inadequate specification of sampling universe, (2) lack of sampling or inadequate specification of respondents' characteristics, or (3) respondents represent highly particularized, atypical populations.
54 percent who returned mail questionnaires, 5 percent interviewed personally, 7 percent interviewed by telephone, and 15 percent represented in questionnaires filled out by bishops. Public releases from this survey are summarized in table 4, along with entries from two other national surveys.

Among the findings that seem to merit being called facts—most of them supported by results from small-scale, nonrepresentative samples as well—are these:

7. Mormon adults in the U.S. and Canada are much more likely to have had post-high school education than are adults in the U.S. populations as a whole.
8. The Mormon advantage in years of formal education completed also applies to graduation from college. However, there is a sizable gender difference favoring Mormon men, who are much more likely than U.S. men generally to have finished college, while Mormon women are only slightly more likely than other women to have finished college.
9. Although most studies of correlates of religiosity among U.S. adults reveal an inverse relationship or no relationship between higher education and religiosity, among Mormon adults the relationship is direct: college-educated Mormons are more apt to attend church and to exhibit other manifestations of "high" religiosity than are less-educated Mormons.

The above findings appear in scientific articles as well as in an official Church publication.27 Here are some other findings from the 1981 Church demographic survey that have appeared in official LDS publications (see entries 2 through 5 in table 4):

10. Among Mormon adults in the U.S. and Canada, most converts joined the Church during their teen years or as young adults.
11. Women converts outnumber men converts almost two to one.
12. Compared to the adult population of the U.S., Mormons in the U.S. and Canada are more likely to be currently married and less likely to be separated, divorced, or widowed.
13. Among unmarried Mormons, the sex ratio (men per one hundred women) declines sharply with age, ranging from ninety-five for ages thirty to thirty-nine, to twenty-four for ages sixty and over.
14. It is probable that Mormon women are more likely to marry nonmembers than are Mormon men.

Comparisons between LDS rates of attendance at church services and those obtained in surveys of other populations indicate that:

14. Mormon adults attend church services more frequently than U.S. adults in general, and also more frequently than do members of any major denominational group except Catholic women, whose attendance rates are comparable to those of Mormon women.28

Duke and Johnson's analysis of the various dimensions of religiosity in a national sample of Mormons supports this proposition:
### TABLE 4. SELECTED STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY MORMONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>How Selected</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Limits of Generalizability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albrecht &amp; Heaton</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>6,000+</td>
<td>Adult LDS, U.S. and Canada</td>
<td>Random sampling from current Church membership file</td>
<td>1981 Mail questionnaire; personal and telephone interviews and bishops’ descriptions of potential respondents who could not be contacted</td>
<td>U.S. and Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaton &amp; Goodman</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Leer</td>
<td>1983a</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Leer</td>
<td>1983b</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Leer</td>
<td>1983c</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1,384</td>
<td>Adult subscribers to major Church publications</td>
<td>Random sample from subscription list</td>
<td>1981 Mail questionnaire</td>
<td>U.S. subscribers to official LDS publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herrin</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>274 active LDS couples</td>
<td>Stratified sample, 21 LDS congregations selected to maximize sample representativeness in continental U.S. with reference to region, membership dispersion, density, unit size, activity level, age distribution, and rural-urban character. Of 974 adult respondents, 548 were active couples who completed and returned questionnaires and time-logs. All persons 12 and over in the 21 units were potential respondents; the 548 individuals were 56% of adults responding, representing 10% of original sample to whom materials were mailed.</td>
<td>1981 Mail questionnaires, including adult questionnaire and time-log for persons 18-45; youth questionnaire and time-log for persons 12-17; and brief rating scale on church “activity” from bishops of all persons sampled</td>
<td>Active U.S. LDS couples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partridge</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1,695</td>
<td>565 LDS young men aged 12-18 and both parents</td>
<td>Lived in one of 54 randomly-selected wards in a national sample of LDS stakes (50 randomly selected, 4 added to maximize geographic representation)</td>
<td>1981 Group administration of questionnaires to all young men and their parents in LDS Sunday service; two-hand delivery of questionnaires to those absent; personal follow-up</td>
<td>Active LDS young men who live in complete (two-parent) families, U.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
G. It is probable that among Mormons a "consequential" dimension (including behavioral consequences of religious belief and commitment such as personal honesty, chastity, and service to others) is an important component of religiosity.30

The seventh entry in table 4, Donald Herrin's doctoral dissertation on time use by married couples, is a significant contribution to the social psychology of family life but adds little to the social science of Mormondom for the following reasons: (1) the representativeness of the couples whose time use is analyzed is open to question (they constitute only 10 percent of all individuals to whom sets of materials were mailed and 56 percent of the adults who responded); (2) it is certain that Mormons partly or totally inactive are underrepresented in the sample; and (3) due to apparent constraints on what parts of the study's findings could be made public (the data derive from the 1979 Member Resources Study done by the Church), simple frequencies describing time use by various categories of respondents, as well as indicators of perceived strain or overcommitment, are not given. Without these distributions, the results cannot be readily compared to research on studies of time use and stress among other populations.

The last entry in table 4, Thomas Partridge's master's thesis, attempts to explain teenaged Mormon boys' identification with their parents on the basis of (1) parental attempts to control their sons, (2) parental supportiveness, (3) the amount and nature of interaction between parents and sons, and (4) the personal characteristics of parents. The thesis is another public release of data from a general Church survey, this time the 1981 Young Men Study. "Structural variables" such as father's occupational status and education proved to be the best predictors of boys' identification with fathers, while for identification with mothers, social-psychological characteristics of the sons (mother's support, guilt, perceptions of mother's withdrawal of love) are more important.

As in the Herrin dissertation, the complex data reduction and analysis procedures in the Partridge report suffice to test a scientific model relevant to the sociology of the family generally but severely limit the work's utility for the social science of Mormondom. Even so, we have described the data sets in some detail in table 4 so that persons who have not shared Rodney Stark's exposure to the national studies conducted under Church auspices will have some idea of what Stark is rhapsodizing about when he writes:

Through the years, I have consulted with many denominational research departments and have read countless reports of their results. I have often been favorably impressed. Yet, the research efforts of other denominations shrink to insignificance when compared with the quality, scope, and sophistication of the work of the Mormon social research department. One might as well be comparing missionary efforts.31
**Toward a Social Science**

*The Social Science of Mormon College Students*

Much of the empirical research on contemporary Mormons draws upon surveys of university students, often students of Brigham Young University. Research on student, or former student, samples is not necessarily suspect. Students are an important segment of the general population. The problems arise when researchers permit or encourage generalization to nonstudent populations or make inferences about students generally from atypical "samples" of students.

A mature science of Mormondom would surely include generalizations about college students. Unfortunately, no one has determined precisely what wider universe, if any, the studentbody of Brigham Young University represents. It is certain that there have been important changes over the past half-century in the composition and typicality of BYU students. As the Church has grown, and as BYU has imposed higher academic and behavioral standards for admission, BYU students have come to represent a smaller, more distinctive—in some ways, we suspect, more "conservative," in others, more "elite"—segment of college-age Mormon youth.

What is most disappointing about the extant research on Mormon college students is not that the student populations do not represent all Mormon youth, but rather that all but a handful of the studies represent neither the studentbody of a given university nor even a class within that studentbody. Instead, most studies of Mormon students have used "accidental" or "purposive" samples, that is, students who happened to be enrolled in courses available to the researcher. In other words, what we have is not even a social science of the BYU student, but a collection of studies whose generality is unspecified, unknown, and probably unknowable. Of the forty-two studies listed in table 5, and these include much of the best research on Mormon students in the past decade, only three represent a scientifically drawn sample of an entire studentbody or of a specific class level.

Scanning the entries in column seven of table 5, it is immediately and overwhelmingly apparent that only for one study in seven is it possible to specify in any meaningful way the wider population to which the findings apply. The studies listed in table 5 may have provided many useful insights and highlighted tentative hypothetical relationships. What they have *not* done is to allay our suspicions that much of what we know of Mormon students applies to only a tiny minority of the Church and that most of the time it is impossible to tell where that tiny minority begins or ends or what may be its distinguishing characteristics. Table 5 provides sobering, even humbling, evidence of how little we know, and how little real progress we have made in the past decade. What at first glance looks like a solid structure of scientific work crumbles and collapses when we lean on
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>BYU</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>How Selected</th>
<th>Methods of Data Collection</th>
<th>Limits of Generalizability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barney &amp; Chu</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Modified Q-sort</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowers &amp; Hastings</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brimhall*</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>414</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bunker et al.</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>134, Biola College</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burr, Ahern, Knowles</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>1,036</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardwell &amp; Lindsey</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>?$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christensen</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christensen</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christensen &amp; Cannon</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1,139 (1935 sample)</td>
<td>1,036 (1975 sample)</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christensen &amp; Gregg</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Obs</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day*</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>278</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dunford &amp; Kunz</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>155</td>
<td></td>
<td>Members in two campus branches</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ellis*</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1,233</td>
<td>186 WSU</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galbraith</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>10,923</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>University Records BYU</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haney*</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>333</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy &amp; Larsen</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Univ. of Utah</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Q, Obs</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hatch**</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>1,018 in four Utah schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hatch &amp; Cannon</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1,021 in four Utah schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hill*</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
<td>$ (48 engaged couples)</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hughtiston*</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>163</td>
<td></td>
<td>R. 1971 family living courses</td>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>BYU 1971 family living courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kunz</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>216</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kunz &amp; Petersen</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1,126</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lippetts*</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>154</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mackie &amp; Brinkerhoff</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>347, Univ. of Nebraska; 355, Univ. of Calgary</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madsen &amp; Vernon</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>134, Univ. of Utah</td>
<td>Sample of 1975 Utah high school graduates</td>
<td>MQ</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milet*</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montanye et al.</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Lost letter technique</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortenson*</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>Four Utah schools</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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TABLE 5 CONTINUED

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<th>Author(s)</th>
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<th>Methods of Data Collection</th>
<th>Limits of Generalizability</th>
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<tr>
<td>Payne</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>Three Utah schools</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<td>Peterson*</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>795</td>
<td></td>
<td>R, student body</td>
<td>MQ</td>
<td>BYU students</td>
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<td>Rich*</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>188</td>
<td></td>
<td>S, 94 engaged couples</td>
<td>Exp, Q</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rytting &amp; Christensen</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1,159 (1935 sample)</td>
<td>1,056 (1973 sample) 1)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandall**</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>156, three Utah schools; 194, four non-Utah schools 2)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>8,584a 7 schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoddard*</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>84, Snow College</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swenson*</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>1,007</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tayson*</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westover*</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>85 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams*</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>206</td>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>MQ</td>
<td>BYU students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorgason*</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
<td>S, (32 engaged couples)</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Master’s thesis
**Ph.D. dissertation
1) S: students in selected classes (nonrandom, nonrepresentative); R: randomly or systematically selected, representatives of some well-defined collectivity such as an entire student body or all freshmen.
2) Q: administered questionnaire; MQ: mail questionnaire; Obs: observation; Exp: experiment.
3) ?: unknown; indeterminate.
4) The total sample of 616 students included students from a predominantly LDS college and high school in Utah, and from two high schools and two colleges in northern California.
5) Respondents were 580 students at a western state university: only LDS students were included in this analysis.
6) Data are presented on student samples from other universities, as well as 220 students at “Intermountain U.”
7) The 1935 sample was drawn from “required religion classes” and included about two-thirds of the entire BYU student body; it was much more representative than the 1973 sample, drawn from selected social science and English classes and a few physical science classes.
8) An additional 282 respondents were drawn from the community.
9) Subjects were thirty women students, including BYU and University of Utah LDS students.
10) Subjects were “dating couples, volunteers” from Provo High School and BYU.
11) Non-Mormons.
12) Subjects were high school graduates of 1973, 90 percent of whom had attended the University of Utah by 1979.
13) Sampling universe for 1975 not described.
14) These are last letters, not individual respondents; two hundred letters were lost at BYU, and two hundred each at Arizona State University and Cincinnati University.
15) Respondents were male students returned from an LDS mission within the past two years.
16) All respondents, in and outside Utah, were non-LDS.
17) Although the analysis contrasts active and inactive LDS students, the number of LDS students in the seven-college sample is not given.
18) Student respondents in class were given questionnaires to pass on; includes data on thirty-eight engaged couples.
it. Once again it appears that there is plenty of exploratory work and tentative hypothesizing but little hard evidence that findings apply to any population beyond the "accidental," and now dissolved, collectivity that was so conveniently available to the university researcher.

The Social Science of Contemporary Mormon Families

Our review of the contemporary research literature leads inescapably to the conclusion that the social science of Mormondom is far less developed than it ought to be. Indeed, it is far less mature than many of us thought it was. Let us buttress that conclusion, in traditional Mormon fashion, by reference to the testimonial.

Darwin Thomas recently wrote a chapter on "family in the Mormon experience" for a book on religion and the family. He tried to describe the position of the family unit in Mormon teachings and to marshal available scientific evidence on the characteristics of the Mormon family. His report on the state of knowledge about Mormon families begins this way (in this and subsequent quotations the emphases are ours, not his):

The social scientist wishing to describe the Mormon family is . . . forced to acknowledge an acute lack of hard data and an overabundance of soft opinion . . . . The records of the Mormon Church are not open to everyone's use, do not have a lot of family-related information in them, and have an unknown margin of error . . . .

Most of the information about Mormon families comes from a variety of relatively small, nonrepresentative samples and from census data for the state of Utah compared to national averages. The comparison of Utah with national data has to be treated with extreme caution, because no one is sure what percentage of the state of Utah is Mormon.

Thomas emphasizes in many different ways that his conclusions stand on very shaky struts. Observe the hedging forced on him by the "state of the art":

On suggestions that Mormons marry young:

*If* Mormons are marrying young, it *could* portend difficulties for such marriages. Unfortunately, *good data are not currently available* to provide insight into how young marriages fare in the Mormon culture.

On future fertility patterns of LDS families in non-LDS settings:

*It seems reasonable* to predict that they will opt for fewer children.

On divorce among Mormons:

From the above *it seems logical* to conclude . . .

On gender roles:

*Research is virtually nonexistent* . . . *It seems logical* to conclude . . . *It seems reasonable to assume* . . . The available evidence *probably warrants the hypothesis* that . . .
Toward a Social Science

On the socialization of Mormon children:

Not a great deal of research evidence exists on parent-child relations in Mormon and non-Mormon comparisons.

On evidence suggesting that some LDS fathers may not express sufficient emotional support to their sons:

If this decreased support . . . is replicated in additional research . . . it could be seen as a possible forerunner for . . . 33

Thomas’s hedging is forced on him by the sorry state of the data on Mormon families. Yet our review of the literature led us to conclude that, disorganized and nonrepresentative though the sociology of the Mormon family may be, the assemblage of bits and pieces on Mormon families is a veritable treasure trove of knowledge in comparison to the evidence available on any characteristics of contemporary majority (that is, non-Utah) Mormons. With the exception of the epidemiology of cancer mortality and the documenting of fertility trends, even our knowledge of Utah Mormons is tentative and problematic.

Local Studies: Cities, Communities, and Neighborhoods

The early interest of rural sociologists and agricultural economists in the Mormon village has not been continued by today’s social scientists. As a result, the contemporary Mormon community remains largely uncharted.

Many researchers have drawn samples from LDS ward or stake directories, and from city or telephone directories, but usually these scientists have not been interested in the Mormon community per se, but rather in drawing samples to test notions about such things as family relationships, voting patterns, or attitudes about interfaith marriage. 34 Similarly, questionnaires completed by LDS high school students have served to test relationships between religiosity and deviance, or religiosity and attitudes about ethnic groups, but community variables have not been explicitly considered in the reports of such work. In fact, usually the communities where the target high schools are located are not identified or described other than by approximate population size and state or region of location. 35

Residents of Utah County have often served in experimental and control groups and as respondents in interview, questionnaire, and telephone surveys associated with student and faculty research at Brigham Young University. Even so, Utah County neighborhoods or the “community” itself—whether Provo, Orem, the metropolitan area that includes both cities, or local neighborhoods, stakes, or wards—has not been the focus of attention. Rather, Provo, Orem, and Utah County have simply served as convenient sites where the diffusion of good news, attitudes of police officers, Sunday shopping, children’s
attitudes about death, voting behavior, the linkage between students’ self-images and their emotions, and dozens of other topics relevant to modern social science might be investigated with little or no reference to real neighborhoods or the specific urban context where the behaviors in question are enacted.

The only valid exception to the generalization that modern Mormon communities have not been studied as communities is the study of social impacts associated with sudden population growth and energy development. Sometimes the social impact analyses have drawn primarily upon demographic and economic sources, but there have also been studies of satisfaction with medical services in some Utah towns (Duchesne, Roosevelt, and Vernal).\textsuperscript{36} Data collected for their relevance to social impact analysis have been used to estimate migration flows into and out of Utah as well as attitudes about resource development. Publications drawing upon the social impact studies have usually combined data from several towns. For instance, the migration analysis draws upon data collected in Panguitch, Delta, Richfield, Salina, Moab, Duchesne, Roosevelt, and Vernal, and a summary article on attitudes about development combines data from Blanding, Kanab, Monticello, and Escalante.\textsuperscript{37}

Research on Urban Mormons

Edward Geary, writing about ‘‘Mormon Country,’’ repeats Charles Peterson’s comment that Salt Lake City ‘‘may well have become the least Mormon of all Mormon places.’’\textsuperscript{38} The statement underscores how little we know of contemporary ‘‘Mormon places’’ in contrast to the Mormon villages of a prior generation. What, precisely, is a ‘‘Mormon place’’ in the 1980s? More importantly, how do the Saints who live in manifestly un-Mormon places, the metropolitan areas of the world, differ from the Mormons still rooted in traditional Mormon country? The study of Mormonism as an urban religion, either within the U.S. or outside its borders, has barely begun.

Mauss’s widely cited studies of Mormons in urban areas draw upon two subsets of nonrepresentative respondents: persons living in ten different wards in Salt Lake City and those living in two wards in California.\textsuperscript{39} It is possible that his findings apply to the entire Church. It is also possible that they do not fit most urban Saints. The critical point is that there is no way to judge how Mauß’s respondents differ from urban Mormons generally. We would question the generalizability of his findings to anywhere but Salt Lake City even if he had had a random sample of Mormons in that city. As it is, neither the reader nor Mauß himself can know how representative his respondents are. Hogenson’s data from a random sample of married Mormon men in
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Calgary, Alberta, is a better cross section of Mormons in a metropolitan area, but again, we are unable to generalize beyond a particular city.40

Research on Mormons outside the United States

For many years, historians have pointed to the growing internation- alism of Mormondom as perhaps the most significant problem facing the Church.41 It is therefore heartening to read in Mauss’s recent bibliographic essay on Mormon subculture that there has been some research on non-American Mormons. In addition to studies of Mormons in Canada (‘‘part of the Mormon heartland’’) Mauss lists studies of Mormons in Mexico, Latin America, Polynesia, Asia, Europe, and Africa.42 Unfortunately, closer examination of these studies reveals them to be historical accounts—here again, the historians are ahead of other social scientists—or essays in which U.S. observers relate their impressions about the problems faced by the Church in trying to adapt its programs to various more or less incompatible cultures, and about what Church members might do to reduce the problems of ‘‘lack of fit.’’ With two partial exceptions, none of the articles and books cited draws upon systematic, empirical data from contemporary international Mormons. Of the seventeen non-Canadian studies of Mormons in foreign lands listed in Mauss’s essay, thirteen were published after 1969. Of these, two are bibliographies to a periodical literature that is largely historical and nonquantitative; two are content analyses of the image of Mormonism in French literature; and four are narrative histories reflecting official LDS sources and drawing upon an author’s familiarity with the country in question, but not buttressed by data collection among representative, or even nonrepresentative, samples of any size. The histories are of Mormon pioneering in Mexico, of the first LDS mission in Japan (1901–24), of the expansion of Mormonism in the South Pacific, and of missionary work in Africa.43

Of the remaining five pieces, one gives a prognosis for missionary work in Maoist China; one reports impressions on how ‘‘international’’ Japanese Mormons are, based on responses from seven stake presidents’ unsystematic observation and statistics from a 1978 yearbook on Christian churches in Japan;44 one purports to be a survey of ‘‘Mormons in Britain’’; and two are essays on Mormonism in Latin America. The British survey turns out to represent, at most, only two localities (Hereford City and Glasgow), does not report the number of Mormons interviewed, and yields the conclusion that ‘‘missionaries’ influence’’ was the reason usually given for joining the Mormon church.45 The Latin American essays emphasize that the economic and political realities in Latin America are not compatible with the U.S. nationalism and ethnocentrism manifested, often unconsciously, by many U.S.
Mormons. Lamond Tullis, in a 1973 article, urges Anglo-Americans to "jump out of the world of your own political rhetoric and into the real one that exists in Latin America," where the political and economic realities include a recognition that a person's acceptance of revolutionary rhetoric and anti-Americanism is often a realistic adaptation to economic exploitation by foreign capitalists. Seven years later, Tullis framed an essay on Mormonism in Latin America around two issues aimed at different audiences: "I have chided Anglo-Americans on the issue of nationalism, and I have chided the Latin Americans on traditional leadership culture." 47

None of these articles provides quantitative data on the characteristics of LDS people in the countries where Mormondom has grown so rapidly. There is nothing here that conveys even an approximate depiction of what Church members outside North America are like. In a way, these thirteen pieces are articles of faith: faith that someone, sometime, will collect the data necessary to allow more certainty about how closely these authors' impressions fit the reality experienced by members, active and inactive, in these lands.

Dean May refers to the traditional Mormons, rooted in the LDS pioneer heritage of the Mountain West, as "Deseret Mormons" and says that they continue to dominate the Church culturally as well as numerically, even amid the changes forced by the rapid growth of the Church in foreign lands. 48 We would argue that even the numerical dominance of the Deseret Mormons is open to question, as is the extent of their cultural dominance and its rate of decline.

In Summary: The Quality and Scope of Existing Research

Earlier we described six kinds of standards or paradigms that might be applied to assess the social science of modern Mormondom. They are: (1) the list of major social processes and institutions essential to the survival of any society; (2) the standard of grounded theory; (3) Sorenson's ten emergent levels of human activity and organization; (4) geographic or ecological scale; (5) the issues of social structure, historical place, and human variety imbedded in Mills's "sociological imagination"; and (6) standards of method, especially generalizability and replicability. Now that we have considered the available research, let us summarize the status of the social science of Mormondom as measured against these six standards.

Social Institutions and Processes. Whether our standard is a list of social processes or of institutions, the result is the same: apart from the work by historians on the economic structure of early Mormon communities in Utah and adjacent states, and on how modernization
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has changed the economic and political power of the Church, none of the essential institutions has received much systematic study.

There is probably more research literature on matters related to family life, ranging from fertility studies to analyses of parental support and control, than on any of the other essential institutions. There is no research literature to speak of on patterns of social differentiation and the division of labor in modern Mormon society, little on stratification processes (apart from comments by observers that Mormon males "get ahead" in the Church hierarchy by rigid conformity to the authoritarian control of the authorities over them), nothing but opinion and argument by illustrative instance with regard to social control, and nothing on patterns of inequality in contemporary Mormon communities. There is very little on the Church as a functioning bureaucracy concerned with secular needs such as welfare, human resource management, and communication; on the relationship between Mormon society and the military in the various national settings; on political organization and power; on the functioning of educational institutions (as distinguished from characteristics of selected students); on LDS kinship structure; on Mormon consumer behavior (including relationships to national and regional economies); on involvement in voluntary associations or organizations (recreational, artistic, philanthropic, educational); or on the issues of the interconnection of Mormondom with the major institutions in the wider society, as opposed to the maintenance of separate "parallel institutions."

Grounded Theory. Because the approach of grounded theory builds upon or organizes "what is there," the social science of Mormondom looks better from this perspective than any other. The points of emphasis that stand out when we simply distribute the research literature by topic are fertility, epidemiology, and research on young people, both high school and college students. Perhaps the next step would be to ask how these kinds of studies relate to some of the behaviors said to be critical by Mormon leaders, such as missionary work, temple work, mate selection, family solidarity, and community service. In any case, the grounded theory approach affirms the importance of large families, healthful living, and formal education in Mormondom.

Emergent Levels of Human Activity. The comparison of existing work to the ten types of activity identified by Sorensen is perhaps our simplest task. Only three of the levels—demography, population distribution, and social organization (levels 4, 5, and 6)—have received systematic attention sufficient to generate empirically-based propositions. The interaction of Mormons with the natural environment of the Great Basin in past times has been extensively covered by historians. However, our knowledge of the social organization of
today's Mormon people is minimal, and the higher emergent levels, such as language in the broadest sense, knowledge, values, and ideology, remain essentially virgin territory.

**Geographic and Ecological Scale.** We noted earlier that considering only two variables, location and member density, contemporary Mormons live in at least twenty-five geographic/density contexts. Although Church membership is not apportioned evenly among the twenty-five, the three or four ecological contexts where most studies of contemporary Mormons have been done no longer represent a majority of the Church membership. Our rough estimate (we have not systematically coded each of the studies by the location and member density of the research site) is that most research on contemporary Mormons has dealt either with sublocal samples such as local wards or stakes in regions where Mormons are a majority of the population, or with Utah considered as a whole, where Mormons are the predominant religion, or with relatively small communities—rarely metropolitan areas—where Mormons make up at least 10 percent of the population and typically are a majority. Those geographic/ecological sites where the most Church growth is taking place and where an ever-larger proportion of all Mormons reside, namely metropolitan areas where the LDS people are less than 1 percent of the population, are virtually ignored in contemporary research.

**Applying the Sociological Imagination.** Mills defines productive social research as an exploration of personal problems and social issues in the context of individual biography, history, and social structure. We believe he would approve of some of the recent histories of Mormondom. What is lacking is the other two components of the picture: an understanding of the human variety exhibited by today's Mormons and of their social structure. Because so little is known of the personal and demographic characteristics of today's Mormons, the fruitful juxtaposition of population composition, historical process, and social structure urged by Mills is usually impossible. Remember that when Mills refers to social structure he means more than the social structure as idealized; he means the varying social structures worked out in process, growing out of a give-and-take social evolution. He would want to know the diversity of social and political structures in the many settings where contemporary Mormons live out their lives. It seems to us that so little is known of the personal problems and pressures experienced by Mormon people in the 1970s and 1980s, and of how these relate to the issues and constraints of our times, that Mills's view of the promise of social research as it might apply to Mormondom remains an unreachable goal.

**Generalizability and Replicability.** We discussed standards of generalizability at some length, buttressing our points with tabular
summaries of much of the best contemporary research. A quick review of tables 2–5 reaffirms the conclusion that most research on today’s Mormons is not generalizable beyond the particular population studied. In many cases that population is not described well enough even to permit replication. Most of the social science of contemporary Mormonism is exploratory work using small or unrepresentative samples, and most of the findings are appropriately viewed as hypotheses for further testing rather than as probabilities or facts. Finally, the concentration on populations convenient to the researchers rather than on those most representative of the Church, or those most interesting from a theoretical standpoint, means that even the best studies have ever more limited applicability as the proportion of "traditional" or "Deseret Mormons" in the international Church declines.

We have reviewed the accumulated scientific knowledge about contemporary Mormondom, as we understand it, in the light of several models or sets of standards. There are some bright spots, but our conclusions are mostly disappointing. Measured against any of the standards, it is plain that social scientists are not well informed about contemporary Mormondom. This "research gap" is especially critical in view of Rodney Stark’s admonition to sociologists of religion generally that "the ‘miracle’ of Mormon success makes them the single most important case on the agenda of the social scientific study of religion."49

Perhaps more serious than missing data—things we can agree we don’t know about—is the problem of distinguishing among facts, probabilities, and possibilities in a literature where the typical data base is an undefined or unrepresentative population. There is no limit to the number of "exploratory hypotheses"—possibilities stated as facts—that one can produce. That is why we must be very careful not to make such hypotheses without labeling them as hypotheses: so many more things might be true than are so. And the production and consumption of such froth consumes time and other resources better devoted to documenting what, in fact, is, rather than what conceivably may be.

To illustrate the kinds of things that are set forth as facts about Mormondom, rather than as assumptions or hypotheses to be tested, we present in table 6 a set of seventeen statements grouped into six categories. Many of the statements within categories are contradictory, and most raise many questions: Does this finding apply to all Mormons? How are the "players" defined? What is an "intellectual" or an "urban" Mormon? How is "rigidity" defined? And so on.

The appearance in table 6 of one or two statements from a single work does not mean we have exhausted the possibilities offered by an imaginative piece of writing. Readers may choose to take the statements, as written, on faith—apparently that is how many of the writers...
| **Wealth and Worthiness:** | *The positive relationship between worldly success and goodness:* The association between spiritual and material progress operates at both the level of the individual and of mankind in general. A particular man’s economic prosperity is often taken as a sign of spiritual “worth.”¹
*The lack of relationship between worldly success and church callings:* Callings to church office are tendered on the basis of piety and diligence in church service rather than wealth or occupational status.² |
| **Tolerance and Diversity:** | *Intellectual tolerance exhibited in LDS meetings:* Participants are allowed a wide freedom of expression and interpretation. As M. P. Leone has noted, in Sunday School the Mormon appears to truly be his own exegete. Along with the reaffirmation of the unified collectivity (through blood) comes a pronounced tolerance for idiosyncracy and diversification.³
*Intolerance for intellectual or any other kind of diversity among Mormon lay leaders:* Any bishop or stake president who wishes to retain his position or more to a higher one fully recognizes that he must conform to the expectations of those above him. Otherwise he will be replaced. Consequently, remarkably little difference obtains among Mormon officials. . . . The hierarchical structure, succession policy, and lay ministry . . . reinforce a general homogeneity across social and geographical boundaries.⁴ |
| **Individualism versus Central Control:** | *Changes toward individualism over the past century:* The major change is not doctrinal, it is structural. Those who define belief have changed. The people do it now, the leaders did it then. And this change has occurred not in theory but in practice. The President is still Prophet, Seer, and Revelator. Interpretation, however, once in the hands of a few, those who also safeguarded the economy, is now in the hands of all.⁵
*The continuity of rigidity and authoritarianism over the past century:* The modern church is no less authoritarian and hierarchical than in the past. In some respects, the Church exercises greater control over beliefs and morals today. . . . At no point in Mormon history have the sexual and dietary codes been more rigidly interpreted and apparently enjoyed greater consensus.⁶
*Freedom of thought among urban Mormons:* Many urban Mormons have already been secularized by the process of urbanization and are seeking a more relevant approach to the Gospel. This new Mormon is . . . independent in applying these Gospel principles to contemporary situations. He no longer fits the old rural stereotypes . . . nor is he willing to be “instructed” politically or told how to think religiously. He does his own thinking.⁷
*The attitudes of educated Mormons:* LDS liberals . . . are uncomfortable as leaders of the church express conservative social, political and economic positions in such a way that they become official. . . . Intellectuals in the church . . . are bothered by the drift toward rigid orthodoxy in the spheres of both behavior and belief.⁸ |
| **Socialization of Children:** | *The bad manners of Mormon children:* Mormon children are doted upon, are present and accepted in adult society, and are not taught to know their place. They are assertive, bold, even brassy, and do not respect adults.⁹
*On the effectiveness of socialization:* That these young men [missionaries] are willing and able to go suggests they have accepted the standards and values of their parents.¹⁰
*Methods of socialization:* It appears that the prime value of Mormon parents is “proper” socialization in terms of end results rather than in terms of method. They do what they think will be effective in terms of making the child a good Mormon.¹¹ |
| **Absence or Presence of the Past:** | *The weakness of ties to the past and historical perspective:* [Mormons represent] a rational population without a memory . . . Most Mormons, especially older ones, can report virtually nothing about the past.¹² |
A decline in religious observance among Mormon youth and women in the 1960s and 1970s has been observed in various studies. For example, a longitudinal study of college students in the 1960s and 1970s found a decrease in religious activity among Mormon students, particularly among those in non-Mormon institutions. This trend continued into the 1980s and 1990s, with a further decline in religious observance among young Mormons. These changes have been attributed to a variety of factors, including increased secularization and a decrease in the influence of the Mormon church. The weakening of religious observance among Mormon youth is a significant trend that has implications for the future of the Mormon church and its cultural influence on American society.
intended them to be taken. If so, we merely note, with some anxiety, that the foundations for a body of knowledge can sustain relatively few articles of faith; include too many, and the foundation anchors something other than science.

We want to be very clear about the difference between writing that points to significant questions, laying out an agenda of productive research topics or priorities, and writing that disguises as fact statements that are hypothetical at best, or that generalizes, implicitly or directly, from unrepresentative samples to some wider, undefined, ambiguous population of Mormons. It is the latter that we suffer a surfeit of; there is rarely enough of the former in any discipline.

PROPOSALS FOR RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

Some Neglected Essentials

What is distinctive about Mormonism, apart from peculiar dietary habits, low cancer rates, and large families? First, there is the astonishing growth outside North America, growth such that Mormonism is now heralded as "a new world faith." The source of that growth often is a direct result of the Church's far-flung missionary efforts. Then there is the affirmation by converts and lifelong members alike that they have a "testimony" or personal confirmation of the truthfulness of Mormonism, a confirmation often attributed to the Holy Spirit. Finally, there is the conformity to authority: among the things Mormons say when they bear their testimonies is that they have a conviction that the current President of the Church is a prophet, seer, and revelator, that in matters relating to the Church as a whole he is authorized to speak for God. Indeed, much of the often-remarked willingness of Mormon people to submit to ecclesiastical authority may stem from that conviction.

These topics can be grouped under four headings: the nature and consequences of the international growth of the Church; the processes of missionary work and conversion; the experiential component of personal religiosity; and the attribution and management of charisma. International growth, teaching and conversion, testimonies, and prophetic leadership: it may not be everyone's list, but it covers much that makes Mormondom unique.

What is remarkable as we list these essential characteristics of Mormondom is that none of them has received much attention in the research literature. There are demographic projections of Church growth but no available analyses of how converts in the Third-World countries differ from those who do not join; or of the consequences of their conversion for themselves and their social networks, as well as for the local LDS branches and wards. There is virtually no published research
on the life-styles, characteristics, and personal experiences that lead some people to become Mormons and others to turn the missionaries away.

The experiential component of religiosity and the nature, maintenance, and transmission of religious charisma are much neglected in the sociology of religion generally. Even so, the personal testimony and the perceived "mantle" of the Prophet (or of the bishop, stake president, patriarch, or mission president) seem so central to Mormon society and to the motivation that "drives" individual Mormons that they deserve far more attention than they have received.

Perhaps our social scientists are timid or our members suspicious of those who would try to measure intrinsically immeasurable things such as testimonies and prophetic callings. Yet the social scientist merely seeks to understand the nature of charisma and testimony as manifest in daily life, in what people say they think and feel, and what these thoughts and feelings have to do with the way Mormons live, work, play, and worship.

The poet E. E. Cummings warned us, decades ago, of the perils to the humanistic appreciation of nature posed by the meanspirited who would reduce the "sweet spontaneous earth" to charts and figures. Addressing the earth, he lamented:

how often have
the
doting
fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked
thee
, has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy
beauty , how
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and
buffeting thee51

Yet the sweet earth, Cummings assures us, in blissful forgiveness answers with spring.

Nowadays the doting fingers and naughty thumbs are attached to meteorologists, agronomists, plant geneticists, and geologists, yet the miracle of spring continues. Spring springs back, as it were. Similarly, the fingers and thumbs that would plumb the spiritual pulses of Mormon converts and chart the nebulous clouds of the experiential and charismatic dimensions of Mormon religiosity need be neither
sacrilegious nor profane, but merely honest attempts to understand the most important features of Mormonism. And if the problem is not an aversion to inquire about the sacred, how can we explain a social science that has neglected most of the "big" questions? Is it lack of imagination?

Mormondom as an Underdeveloped Nation

Some of the problems of rapid growth facing Mormondom are similar to problems facing underdeveloped nations in the process of modernization. We believe some valuable insights and useful research questions are brought into focus when we consider Mormondom as an underdeveloped nation. With its population of over five million, Mormondom commands the allegiance of more citizens than Israel (1980 population 3.92 million) and is approximately equal in population to Haiti or Denmark (1981 populations respectively 5.10 and 5.12 million). Despite the size and, in many ways, the cosmopolitan nature of Mormondom, essential facts and figures on its people are far less accessible than they are for impoverished Haiti, let alone for more developed nations of comparable size. In fact, the existing social science data base for this growing "nation" is a series of studies that describe nonrepresentative portions of the national heartland, where are found the oldest, most traditional, and most powerful communities.

The spectacular growth of this "country"—its birth rates are higher than those of Mexico and Brazil, and its total growth rates include substantial immigration—occurs near the national boundaries, in regions where local culture is far different from that of the traditional core. Building on the "underdeveloped nation" model, we might hypothesize that the burgeoning "national" growth—the rapid influx of people whose ethnicity and culture are vastly different from the historical, western-European influence that has dominated Mormondom for 150 years—is largely ignored by most "traditional" Mormons. Moreover, the values and attitudes of Mormondom's old-timers, who live in the powerful central cities, seem to reflect an acceptance of the status quo and a belief that the present way of doing things—including great inequality in the distribution of power and resources and a traditional life-style that by Third-World standards is profligate—will continue. Whether this observation is accurate is one of the empirical questions that cries for an answer.

The gap between the richest and the poorest citizens of Mormondom does not seem to be diminishing (no available scientific data would let us be certain of this), and if present growth rates continue the impoverished new Mormon "villages" will soon contain more citizens than do the cities in the traditional heartland. As the numerical power
of the impoverished newcomers increases, so will their aspirations: that is one of the truisms of modernization. Pressures to alter the balance of resources and of social power to reflect the new economic and demographic realities may become nearly irresistible. Perhaps the well-to-do, traditional old-timers—the Deseret Mormons—should be preparing for the wrenching shift in institutional priorities likely to follow their own decline into minority status within the body of the Church. Are they doing so? To what extent are they even aware of the pending "revolution"?

There are few social indicators on the growing non-U.S. LDS population. Sociologically and statistically, most of the newcomers represent the unknown. And the lack of good demographic data hampers program administration and virtually guarantees that many of the newcomers' needs will not be met by Church programs designed by the well-to-do old-timers.

There is an enormous scientific literature on modernization and national development. Here are some of the characteristics of "developing man" according to one authority on Third-World modernization:

He uniformly blames his shortcomings, his failings, and his condition on society rather than on himself as in former times. . . .

. . . Freedom and liberty have increasingly come to mean security for the person. When such security is not forthcoming, the situation becomes ripe for social rebellion.

[There is] . . . discontent with low-grade economic status, which is expressed in a variety of ways—shifts from house to house and from job to job, concern with the education of children, willingness to postpone immediate gratifications. . . .

. . . Secularization of personal values, as expressed in "free" love patterns, a lessening of the bonds of religious fervor, or even sometimes conversions to other faiths, and a general acculturation to the impersonal, anomic life of the large industrial city [emphasis added].

. . . Above all, [there is] an unwillingness to return to the agricultural communities from which they have immigrated. . . .

Developing man . . . believes the world is imperfect as it is; and further, he believes he can better himself or better the world as such.52

Which of these characteristics fit the citizens of underdeveloped nations who opt for citizenship in Mormondom? Are the Mormons of 1986 in the Third World rejecting traditional values and embracing Mormonism as a "modern" religion? Does the experience in the Church of recent Third-World converts help them educate themselves and improve their economic position? What proportion of Third-World converts become quickly disenchanted with the Church because it fails to provide the social network or the services that it promised? Given the liberation of women from traditional life-styles that is also
characteristic of modernization, what is the impact of Mormon gender-prescriptions and "traditional" family values? Does joining the Church represent an attempt to hold onto some traditional values or a step toward greater emancipation? What are the hopes and dreams of these new citizens of Mormondom? Alas, the social scientists cannot tell us. We cannot describe the marital status or educational attainment of Third-World Saints, let alone their aspirations for the future.

Thomas O'Dea asked similar questions almost fifteen years ago, and his admission that no one had the answers then still applies:

Are the Mormon converts converted because they find in the Mormon Church a deeper understanding of the divine-human encounter and consequently a more authentic religious life that enables them to live reasonably and ethically with the upsetting crisis of our day? Or are they converted because they find in the Mormon Church a reinforcement of older values and attitudes that had been undermined and threatened by the conditions of our times?33

Critical in the governance of a Third-World country is the provision of opportunity for the young people. Yet issues of occupational aspiration, educational aspiration, and occupational mobility either within or between generations have been almost entirely overlooked by students of contemporary Mormonism. There is no sociology of work among the studies of the LDS people, no sociology of modernization, and only a rudimentary sociology of secularization.

Mormondom in Boomtown Metaphor

Another perspective that might profitably be applied to international Mormondom is the "boomtown" metaphor. Boomtowns face serious economic and social problems because of rapid growth. Most U.S. boomtowns of the past two decades have been towns located near energy resources or projected power-generating installations. They grew rapidly as construction workers and people in mineral extraction industries moved in and strained existing community support services. In the stereotypical boomtown, housing becomes hard to find and is very expensive, schools are overcrowded, medical facilities are inadequate, welfare and mental health services are strained, and rates of suicide, divorce, crime, and alcoholism increase. Part of the trouble in boomtowns is culture conflict between the "old-timers," who lived there before the rapid growth, and "newcomers" who may differ from the old-timers in ethnic origin, values, and life-styles. The newcomers are often seen as lacking long-term commitment to the community; they "don't care," have little investment in the community, and threaten traditional ways of life.
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Communities that have coped successfully with rapid growth generally have done so by carefully monitoring rates of population increase and the characteristics of the newcomers arriving or anticipated. Impact-mitigation programs have been designed which take into account the attributes of newcomers, such as their marital status, the size of their families, their educational background, their customary recreational and social activities, and even their religious practices. In some instances, local political action and planning have prevented development until the firms or government entities fostering the development have helped to provide "front-end" resources that allow the community to expand essential facilities and services along with, or even in advance of, projected growth.

An annual growth rate of 5 percent or more is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a boomtown. In many locales in contemporary Mormondom, growth rates are much higher than that. Does a local LDS community beset by a flood of new converts experience many of the problems that boomtowns encounter? Several historians have pinpointed rapid growth as a mixed blessing to Mormondom. Jan Shipps cautions that "the church will have to exercise enough control over its growth to allow time for each new LDS cohort to complete the acculturation process," and Michael Quinn interprets the heavy emphasis on personal obedience to Church directives as a bureaucratic response to "an inherent fear of the centrifugal tendencies of enormous Church growth."34

The "old-timers" of Mormondom are the Saints in Utah and the Mountain West. Their culture includes aspects of the gospel as well as characteristics of the pioneer and the American heritage. Students of contemporary Mormondom have worked almost exclusively upon these Mormon "old-timers." As a result, almost everything we know about Mormons, in the sense of generalizations having some basis in research, reflects traditional Mormondom.

If international Mormondom experiences some of the problems of boomtowns—newcomers who are not entirely accepted by old-timers, converts whose loyalties to the community have not been tested, new families who bring their economic problems and unmet expectations along with them, and thereby strain existing welfare, counseling, and leadership resources—perhaps the Church can profit from some of the experience of boomtowns in impact analysis and amelioration programs.

However, to be able to apply lessons learned in boomtown research, continuous monitoring of converts' characteristics, abilities, attitudes, and experiences is necessary, and so is constant review of projected growth in the various subpopulations which, taken together, comprise the local or regional LDS community. There is little evidence in the public/scientific domain to suggest that enough is known about the
converts’ characteristics—age, education, occupational experience, marital situations, expectations, and abilities—to permit efficient management and mitigation of the impacts of rapid growth in the Church. The long-range costs of ignorance—of unmet expectations, inadequate support facilities, insufficient preparation among old-timers for the differing values and attitudes of newcomers—are likely to be very high. LaMond Tullis states the problem in these terms:

From the telescope we view the grand sweep of events that transforms nations and peoples, knowing in advance that the outcome—the triumph of the kingdom—is never in doubt. But if we turn to a microscope and view in magnification smaller parts of the Mormon reality, thereby holding them up for closer inspection . . . events of this hour, this day, set the scenarios for magnification—the happiness, the heartache, the dilemma. Only a moment’s time at the microscope impresses us that each person’s crucial role in the chain of events that links individual lives and feelings with the destiny of the gospel obliges Church members to bring all our faculties of mind and spirit to bear on what is happening to us in these latter days. Sometimes families are won and lost in the Kingdom for odd reasons. Yet from the micro view where a close focus may be had on the sentiments and values of individuals and groups—differences of opinion exist about the meaning of what is seen, or even about what is seen.35

Some of the lessons of social impact analysis—the experience of communities that managed to absorb large numbers of very different types of people and still maintained community solidarity and an acceptable level of community services, and the experience of communities that failed—are relevant to the problems of international Mormondom. How useful they may be is another empirical question. Surely “to bring all our faculties of mind and spirit to bear on what is happening to us” includes careful, continual study of the demographic, social, ethnic, and political composition of the vast population of newcomers who have adopted the Mormon community as their own. And surely the community of Mormon scholars must include some who are willing to undertake the kind of trend monitoring done by planners in successful boomtowns.

Some Prescriptions

Our concern that much of what passes for a social science of contemporary Mormonism is noncumulative ritualism—scientific activity that does not contribute much to the body of probabilities and facts about international Mormondom—leads to some suggestions aimed at reducing what seems to us an unacceptably high dross rate in a scientific specialty whose workers are already overwhelmed by the abundance of the potential harvest. We recognize that Mormondom is not, in fact, a developing nation—although its members may see themselves as citizens of an international kingdom—and that the
information necessary to manage this international body (or bodies), as defined by those to whom its management is entrusted, may not be the same kind of information social scientists desire. (Ecclesiastical managers are not necessarily concerned about the same questions or indicators of development that interest social scientists.) Even if Church administrators are interested in the kinds of variables that also interest professional Mormon-watchers, there is no organizational imperative or ethic that compels, or even suggests, that the ecclesiastical administrators should share their data with professionals who on the face of things have much less stake in the success of the Mormon enterprise than do the administrators.

It follows that most social scientists interested in the sociology of modern Mormondom will have to support their work with personal or limited institutional resources. Because the number of scientific person-years available for the study of international Mormondom is limited, and the rate of development is so awesome, those of us committed to the social science of Mormondom must do all we can to assure that our limited resources are not wasted in unproductive or marginal work. In the interest of improving the efficiency of our research effort—of moving the social science of Mormondom ahead more rapidly and less painfully—we make the following recommendations:

1) Let there be a moratorium on studying Mormon college students just because they are captive or readily available. As is apparent in our discussion of table 5, it is usually impossible to identify a larger population to which results of research on students in particular courses may be generalized. We cannot afford to waste resources in nongeneralizable work. This is not to say that researchers should not use Mormon subjects in experiments where the objective is to understand something about human behavior generally. But if the goal is to understand Mormonism and Mormons, then usually there is little utility in collecting and analyzing data from nonrepresentative samples. At the very least, researchers who wish to study LDS college students should make certain that their student samples are demonstrably representative of the university population or some clearly defined portion of it.

Even better would be imaginative studies using Mormon students from nations outside the U.S. as respondents in exploratory research or as associates in well-designed, probably small-scale studies of their home communities. In such collaboration, old-timers and newcomers in the social science of Mormondom might work together to identify trends, problems, and opportunities. As the essential, critical problems are international in nature, it seems sensible procedure to work with people from nations where Mormondom is growing rapidly. Certainly the feasibility of doing research in Third-World settings will be enhanced
if international students and their social networks at home are involved in joint research with professional social scientists, rather than simply serving as respondents.

(2) In light of the availability of Polk city directories and telephone directories as sampling frames in many U.S. cities where Mormons are a substantial minority, there should be more mail surveys and telephone surveys of Mormon people—gleaned from samples that include non-Mormons as well—that would yield findings generalizable at least communitywide. Small samples representing known and definable populations are usually better for our purposes than large samples representing ambiguous or undefined populations. A sample of one hundred Mormon households, carefully drawn to insure representativeness, would produce results far more useful in the evolution of our science than findings from "available" populations of students or neighbors many times larger.

(3) The unknown territory we wish to chart is the world of international Mormondom, or at least that of majority Mormondom, or non-Utah Mormondom. Therefore, where possible, researchers should study Mormons outside Utah, especially urban Mormon populations, even though Utah Mormons are far more accessible.

(4) Two available resources for studying the characteristics of non-Utah Mormons are greatly underutilized: (a) the national censuses of nations such as Canada and Britain that include a census item on religion; and (b) the myriad national and regional studies stored in various data archives in the U.S. and elsewhere. In assessing the census data, researchers are limited to the items that happened to be included in a given census, but the advantage of being able to generalize to all Mormons in a region or nation justifies much gleaning of census tapes and vital statistics records.

As for the secondary analysis of data sets available in private and public archives, the essential first step is to determine if a given sample was large enough to include a fair number of Mormons, and the second is to determine whether they can be identified in items on religious preference or affiliation. Sometimes it will be necessary to pool the handful of Mormons in each of several similar surveys to produce a composite sample large enough to justify analysis. And sometimes a consequence of that pooling will be that analysis is severely limited because only a few items—educational attainment, employment status, occupation, and marital status, for instance—are common to all of the data sets.

Even so, the benefits from analyzing data sets based on samples generalizable to nations, regions, or metropolitan areas—data collected by investigators who had no connection with LDS officialdom and obtained from persons who identified themselves as being Mormons
independent of any Church record or roster—should far outweigh the outlay of scientific detective work necessary to construct the composite samples. Mormons who are totally inactive, for example, who are “lost” as far as the official Church records are concerned, might still report their religious preference to a non-LDS researcher as “Mormon.” Thus, by gleaning the handful of LDS respondents from several surveys and combining them, we may obtain a clearer picture of the differences between “active” and “inactive” Mormons than is possible in studies sponsored by or associated with Mormon institutions. The creative use by Heaton and Calkins of the Mormon subsamples in several national fertility surveys is a good example of such methods.\(^6\)

Our review has been illustrative rather than definitive, and the prescriptions are neither original nor exhaustive. Scholars in anthropology, psychology, political science, and history will have other models and perspectives that may serve them better than our pictures of Mormondom as underdeveloped nation or boomtown. What is abundantly clear, we think, is that the social science of Mormondom will mature only through the personal commitment and coordinated, creative efforts of the interested individual scientists. It does not seem likely that federal or private foundation funding will support much research on Mormons, nor that the large-scale studies of contemporary Mormons conducted by Church administrators in the course of their official stewardships will be made available to scientists generally—that is, to the public—in the near future.

The social scientists of Mormondom are relatively few, and the field for study is vast and growing. Nevertheless, we must make do. It appears that the present cohort of scientists interested in matters Mormon—those of us working in the next two decades—will be the trained social observers present while Mormonism blossoms into a major world faith, the first such development since the Protestant Reformation. It would be grand if history showed that we cooperated and conducted the crucial studies as best we could, making up in careful resource use, strategic research design, and bristling scientific integrity for what we lacked in numbers and external funding.

NOTES

\(^1\) We have tried to distinguish between “Mormondom” and “Mormonism.” Following the lead of some historians, we apply the term Mormondom to the political, social, and temporal domain of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This contemporary “kingdom” includes Mormon organizations spanning local or regional political jurisdictions and concerned with members’ secular and spiritual welfare. The term Mormonism is reserved for the belief system of the Church, its principles, doctrines, and theology (in LDS parlance, the restored gospel). Mormonism is a body of teachings and religious practices; Mormondom is a highly visible worldwide organization devoted to its own expansion and to providing for the spiritual and temporal welfare of people in general and Mormons in particular. Mormondom is wider than the Church; it embraces Latter-day Saint political, economic, educational, and familial organization as well as the cultural attributes of the Mormon people.
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22This finding is supported by numerous surveys of Mormons, including several statewide Utah surveys conducted by BYU's Family and Demographic Research Institute, in contrast to reports of church attendance in the periodic national Public Use Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center and by Gallup Organization polls.


Donald Arthur Herrin, "Use of Time by Married Couples in Multiple Roles," Ph.D. Diss., Brigham Young University, 1983.


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"Ibid., 18.


