

# The use of unusual psychological theories in psychobiography: A case study and discussion

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**Abstract** This chapter argues for the use of ‘unusual’ theories in psychobiographical research through the presentation of a case study using such a theory. Historically, psychobiographical research has predominantly made use of the work of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theorists and developmental theorists, while more recent psychobiographical approaches have preferred more modern, empirically based. However, over reliance on a few theories within psychobiographical research creates the possibility for narrow explanations of complex lives. Given the proliferation of theoretical modes in psychology the current use of theory barely scratches the surface of available explanatory paradigms. This chapter argues for the value of casting the explanatory net wider, and for the inclusion of more psychological theories in psychobiographical work.

Using a psychobiographical case study, the chapter illustrates how a ‘forgotten’ psychological theory (script theory, based on the work of Tomkins) can serve as an extremely useful explanatory paradigm for a complex religious figure. The case study focuses on Gordon Hinckley (b. 1910, d. 2008), the fifteenth president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (commonly referred to as the Mormon Church), who remains a prominent figure in contemporary Mormonism and played a key role in the rapid growth and increasingly positive public profile of the Religion throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Using Tomkins’ script theory in conjunction with a psychobiographical method and the analysis of data gathered from published speeches, this study explores Hinckley’s personality structure and identifies three core psychological scripts.

## 1 Introduction

The application of psychological theory as a lens through which to understand an individual life is a distinguishing feature of psychobiography, and marks it as distinct from other biographical and historical endeavours. Indeed, psychobiography is best understood as a case study based idiographic method (Kóváry 2011; Runyan 2005; Ponterotto 2014, 2015; Schultz, 2005a) that aims to use psychological theory to understand the lives and personalities of exemplary individuals. The decision concerning which psychological theory to use within a psychobiography is therefore a crucial one, as selecting an appropriate theory allows for meaningful interpretation and the production of a high quality psychobiography.

Given the importance of theory selection in psychobiography, it is unsurprising that almost all of the published guidelines in relation to conducting psychobiography incorporate discussions regarding the selection and application of psychological theory within psychobiography (see, for example, Elms, 2005; du Plessis, 2017; Ponterotto, 2017). The general consensus amongst these authors is that theory selection often involves pragmatic choices and is often “determined as much by a researcher’s familiarity with a specific theorist as it is by the inherent suitability of the theory” (du Plessis, 2017, p. 225). This has resulted in certain theories gaining prominence within the psychobiographical oeuvre.

Psychobiography has its roots in psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories and these continue to be prominent in psychobiographical studies, although classical Freudian interpretations have largely been replaced with the work of modern psychodynamic theorists such as Winnicott, Kernberg and Kohut (Ponterotto, 2014, 2017; Ponterotto, Reynolds, Morel & Cheung, 2015; Schultz, 2005a; 2005b). In addition, developmental theorists such as Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson are frequently used as they allow for the discussion of adult development. A study by Ponterotto et al. (2015) found that 74% of psychobiographical doctoral dissertations completed in North America between 1978 and 2014 made use of these theories.

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Despite the continuing prominence of a small number of theories, there have increasingly been calls by psychobiographical researchers for the expansion of the types of psychological theories used in psychobiographical research. The reasons for these calls vary between researchers. For some, expansion of the range of theories used and the use of multiple theories reduces the risk of deterministic conclusions being drawn (Ponterotto, 2018), which is one of the hallmarks of poor psychobiographical research. For others, the emphasis is on including more empirically validated theories in order to enhance the quality of the psychobiographical endeavor (Schultz & Lawrence, 2017). Whatever the reason, there is a broad consensus that the incorporation of more psychological theories into the psychobiography ‘toolbox’ will enhance the quality and interpretive power of psychobiographies.

Against this backdrop, the main body of this chapter presents a case study illustrating the use of an ‘unusual’ psychological theory, Silvan Tomkins’ script theory, to provide a psychological portrayal of Gordon Hinckley, a prominent Mormon leader. This is a theory that has been largely forgotten by main stream psychology, but one that has gained some traction as an explanatory paradigm within psychobiography (see Ponterotto, 2015; Ponterotto et al., 2015). Following the presentation of the case study the chapter concludes with some suggestions and recommendations for the inclusion of ‘unusual’ theories in psychobiographical research.

## 2 Gordon Hinckley and Mormonism – a Case Study

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, more commonly referred to as the Mormon Church or the LDS Church, is one of the fastest growing religious denominations in the world (Stark, 1996; Lawton, 2012) and forms a major part of the global contemporary religious landscape. Founded in the 1800s by the charismatic Joseph Smith, the organisation has experienced considerable expansion and official membership figures now exceed 14 million and continue to increase (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2015). Much of this expansion took place in the mid to late twentieth century (Allen & Cowen, 1972; Shipps, 2007), when membership figures increased rapidly, from just over 1 million in 1945, to over 11 million at the turn of the century (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2015). During this time period the organisation has also managed a fairly successful transition in terms of its public image, from its initial positioning as a maverick religion characterised by the controversial practice of polygamy during the nineteenth century, into a position where it is now viewed as a fairly mainstream conservative religion embodying a deeply moral approach to living (Baker & Campbell, 2010; Beaman, 2001; Bowman, 2011; Mauss, 2011).

One of the key figures identified with this transition in late twentieth century Mormonism is Gordon Bitner Hinckley (b. 1910; d. 2008), the fifteenth president of the Mormon church. Hinckley spent most of his adult life formally employed by the Mormon church and was primarily responsible for finding new ways to communicate Mormon doctrine to both Mormons and non-Mormons in such a manner as to allow for the increased public positive perception and acceptance of Mormonism as a mainstream religious movement (see M. Carlson, 2008; Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996). During the 1980s and early 1990s Hinckley assumed de facto leadership of the religion due to the ill-health of many of the church’s leaders and in 1995 he was officially appointed as the fifteenth Mormon president. Hinckley’s legacy with respect to the Mormon religion relates to his extensive travel, aimed at improving the public image of the Mormon church as well as his willingness to publicly talk about the church, appearing on television shows such as *60 Minutes* (1996) and *Larry King Live* (1996). However, although Hinckley is frequently referred to and referenced throughout Mormon literature (such as in the Mormon academic publication, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*) this frequent discussion does not equate to an investigative and evaluative stance regarding the personality of Hinckley himself. Hinckley is most frequently mentioned as an authority figure whose point of view is used to support the specific argument the author is making. Any writing specifically focused on Hinckley centers on presenting him in a Sainly manner without any psychological investigation (see Decker, 2005 and Koltko-Rivera, 1999, for a discussion of why this might be the case).

The study presented in this article is positioned against the backdrop of the rapid expansion of Mormonism, the prominent role played by Hinckley within contemporary Mormonism and the lack of academic literature relating to Hinckley in particular, and contemporary Mormon leaders in general. Making use of a psychobiographical method, the study investigates aspects of Hinckley’s personality through the lens of Tomkins’ (1991/2008, 1992/2008) script theory. Through so doing, it identifies three core personal scripts (defined as sets of rules aimed at affect management) that characterised Hinckley’s personality, specifically in relation to how his personality influenced his role within the Mormon church. These scripts provided rules through which Hinckley was able to interpret events and determine his own course of action in relation to these events. These scripts are also likely to have influenced the manner in which Hinckley led the Mormon Church and thus may have had a direct impact on the growth and development of the Religion. This is the first published psychobiography of Gordon Hinckley and thus contributes to burgeoning bodies of literature concerning Mormonism and contemporary religion. In addition to providing insight into the psychological profile of Hinckley himself, the

study highlights the complex interplay between a religious leader's own belief system and the religion which he leads. .

In the sections below a brief biographical overview of the life of Gordon Hinckley, as well as an introduction to Tomkins' script theory (1991/2008, 1992/2008), are provided. The method section begins with a brief overview of psychobiographical research before turning to a detailed discussion of the specific method employed in this study. The three identified scripts are presented separately in the results section, while the discussion section discusses the relationship between the scripts and provides examples of how the scripts influenced the way in which Hinckley led the Mormon Church. Finally, the paper ends with a discussion of the conclusions drawn, the possible limitations of the research and a suggestion of directions for future research.

## 2.1 Biography of Gordon Bitner Hinckley

Born in Utah in 1910, Hinckley was the descendent of Mormon polygamists who had assisted in the founding of the state of Utah. Gordon was the first child of Ada and Byrant Hinckley (Byrant already had eight children from a previous marriage) and was to be joined by four siblings. The Hinckley family remained in Utah throughout Gordon's childhood, with Byrant working outside the home and Ada assuming responsibility for the children and the home. The Mormon church played a central role in the Hinckley household, and Gordon participated in various Mormon ceremonies throughout his childhood and adolescence. Outside of the church arena Gordon was a fairly shy and sickly child who was reluctant to attend school (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996; Deseret Publishers, 2005b). Hinckley developed a strong belief in the Mormon church during his adolescence (Hinckley, 1971-2007).

In 1928 Hinckley enrolled at the University of Utah (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996). Hinckley's university years coincided with the onset of the Great Depression, and he described this as one of the most difficult periods of his life because the challenging economic situation combined with the secular learning of the university led him to question "in a slight measure the faith of my parents" (Dew, 1996, p. 47). This difficult time was compounded by the death of his mother in 1930. Following his completion of university Hinckley volunteered to complete a proselyting mission for the Mormon church in England (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996). This mission, which lasted from 1933 to 1935, was a pivotal time in Hinckley's life. Occurring in close proximity to the death of his mother and his crisis of faith, Hinckley's mission solidified his Mormon belief system. While on his mission, he made a conscious decision to dedicate himself to the Mormon Church (Deseret Publishers, 2005a).

Following his return from his mission, Hinckley almost immediately entered the employment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and he spent the next seven decades of his life formally involved with the Mormon church and living mostly in Utah (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996). He married Marjorie Pay in 1937; the couple would eventually have 5 children and remain married for over six decades until Marjorie's death in 2004. Hinckley's life from the time he returned from mission consists of a fairly linear narrative in which he gradually assumed positions of increasing responsibility within the Mormon church, including his appointment as an apostle in 1961, his membership of the first presidency from 1981, and his appointment as president in 1995. Throughout this time Hinckley travelled extensively, meeting with Mormons and non-Mormons across the globe and becoming the public face of Mormonism. Hinckley was often called on to address controversial topics within Mormonism and gained a reputation for endorsing 'old fashioned values' by speaking out strongly against issues such as pornography, child and domestic abuse, drugs, extra-marital sex, abortion and homosexuality (Dew, 1996). Hinckley passed away in 2008 at the age of 97.

Despite the prominence of Hinckley within twentieth century Mormonism he has not been the subject of academic attention from non-Mormon scholars<sup>3</sup>. The two published biographies of Hinckley (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996) are both works by Mormons and endorse a very specific view of Hinckley. Other publications that mention Hinckley are either written by Mormon scholars, or mention him in passing as a part of Mormon development. This is the first study to focus specifically on Hinckley from a psychological perspective, and to make use of a psychobiographical method to understand Hinckley's personality.

## 2.2 Theoretical Background

Silvan Tomkins' script theory is based on his theory of affect, and anchored in the metaphor of the individual as a playwright (L. Carlson & R. Carlson, 1984; Tomkins, 1981). Affect theory holds that there are a limited number of innate, inherited and universal affects (Holinger, 2008; Tomkins, 1965, 1981) and that these affects are

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<sup>3</sup> Although, as stated previously, he is frequently mentioned in the Mormon literature, usually as an authority on things such as Mormon doctrine or policy. This form of reference to him is common in journals focusing specifically on Mormon issues, such as *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*.

the fundamental motivators of human behaviour (Tomkins, 1991/2008). Each individual experiences a large variety of scenes, which all contain objects and affects (R. Carlson, 1981; Demorest, Popovska, & Dabova, 2012; Tomkins, 1992). Although most scenes are transient some scenes become linked together to form scripts. This linking occurs through the twin processes of affective amplification and psychological magnification (R. Carlson, 1986; Tomkins, 1992).

Affective amplification occurs when the affect related to a single scene is amplified, for example, when the surprise affect is amplified by the hooting of a horn outside a baby's window (Tomkins, 1992). The amplification of the affect leads to a response, for example, the baby may cry (Tomkins, 1991/2008). However, despite the affective amplification the scene remains transient unless some form of psychological magnification occurs (Holinger 2008; Tomkins, 1992). Psychological magnification is a cognitive process whereby affectively laden scenes become linked (R. Carlson, 1981) through a process of identification of their similarities and differences. Through this linking process, each of the scenes acquires greater importance and starts to form a script that makes certain statements designed to help an individual understand the way in which the world functions (Tomkins, 1992/2008).

A script is "a compressed set of rules that is created to predict, interpret, respond to, and control a magnified set of scenes" (Demos, 2009). Each individual will possess a large number of scripts aimed at explaining scenes and providing directions for appropriate behaviours. These scripts are not fixed entities, but overlap with each other and change and develop as new scenes occur and are incorporated. Initially, scripts are created based on the experience of scenes but over time this process shifts and as scripts become more powerful (due to the psychological magnification of scenes) they increasingly determine the way in which scenes are interpreted (Tomkins, 1991/2008). The proliferation of individual scripts, as well as the relationship between these scripts, is referred to as personality (Tomkins, 1991/2008).

Scripts vary greatly in their specificity and completeness and do not necessarily all contain the same features (Tomkins, 1991/2008). Tomkins identified several categories of scripts and differentiated between psychologically affluent scripts (high ratio of positive to negative affects) and psychologically poor scripts (high ratio of negative affects to positive affects) (Tomkins, 1991/2008). Script categories identified by Tomkins include affluence scripts (related to positive affects and their appropriate magnification), scripts of limitation and remediation (scripts related to negative affects and the ability to absorb negative affect) and ideological scripts (scripts allowing for the evaluation of things as either good or bad). According to Tomkins (1992) ideological scripts are the most important class of scripts, as they link facts with values and affects. Although these scripts might be linked to external ideologies they are not identical to these ideologies, but instead represent a unique personal ideology that is a core component of personality (De St. Aubin, 1996, 1999; Tomkins, 1963, 1992).

## 2.3 Methodology

In this psychobiographical study, Tomkins' script theory was used to identify core scripts in the life of Gordon Hinckley, with the aim of arriving at an in-depth understanding of the rules that Hinckley used to understand his world and function within that world. In addition, these personal scripts also influenced the way in which Hinckley guided the development of Mormonism in the late twentieth century.

There are various best practice guidelines associated with the conducting of psychobiographical research (see, for example, Alexander, 1988; Elms, 2005a, 2005b; Itzkowitz & Volkan, 2003; Ponterotto, 2014, 2017; Schultz, 2005b), as well as for evaluating the quality of psychobiographical research (see Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005a). This study made use of these guidelines, as well as the broad qualitative research strategies of Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) to identify prominent scripts in the life of Hinckley. The specific methods used are outlined below.

The data collection involved identifying material that contained evidence of scripts. It was hypothesized that prominent scripts would be identifiable in the stories, anecdotes and life lessons presented by Hinckley in various forums. The data was collected from a number of publically accessible sources. Firstly, Hinckley's speeches to the semi-annual Mormon gathering known as General Conference are freely available on the official LDS website (lds.org) and these speeches were used as primary text. This data source consisted of over 200 individual speeches, delivered between 1971 and 2007 (Hinckley, 1971-2007). Secondly, the two volume set published by the Mormon church detailing various other speeches delivered by Hinckley during his time as the president of the LDS church was also used as a primary data source (Deseret Publishers, 2005a, 2005b). These two volumes contain hundreds of speeches delivered by Hinckley to various audiences. Thirdly, various other texts published by Hinckley were used as data sources, including his books *Faith, The Essence of True Religion* (1989), *Be Thou an Example* (1981), as well as *Standing for Something* (2000). These various texts were used as the data from which prominent scripts could be identified through the process of data coding.

During the data coding process stories and narratives were identified in the data and were coded as scenes. In order to produce the most in-depth analysis possible, the broadest possible definition of scene was used,

which included any ‘story’ included within the text, as well as any indication of emotion (affect) within the text (Demorest & Alexander, 1992). It was assumed, in accordance with Tomkins’ script theory and with practices used in other studies, that scenes recorded in written works and speech are unlikely to be transient scenes but instead are scenes that have undergone at least some affective amplification and psychological magnification (Demorest & Alexander, 1992; Siegel, 1996; Tomkins, 1991/2008, 1992). In total, approximately 500 scenes were identified in the texts. Given the sheer volume of text only a sub-set of these scenes were initially coded. The scenes that were coded were those that included the most complete narratives, as it was felt that these scenes would be the most likely to lead to the initial identification of scripts. To move from the identification of scenes to the identification of scripts, the individual scenes were coded. The coding related to the affect(s) and object(s) present as well as to the perceived relationships between them (the cognitive process of psychological magnification). Other aspects of the scene were also coded where appropriate (see Demorest, 2008; Demorest & Alexander, 1992; Tomkins, 1991/2008). These coded scenes were then used as the basis for script identification using Tomkins’ (1992) rules for script identification relating to 1) the presence of abstract rules; 2) the presence of sequencing rules; and 3) the presence of intense affect and affective changes. This process of script identification is broadly similar to that described in previous research studies, such as that by Demorest and Alexander (1992), Siegel (1996) and De St. Aubin, Wandrei, Skerven, and Coppolillo (2006) and is also similar in process to Alexander’s (cited in Schultz, 2005b) methods of identifying psychological saliency in autobiographical material. As would be expected, the initial coding yielded a large number of possible scripts, convalescing around topics such as the importance of Mormonism, the centrality of family and the importance of the media. However, as the goal of the psychobiography was to highlight the intersection between Hinckley’s personality and his role within the Mormon religion the decision was taken to focus on scripts that related to this role and the way in which he enacted this role. This process resulted in the identification of three salient scripts for Gordon Hinckley, which are discussed in detail in the results section below.

Issues relating to the quality of the research study were addressed through the use of multiple data sources that served as a source of triangulation, the use of a structured coding technique, as well as the detailed description of the research process provided in this article. In terms of ethics, psychobiographical studies are always faced with ethical dilemmas regarding the non-anonymity of psychobiographical subjects and the potential harm that may result from the naming of research subjects. In this study, these ethical concerns were addressed through exclusive reliance on public data, thereby not violating confidentiality. In addition, the fact that Hinckley is deceased means that the findings of the study cannot negatively influence him. However, the findings could potentially negatively influence his family members or followers and the researcher remained cognisant of this at all times, ensuring that the findings are presented in respectful and objective language that seeks to provide a fair portrayal of a complex individual.

## 2.4 Findings

The three scripts identified through the coding process are discussed in this section. All three script labels originate in phrases associated with the period of Hinckley’s life that he spent on a mission for the Mormon Church in England during the 1930s. Prior to this time Hinckley experienced a crisis of faith and during his mission he appears to have determined rules for living that were to guide him for the remainder of his life. These ‘rules for living’ take the form of scripts that Hinckley used to guide his understanding of events and make sense of the doctrine presented by the Mormon church. The three scripts are discussed individually below but it should be noted that there is considerable overlap between the scripts and they should be considered as co-existing systems for interpreting events and determining behaviour.

### 2.4.1 Script 1 – Personal Ideology “Be not afraid, only believe”

Ideological scripts provide a way of interpreting scenes that adheres to a personal ideology, rather than necessarily to an external reality. In Hinckley’s personal ideological script, the affects of fear (afraid) and distress are negated by the cognitive process of belief, which has the ability to completely dissolve the negative affects. The primary affect of fear, in Tomkins’ formulation, encompasses a range of more nuanced emotions, including anxiety. Two scenes from Hinckley’s childhood provide an indication of how this script developed:

*When I was a small boy ... my brother and I slept out of doors ... we would look up into the heavens and find the constellation of stars that includes the North Star ... since time immemorial, sailors crossing the great seas of the Northern Hemisphere have navigated by this star because it is immovable. It is fixed and invariable. It is constant ... from*

*looking at that star I learned a great lesson which has remained with me throughout my life. I learned that there are fixed and constant points by which we may guide our lives. (Deseret Publishers, 2005a)*

*When I was a boy ... my father took me to a meeting of the priesthood of the stake in which we lived ... at the opening of that meeting, the first of its kind I have ever attended, three or four hundred men stood. They were men from varied backgrounds and many vocations, but each had in his heart the same conviction, out of which they sang these great words: Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah! Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer<sup>4</sup> ... Something happened with me as I heard those men of faith sing. There came into my boyish heart a knowledge, placed there by the Holy Spirit, that Joseph Smith was indeed a prophet of the Almighty. (Hinckley, 1971-2007).*

These two scenes contain the same affective trajectory and psychological interpretation. In each incident there is a situation (sleeping outside, being in a large congregation) which could potentially evoke negative affects, such as fear (in the form of anxiety) or distress. However, negative affects are not present in the story and instead Hinckley is able to focus on something constant, something in which he can believe. Through so doing the negative affect is not merely minimized but is completely banished. While it may seem a speculative leap to identify the affects of fear and distress within these stories it is in keeping with Tomkins' formulation of the primacy of affects, which suggests that there are only nine primary affects and every affectively amplified scene (such as those recorded above) will incorporate at least one of these primary affects. In addition, the linking of the primary affect of anxiety/fear to these scenes is in keeping with information concerning Hinckley's own childhood experiences, as he was frequently described as a shy and sickly child, thus a child who was likely to experience the situations mentioned above as distressful and anxiety provoking (and potentially fear inducing). The prominence of this script within Hinckley's later life is reflected in the first stanza of a poem penned when Hinckley was 75 years old: "I know that my Redeemer lives/ Triumphant Saviour, Son of God/ Victorious over pain and death/ My King, my Leader, and my Lord" (Hinckley, 1985, cited in *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1985). The implication in the poem is that belief in Christ's victory over 'pain and death' allows an individual to similarly triumph over 'pain and death'.

The title given to this script "Be not afraid, only believe" reflects an injunction given to Hinckley by his father when he embarked on his mission to England in the 1930s (see Deseret Publishers, 2005b). The script reflects a two part ideology. Firstly, that the world is dominated by potentially negative affects (such as fear or distress) and secondly that these negative affects can be negated through the presence of a strong system of belief, which should not be questioned (as questioning might suggest that fear would be present). For Hinckley, this belief was placed in the Mormon religious doctrine. This ideological script plays out in many different aspects of Hinckley's existence. It is there in his statement that "the things of God are understood only by the Spirit of God" (Hinckley, 1989, p. 5) and should therefore not be questioned, it is there in his statement that "I do not fret over the mysteries" (Hinckley, 1989, p. 17) and it is there in his media interviews when he 'glosses over' or 'minimises' controversial aspects of Mormon doctrine in an effort to present the Mormon belief system as the only 'logical' choice. It is interesting to note that this adult public persona of Hinckley's was very different to the shy child that Hinckley had been and it seems likely that the presence of this ideological script provided him with the confidence to express his opinions publically, as long as they were linked to the belief system entrenched in the script.

Through its denial of negative affect, this script places value only on the positive and suggests that a lack of belief can have eternal consequences. Thus Hinckley often insisted that adherence to the principles of Mormonism was of paramount importance and that "obedience brings happiness" (Hinckley, 1981, p. 12) while even small deviations from accepted behaviour and values could result in lasting and devastating consequences "it only takes one little careless slip, one villain, one mistake to blight our lives forever after" (Deseret Publishers, 2005a, p. 284).

#### **2.4.2 Script 2 – Maximization of Positive Affect "Life is Good"**

One of the features of Hinckley's scripts is their focus on positive affect, and the continuous attempt to maximize positive affect. Hinckley was known for being a very optimistic individual, a personal characteristic that was so pervasive that it is commented on by his biographers (Dew, 1996; McCune, 1996), mentioned in his various obituaries, and frequently remarked on by Hinckley himself (see, for example, Deseret Publishers, 2005b,

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<sup>4</sup> A popular Mormon hymn sang in praise of Joseph Smith.

pp. 459-478, 357-363, 556-557). A key example of this attitude is the following statement by Hinckley: “Yesterday was a great day in my life. Every day is a great day in my life” (Deseret Publishers, 2005a, p. 343).

The pervasiveness of this personality characteristic suggests that it was linked to an underlying script, constituting an underlying set of rules that allowed Hinckley to interpret and understand events from an optimistic perspective (see Tomkins, 1991/2008). The label given to this script is taken from a statement by Hinckley regarding his time as a missionary in England in the 1930s: “When I was a missionary in London fifty years ago, my companion and I would shake hands in the morning and say, ‘Life is good’. Life in the service of the Lord is good” (Hinckley, Conference Talks, 1971-2007). This idea, that life is good as long as it was linked to religious service clearly functioned as a cognitive ‘rule’ that allowed Hinckley to interpret various events that he encountered. The two stories presented below provide an indication of how this script functioned.

*I remember a family I knew fifty years ago. The wife was a devoted member of the Church. The husband was not a member. Her example was one of goodness and gladness and faith. After many years he began to soften. He saw what the Church did for her and for their children. He turned around. He humbled himself. He was baptized. (Hinckley, Conference Talks, 1971-2007)*

*I think of two friends from my high school and university years ... Something wonderful took place between them. They fell in love ... they married ... now many years have passed ... their children are grown, a lasting credit to them, to the Church, to the communities in which they live ... Now in mature age, they were finding peace and quiet satisfaction together. (Hinckley, 1989, p. 45-46).*

These two display similar affective trajectories. A neutral or negative affect moves towards the positive affect of joy as commitment to the Mormon religion is continued throughout the narrative. In both stories, life is ultimately good. Although this script obviously overlaps with the ideological script, it is identified as a separate script because it involves giving primacy to positive affect over negative affect, while at the same time allowing for the existence and absorption (rather than the denial) of negative affect (see Tomkins, 1991/2008). Given the maximization of positive affect, this script is characterised as an affluence script. Individuals with prominent affluence scripts have “a general strategy of optimizing costs, benefits and probabilities so that such affluence is not only achieved, but maintained at a stable equilibrium” (Tomkins, 1992). This statement seems to neatly describe Hinckley’s post-mission adult life, which is characterised by stability, consistency and optimism.

### **2.4.3 Script 3 – Commitment “Forget yourself and go to work”**

Both of the scripts described previously provided Hinckley with a set of rules for minimizing (or ignoring) negative affect and through so doing ensured that he experienced mostly positive affect in relation to his life choices. However, negative affect is an inevitable part of human experience and when it cannot be ignored or minimized it must be endured. A commitment script is a script that binds an individual to a specific course of long term action despite the continued presence of negative affects by providing a set of rules that allow for the continued absorption of negative affect due to the promise of eventual positive affect (Tomkins, 1991/2008).

Hinckley’s commitment script takes on the formulation, “forget yourself and go to work” a phrase taken from the following incident related by Hinckley that occurred while he was on mission to England:

*I was assigned to a place where things had not gone well with the two previous elders [missionaries]. I was not well, and I became a little discouraged. I wrote home to my father and said, “I am wasting your money and your time. I think I might as well come home” ... he wrote back to me a very short letter in which he said ... “I have only one suggestion – forget yourself and go to work”. About the same day I received that letter, we were reading in the scriptures and I read these great words: “He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). And I made a resolution that changed my whole attitude and outlook on life, and everything that has happened to me since then that is good I can trace back to that decision. It had a very marked effect upon my life. (Deseret Publishers, 2005a, p. 372)*

This scene contains all the building blocks for a script. The initial affect is one of distress [not well, discouragement] as well as shame [wasting your money and time] and it is clear that these affects have been amplified by the circumstances to the point where they were experienced as overwhelming. However, there is an intervention and suddenly a rapid shift occurs in the affect, and the negative affect is replaced by the positive

affect of joy when Hinckley commits to follow a specific course of action. The process of psychological magnification ensures that the meaning and cognition attached to the scene crystalizes around the idea of shame and distress as linked to selfishness (or a focus on the self) and joy as linked to the service of others (an outside focus). In essence the script outlined in this scene suggests that distress and shame can be converted to joy if attention is focused on others and not on the self. This is an interesting formulation, given Hinckley's experiences as a shy child as it suggests that distressing affects can be overcome by focusing outwards on things other than the self, or in other words by adopting a public persona.

Given Hinckley's ideological script, it is unsurprising that the commitment to others suggested by this script took the form of promoting the Mormon religion. Hinckley's commitment is manifest in his dedication to the Mormon religion throughout his adult life; he worked incredibly long hours and positioned his responsibilities to this organisation as the central feature of his existence. Speaking late in his life, Hinckley (Deseret Publishers, 2005b, p. 390) acknowledged the centrality of this script in his life: "I am an old man. I simply do not have the energy to do what I once did. But I will not permit myself to be unhappy in doing what I can. The demands are great. I feel a constant, unrelenting concern for what is being accomplished in the Church. I want to do better; I want to improve things".

There is considerable overlap between the three scripts discussed above and they functioned together to determine the rules through which Hinckley interpreted scenes and determined future actions. The links between the commitment script and the affluence maximization of positive affect script are clear, as both allow for the minimizing of negative affect and the maximizing of positive affect, although the commitment script prescribes more active methods of dealing with negative affect, including modifying behaviour and accepting the reality of difficulty. There is also a high degree of overlap between the commitment and the ideological script. Tomkins (1991/2008, p. 684) suggested that these classes of scripts might interact in the following manner: "ideology [scripts involve] faith in a systematic order in the world, and commitment [scripts involve] the courage and endurance to bind the self to an enhancement of a segment of that order", and this does seem to typify the relationship between these two scripts in Hinckley's personality structure. From a structural point of view, it is easiest to conceive of Hinckley's ideological and commitment scripts working together to provide both a system of belief and a course of action, while the underlying affluence script allows for the abundance of positive affect. The presence of this script system allowed Hinckley to live in a way that ensured that he continually maximized positive affect and minimized negative affect (while allowing for its continued existence), and this script system would therefore be characterised as an affluent script system (see Tomkins, 1992). It would also seem that through adopting these scripts Hinckley was able to live a very public life and thereby overcome his childhood shyness.

## **2.5 Conclusion and Discussion of the Case Study**

Looking at these three scripts as rules for governing behaviour makes it possible to understand how certain aspects of Hinckley's personality, particularly those aspects related to his professional life, functioned. Thus, for example, his optimism can be described as relating to a core affluence script that was predicated not only on optimizing positive affect but on doing so through the twin processes of belief (ideological script) and hard work (commitment script). Thus, Hinckley's optimistic personality was intrinsically linked to his personal ideology developed based on his Mormon belief system (be not afraid, only believe), which was in turn linked to a set of rules that ensured that he not only passively espoused Mormon religious ideals but also actively worked at promoting those ideals (forget yourself and go to work). In other words, for Hinckley to maximize his positive affect and remain optimistic, it was essential that he continue to believe in the Mormon church and work towards the promotion of Mormon ideals.

This script structure can also provide a useful explanation for the stance Hinckley took towards many controversial topics. His ideological script (be not afraid, only believe) suggests that belief is the way to overcome negative affect, while his affluence script (life is good) implicitly states that happiness is tied to obedience to this belief system. Thus, his unrelenting stance against things such as pornography, homosexuality and extra-marital sex could be seen as relating to his need to firmly believe in an ideological system (the Mormon ideals, which he never really questioned) and to adhere to these beliefs in an attempt to obtain happiness. In addition, his commitment script (forget yourself and go to work) allows him to not question his own stance, and instead work on promoting these ideals to others. Thus, there is no space within this script structure for questioning or re-examining, the focus is on acceptance of ideology and of moving forward from that position.

Hinckley's script structure provided him with an effective way of interpreting the world around him and managing and understanding his personal experiences. Given Hinckley's prominent position with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, this script structure not only relates to his personal functioning but may also have influenced the direction and growth of the Mormon church as a whole. While Hinckley's personal ideology and other personal scripts were initially formed in relationship to the Mormon church they also later influenced the type of Mormon leader he was. In other words, while Hinckley's ideological script may initially have



represented Hinckley's own understanding of Mormonism when Hinckley became president of the Mormon religion this ideological script influenced the way in which he presented Mormonism to the world.

Before concluding this case study, it is important to note a significant limitation of this psychobiography. This case study has advanced an argument concerning Hinckley's personality structure based entirely on publically accessible material. Due to the nature of the available information a decision was taken to focus on the way in which his personality intersected with his religious belief system and his role in the Mormon church (see methods section). This focus may have resulted in other, more private, aspects of his life not being fully taken into account. In particular, it was not possible to explore the nature of his relationship with his wife of 60 years and with his children. While this does not mean that the portrayal of his personality presented here is inaccurate, it is important to acknowledge that the psychobiography presented here relates mostly to his public and professional self and that there may be aspects of his private life that were not included in the portrayal.

In conclusion, this paper investigated the personality of Gordon Hinckley using a psychobiographical method and the script theory of Silvan Tomkins. Three prominent scripts were identified and discussed, and the way in which these scripts influenced Hinckley's actions (particularly in relation to his role as the leader of the Mormon church) were discussed. The findings suggest that Hinckley's personal ideology and personality had a considerable influence on his teachings and the way in which he led the Mormon church. The extent to which the direction taken by contemporary Mormonism was shaped by Hinckley's personality is currently open to speculation, and this is a valuable direction for future research. This is not to say that this was the only factor that influenced the growth of contemporary Mormonism, but does suggest that an examination of the personality of such a prominent individual within a religion can contribute much to an understanding of the way in which religions change and develop. It is hoped that the study not only contributes to a greater understanding of Hinckley and contemporary Mormonism, but also inspires additional research regarding the personalities of religious leaders within other major contemporary religions.

### **3 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE**

In this section, we provide a brief explanation of why Tomkins' script theory was selected as an interpretive lens for the psychobiography of Gordon Hinckley. The section concludes with some recommendations for theory selection in psychobiography.

The decision to include script theory in the psychobiography was based largely on a frustration with the nature of the available data in relation to Hinckley. While the pool of data was large it was almost exclusively produced by (and carefully edited and controlled by) the Mormon church and as such it was very difficult to find any information about him that did not conform to the authorized narrative of his life. Conducting a psychobiographical study with the available data was clearly going to be problematic, as there was simply not enough detailed biographical information concerning his formative years available to inform a psychodynamic or psychoanalytic portrait. Any attempt to do so would have been based in large part on conjecture, which would have been completely inappropriate. Given Hinckley's longevity, the application of a developmental theory (Erik Erikson's theory of lifespan development was used; Erikson, 1950/1963; 1968/1994; 1976; 1982) formed part of the psychobiography in the larger work from which this case study is drawn (see Saccaggi, 2015). This developmental interpretation of Hinckley's life was valuable (see Saccaggi, 2015) but we felt that it did not fully capture the complexities of Hinckley's personality.

Given that Hinckley frequently included stories and anecdotes in his speeches and published works, we set out to find a theory that would enable us to interpret these stories in a way that allowed us to comment meaningfully on Hinckley's personality. Tomkins' script theory, with its focus on the individual as a playwright, provided a lens through which to interpret Hinckley's 'performances' in his public life. In particular, the idea of a scene (Tomkins, 1992) was one that mapped easily onto Hinckley's data, as Hinckley frequently repeated and retold specific affect laden stories from his youth. This matching between the nature of the theory and the nature of the data was the central pivot of the psychobiography, and allowed for the production of a psychological interpretation of Hinckley's life that was able to provide insight into patterns (scripts) that appear to have underpinned his functioning.

Thus, the inclusion of script theory, a theory that we were unfamiliar with prior to beginning the psychobiography, provided a lens through which to view the subject that allowed for the creation of the nuanced and detailed psychobiographical portrait presented here. As such, this case study served to illustrate the points made in the introduction to this chapter concerning the value of using unusual theories in psychobiographical research. In concluding this chapter, the following two recommendations are advanced.

Firstly, the case study illustrates the explanatory power of using a psychological theory that falls outside of the mainstream. It is therefore recommended that when conducting psychobiographies researchers 'cast a broad net' from a theoretical perspective and consider using theories that are not psychodynamic or developmental in nature

(see Ponterotto et al., 2015). Given that researcher familiarity with a theory is often the main reason for the selection of a specific theory (du Plessis, 2017) it is suggested that psychobiographers need to familiarize themselves with a wide range of personality theories and be open to using theories that do not form part of mainstream personality psychology. However, the danger of this approach is it could result in the use of theories that are not well regarded or well researched. Thus, the choice of a theory will always incorporate an evaluation of the 'truth' value of the theory itself. In addition, when using a theory that does not enjoy strong empirical support, it may be useful to ensure that the entire psychobiographical study is not solely reliant on a single theory.

The caution advanced above leads to the second recommendation, which is that wherever possible psychobiographical work should make use of more than a single theory. This is an idea that has been advanced elsewhere, but is echoed in this paper. While the analysis advanced above illuminates certain aspects of Hinckley's life narrative there are other areas that remain shrouded in mystery. These include things such as his personal relationships, his unconscious processes and any discrepancies between the public persona and the private person. Given the data available and the limits of Tomkins' script theory these aspects could not be explored in this psychobiographical study. The addition of another theoretical lens would have resulted in enhanced understandings. In addition, adding a well recognized and well regarded theory from the 'mainstream' of personality psychology helps to add credibility to the addition of a more unusual or 'fringe' theory. For example, in the larger study from which the case study presented in this chapter is drawn the case analysis presented above is complemented by a developmental analysis using the work of Erik Erikson (1950/1963; 1968/1994; 1976; 1982).

In conclusion, this chapter presented a psychobiography of the Mormon prophet Gordon Hinckley informed by Tomkins' script theory. In so doing, it highlighted the usefulness of script theory as an interpretive lens for psychobiography and promoted the use of unusual **and** non-mainstream theories in psychobiographical research.

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