

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF COMPLAINT REPORTING: A SURVEY OF VCR OWNERS

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### ABSTRACT

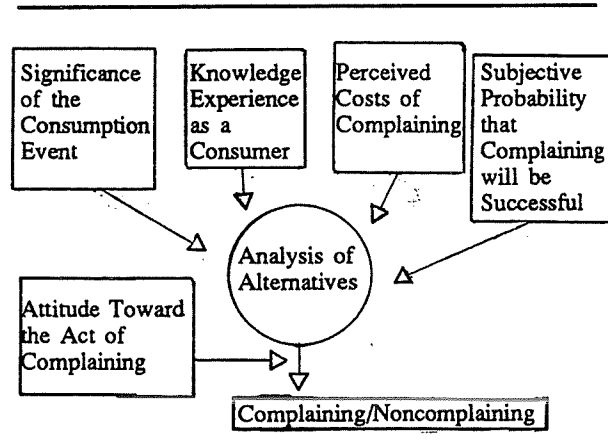
Previous research on complaining behavior has identified a number of factors that can influence whether the expression of dissatisfaction is voiced publicly or privately. Few studies, however, take into account the potential social consequences of complaining and their impact on complaining behaviors. This paper probes the role of the social environment in both the act of complaining and reports given to researchers regarding product dissatisfaction and complaint behavior. The purpose of the study is to examine the responses to a consumer survey regarding VCR ownership. Four hundred and twenty-four usable responses were obtained from a purposive sample of adults in the tri-state area (New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey). About half of the returns were gathered via a drop-off survey, and half via personal interviews. This methodology permits comparisons between face-to-face reports of product dissatisfaction and complaining actions, and more impersonal reporting. Further, each respondent completed a fear of negative evaluation scale which measures people's concerns about being unfavorably evaluated by others. The inclusion of this scale permits assessment of the impact of a respondent's fear of negative evaluation on the frequency of and reasons for dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, Nantel (1985) has suggested a "minor" modification of Day's basic model (Figure 2). This author argues that including the possibility of social constraints or inhibitions based on social pressures as a mediating variable in the model "will prevent it from the disappointing result traditionally obtained for models which have used the attitude construct and thus might allow it to lead itself to an accurate representation of the actual complaining/noncomplaining behavior" (1985:57). Although Nantel suggests using the self-monitoring concept as a surrogate for these social constraints, the 25-item scale he suggests using to operationalize it may well place undue

### INTRODUCTION

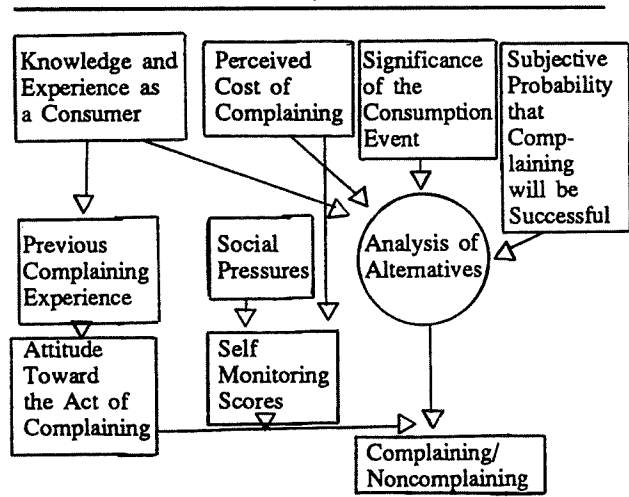
Building on the earlier conceptual work of Day (1977) and Landon (1977), Day (1984) recently proposed a fairly comprehensive model of the complaining/noncomplaining decision process (Figure 1). In his model, Day related four predictor variables such as the "perceived costs of complaining" and complaint alternatives with "attitudes toward the act of complaining" acting as a mediating variable. Although other researchers have proposed their own models (See, for example: Beardon and Teel, 1983; Richins, 1985; Singh and Howell, 1985), Day's work was one of the first to offer detailed suggestions about the operationalization of the constructs employed. Perhaps that is why it is so surprising that only one earlier test of a portion of his model has been reported in the literature (Day, April 25, 1989: personal communication). In that earlier research, Richins (1981:505) found that consumers with more positive attitudes towards the act of complaining had a "greater propensity to complain and reported undertaking more complaint actions."

**Figure 1**  
**Conceptual Model of the Complaining/  
Noncomplaining Decision Process**  
(Day, 1984)



data demands on some respondents. In addition, a prior attempt to use this construct in CCB research produced marginal results at best (Beardon, Crockett and Graham, 1979).

**Figure 2**  
**Modified Conceptual Model of the  
Complaining/Noncomplaining Decision Process**  
(Nantel, 1985)



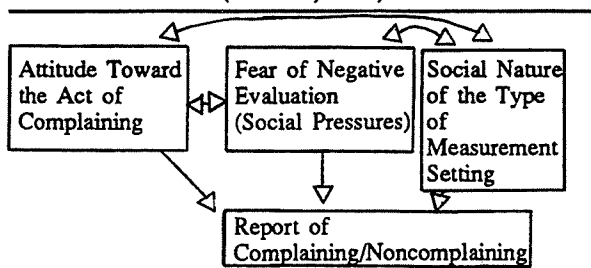
A somewhat more direct and economical way of assessing the pressures individuals feel to conform involves measuring a person's concerns about being unfavorably evaluated by others using the 12-item scale (Fear of Negative Evaluation). According to Leary (1983:371):

"Social processes in which evaluation apprehension is a factor should be partly mediated by differences in the degree to which individuals are apprehensive about being negatively evaluated by others. People who are highly concerned about being perceived and evaluated negatively would be more likely to behave in ways that avoid the possibility of unfavorable evaluations and, thus, be more responsive to situational factors relevant to such concerns than individuals who are less apprehensive about others' evaluation of them."

The situation in which complaints are made, possibly confrontational in nature, would certainly be one of those "social processes" to which Leary refers. Hence, it would seem reasonable to predict that high FNE consumers who perceive the act of complaining -- particularly in public -- to involve the possibility of being negatively evaluated by others (a store employee, perhaps) will be largely noncomplainers. However, as Olshavsky (1977) initially pointed out, being a noncomplainer does not mean that a consumer is not dissatisfied. Quite the contrary, to the extent that engaging in complaint behaviors allows resolution of an unsatisfactory experience, it is likely that high FNE noncomplainers are much more (and perhaps more frequently) dissatisfied than low FNE complainers.

Yet another concern arose with the Day (1984) and Nantel (1985) models. The dependent variable in both formulations is arguably reports of complaint or noncomplaint behaviors rather than the behaviors themselves. This is an important distinction, as Denzin (1970) has maintained that the act of carrying out research is a social one involving both the researcher and respondent. To the extent that this is true, the difference between a mailed questionnaire and a personal interview is then a matter of interactional degree. This introduces the distinct possibility that the social character of the measurement setting itself may need to be included in these models -- particularly for high FNE consumers. To some extent, this possibility has been anticipated by Cook and Campbell (1979) in their proscriptions against "mono-method bias." Thus, in our severely truncated version of the Day model (Figure 3), reports of complaint behaviors are viewed as a function of the "social" nature of the type of measurement setting, fear of negative evaluation, and attitude towards complaining.

**Figure 3**  
**Truncated Model of Complaining/  
Noncomplaining Decision Process**  
(Authors, 1989)



The presence and participation of the interviewer can

make a difference in some responses concerning one's own personal characteristics and one's complaining behavior. If the interviewer conducts the interview, bias and interaction problems can arise. Whether a leave-behind self administered interview can make a difference in the responses is certainly a possibility. "The ideal experiment is one in which subject and experimenter respond exactly as the instructions read...In the closed interaction of the experiment, subject and the experimenter are to assume only those roles dictated by the experimental design. Of course in actuality experiments do not flow as they should. Subjects and experimenters respond in terms of their perceptions of the demand characteristics of the experiment. Each reinterprets, adds to, detracts from, and in general acts in a manner that represents his definition of the situation..." (Denzin, 1970).

### OBJECTIVES

This study has four principal goals:

1. To examine in general the relationship among personal characteristics and personal values, aspects of personality and consumers complaining among a sample of VCR owners.
2. To examine the relationship between two particular aspects of personality:
  - (1) Concern with degree of negative evaluation on the part of those to whom public complaints would be voiced.
  - (2) Attitudes toward one's complaining behavior and its potential outcome.
3. To learn what the respondent will be motivated to say about oneself, the forms this dissatisfaction takes, the fears expressed concerning negative evaluation of others, and the complaining behavior believed feasible to assert and actually asserted in exercising and assuaging this dissatisfaction.
4. To examine what differences in key responses, if any, exist between respondents to personal interviews and respondents to self administered questionnaires when the same questionnaire was used.

### METHODOLOGY

College students of the authors were instructed in the art of interviewing and conducted a consumer sample pretest of the questionnaire on both a personal interview and leave-behind basis. These same interviewers employed a slightly modified version of the same questionnaire in December 1988, again in a combined sample evenly divided between (1) Personal interviews and (2) Leave-behind self-administered questionnaires.

The population consisted of individuals variously intercepted in an extended New York City metropolitan area (New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania) who qualified by answering the following questions in the affirmative:

1. "Do you currently own a Video Cassette Recorder? Have you had any trouble with your VCR or have you ever been disappointed with its performance in the past year?"
2. "I have to talk to the person in this household who

is primarily responsible for buying VCRs, stereos, and television sets. Are you that person?"

3. "Will you please be the spokesperson for your household?"

In addition respondents, to qualify, must not have replied "Not at all" to the following question: "Approximately how many times during the past twelve months have you been highly dissatisfied with the performance of your VCR?"

Several salient characteristics of the 424 consumers sampled should be highlighted from Table 1. As for gender, 49.2% of the respondents are male; 50.8% of the total are female. Age is well distributed, with 30.9% of respondents between the ages of 25 to 34, 27.6% 35 to 49, and 27.8% between 50 and 65 years of age. Nearly one-half of the respondents (45.9%) are currently married. As for occupation "best described": 19.6% of the respondents describe themselves as "Professional", 13.7% "Managerial", 12.5% "Clerical/secretarial", 11.1% full time Students and 9.9% "Sales". Respondents vary in residence with 22.5% saying they rent an apartment/condominium and 58.6% report owning their house/home. Most of the respondents (91.5%) live in a household containing two or more people, including themselves.

VCR data concerning the sample is reported in Table 2.

Well over three-quarters of the respondents (85.8%) purchased their VCRs in 1984 or later. Respondents report the mean list price of the VCR they own is \$428.96. Respondents claim the mean price they paid for their VCR is \$367.47. Their claimed price for the VCR is 85.7% that of what they said was the list price. This is not a large difference, given that no one can be expected to believe he/she paid more than the list price, people frequently pay less than the known list price, and some people will inflate their purchase savings under list price when responding to an interviewer.

Table 2 data also indicate that 69.2% of the respondents use their VCRs daily or at least two to three times a week. Almost two-thirds of all respondents frequently use their VCRs. A direct correlation between frequency of use and degree of dissatisfaction or extent of complaint behavior may be a function of augmented customer/user frustration, or it may be a function of increasing difficulties or breakdowns of VCRs the more they are used. When using the VCR, 62.3% of the respondents say they are usually with family members and 21.2% say they are with friends. The fact that 85% of total respondents report using their VCRs in the presence of their families and/or friends emphasizes the psychological equity that they have in the smooth running performance of their VCRs. Use of a VCR, unlike many products, constitutes a social process in which people actively participate, very likely at the behest or certainly the patronage of the customer-user. Not only does the occasion call for control and goal achievement on the part of the customer-user, but the latter's own status, prestige and judgment are perceived as being at stake. A VCR mechanism that breaks down in the presence of those whose perceptions are important to the customer-user can be suggestive, whether exaggerated or not, of poor purchasing judgment, poor maintenance, inability to run the device correctly, and the like.

**Table 1**  
**Sample Demographic Characteristics**

<u>Gender</u>	<u>%</u>
Male	49.2
Female	50.8
<u>Age</u>	
20 or under	4.0
21-24	30.9
25-34	27.6
35-49	27.8
50-65	8.3
Over 65	1.4
<u>Marital Status</u>	
Never married	44.2
Married	45.9
Widowed	1.2
Separated/Divorced	8.7
<u>Occupation</u>	
Student	11.1
Homemaker	6.1
Professional	19.6
Managerial	13.7
Clerical/Secretarial	12.5
Laborer	2.8
Craftsman	3.8
Sales	9.9
Other	20.5
<u>Residence</u>	
Own mobile home	0.3
Rent apartment/ condominium	22.5
Own apartment/ condominium	6.4
Rent house/home	9.3
Own house/home	58.6
Fraternity/Sorority	0.3
Dormitory	2.7
<u>Number living in own household(including self)</u>	
One	8.5
Two	26.3
Three	22.7
Four	28.0
Five	8.3
Six or more	6.2

When asked (Table 2) about the importance of the VCR to personal lifestyle, 56.1% of all respondents rate the VCR from 5 to 7 on a 7-point scale (7 = "Extremely Important" and 1 = "Not Important At All"). The above mentioned

**Table 2**  
**Sample VCR Purchase/Use**  
**Characteristics**

<u>1. Year VCR Purchased</u>	<u>%</u>
1978-1982	7.1
1983-1984	18.8
1985	19.0
1986	25.7
1987	20.2
1988	9.3
<u>2. Frequency of VCR Use</u>	
Daily	30.0
Two or Three Times a Week	39.2
Once a Week	13.9
Several Times a Month	16.8
<u>3. When Using VCR, Usually</u>	
By self	16.5
With Others in Family	62.3
With Friends	21.2
<u>4. Importance of VCR to Personal Life Style</u>	
Extremely important	7 15.1
	6 16.0
	5 25.0
	4 20.0
	3 11.8
	2 6.6
Not important at all	1 5.4
<u>5. Time and Effort Given to Shopping</u>	
I put a lot of time and effort into shopping	7 13.7
	6 18.0
	5 22.0
	4 19.1
	3 13.0
	2 13.0
I put as little time or effort into shopping as possible	1 6.4
<u>6. VCR Involvement With Problems (Prior to Previous Twelve Months)</u>	
It's been totally trouble-free	26.7
It's had a few minor problems	62.5
It's had a few major problems	6.7
It's been one major problem after another	0.7

**Table 2 (cont.)**

<u>7. Number of Times Highly Dissatisfied with VCR During Previous Twelve Months</u>	
Once or Twice	73.3
More than twice, but less than ten times	21.9
More than ten, but fewer than twenty times	2.4
Twenty or more times	2.4
<u>8. Extent of Inconvenience Incurred by Unpleasant Experience with VCR</u>	
Terribly embarrassing	7 0.5
	6 1.9
	5 2.4
	4 6.2
	3 6.9
	2 13.5
Not embarrassing at all	1 68.6

psychological equity is compounded by the perceived importance of the VCR to respondents' life styles, with 56% indicating that their VCR was very important or extremely important to them. Importance takes on many other dimensions, however, including the potential damage a flawed VCR can do to one's fresh or recorded tapes and the occasions for recording and/or playing that respondents are compelled to miss while the VCR is disabled.

About one-half of all respondents (53.7%) rate the time and effort put into shopping at 5 to 7 on a 7-point scale (7 = "I put a lot of time and effort into shopping" 1 = "I put as little time and effort into shopping as possible"). Over 50% of all respondents clearly reflect another basis for concern with a flawed VCR, i.e., the fact that they spend an above average amount of time and effort in shopping for goods and services. Such individuals are more likely to believe that their own persona are under attack and their own personal images under challenge by family members and friends present on occasions when the formers' VCR breaks down or is in trouble.

Over one quarter of all respondents (26.7%) say of their VCR that, prior to the past 12 months, "It's been totally trouble-free"; 62.5% report "It's had a few minor problems"; 3.4% say "It's had numerous minor problems"; and 6.7% report that "It's had a few major problems". Respondents' history of problems with their VCR is clearly of minor import prior to the most recent twelvemonth period during which the relevant dissatisfaction and complaining behavior took place. Future research should be designed to determine the extent, if any, to which people's discomfiture and consequent action (complaining behavior) depend on the extent to which their VCRs have in fact been free of problems prior to the incidents about which they complain.

Nearly three-quarters of all respondents (73.3%) report that during the past twelve months they have been highly dissatisfied once or twice and 21.9% of the total say they have been highly dissatisfied more than twice, but less than ten times. VCR owners need not be highly dissatisfied with

their VCRs more than once or twice to cause them to engage in some form of complaining behavior.

When asked about the extent of inconvenience incurred by unpleasant experience with their VCRs (Table 2), 49.8% of all respondents give a rating of 5 to 7 points on a 7-point scale (7 = "A Major Inconvenience" and 1 = "Very Minor Inconvenience"). Convenience involves an amalgam of time and effort that few people want to lose regardless of how else they may have chosen to invest it. 50% of the respondents consider their flawed VCR as having been substantially inconvenient if not a major inconvenience to them, still another frequent motivation for complaining behavior.

Concerning the extent of embarrassment from unpleasant experience with their VCRs (Table 2), 89.1% of all respondents give a rating of 1 to 3 on a 7-point scale (7 = "Terribly Embarrassing" and 1 = "Not Embarrassing at all"). Whatever irritation respondents suffered to their self esteem or their perceived image in the minds of others, respondents do not evaluate their deprivation as one of embarrassment. A 7 rating was offered by 68.6% of all respondents another 15.6% offered a "6" rating and another 6.9% offered a "5" rating.

## RESULTS

### Reasons for Dissatisfaction

Of thirteen reasons for dissatisfaction listed in Table 3, any one of which respondents might have cited, the five most frequently mentioned deal with their perception of the manner in which their VCRs were marketed. Indeed, a clear incompatibility exists between what these consumers anticipated in the use experience and the pleasure they actually received. The greatest incompatibility by far is expressed by the 39.9% of all respondents who cite "The instruction for using the VCR were unclear or incomplete". The second most frequently cited statement of dissatisfaction was "The quality was poorer than I expected" (24.3% of respondents) and the third was "An advertised 'special' was out of stock when I went to the store to buy it" (16.0%). The least frequently cited involved the circumstances of the purchase transaction: "The container was damaged, unsealed, or faulty" (2.6% of total survey respondents), "The amount I got was less than it was supposed to be" (2.6%) and "I was charged a higher price than the one that was advertised" (3.1%).

### Perceived Disadvantages of Complaining Behavior

Results presented in Table 4 show that respondents do not lean heavily to any pejorative statement characterizing the disadvantages of the time and effort given to complaining behavior concerning their VCRs. On a scale of 1 to 7 ("I strongly agree" and "I strongly disagree" respectively), respondents only offer 3.5 and 3.6 mean scores respectively to "Seeking redress or complaining when I am dissatisfied with a consumer experience would take a lot of my time and efforts" and "be a hassle I don't need". They offer their highest rate of disagreement with the statement that complaining behavior would "...be very difficult for me because of my poor health" (6.7% of total survey respondents) and "cause me embarrassment" (6.2%), the

**Table 3**  
**Reasons for Dissatisfaction**

Reason	% FREQUENCY OF MENTION	RANK
I was charged a higher price than the one that was advertised	3.1	11
The quality was poorer than I expected	24.3	2
The advertised "special" was out of stock when I went to the store to buy it	16.0	3
The VCR was damaged or spoiled	5.9	8
The amount I got was less than it was supposed to be	2.6	12
The VCR did not correspond to the general impression created by an advertisement	13.7	5
The container was damaged, unsealed, or faulty	2.6	12
A sales clerk made false or misleading claims about the VCR	9.7	7
The store was unwilling to provide a refund or exchange	5.0	9
The instructions for using the VCR were unclear or incomplete	39.9	1
The package was misleading	4.0	10
Store personnel were discourteous or unfriendly	10.4	6
The VCR is now obsolete	15.1	4

latter being consistent with the earlier cited finding that respondents do not evaluate their deprivation in terms of embarrassment.

It is clear that worth, the value that people give to whatever they sacrifice to the act of complaining behavior is measured by people more frequently in terms of time and effort, "hassle" and interruption of daily routine than in terms of money, health or personal embarrassment. The

**Table 4**  
**Perceived Disadvantages of**  
**Complaining in Time and**  
**Effort**

Scale of 1 to 7. 1 = "I strongly AGREE with this statement"; 7 = "I strongly DISAGREE with this statement"

Descriptions of disadvantages	MEAN SCORE	RANK IN AGREEMENT
"Seeking redress or complaining when I am dissatisfied with a consumer experience would --		
take a lot of my time and efforts"	3.5	1
disrupt my daily routines"	3.8	3
require a substantial amount of out-of-pocket expenses"	5.0	5
be very difficult for me because of my poor health"	6.7	7
require a lot of effort to find out who to contact or where to go"	4.5	4
be a hassle I really don't need"	3.6	2
cause me embarrassment"	6.2	6

consequences for brand image merit consideration given the analogies people make between time and money, and the negative associations between what people perceive as not worthwhile, or time ill spent and the brand name borne by the disabled VCR (Sorensen, 1973).

#### Attitudes Toward Own Complaint Behavior

Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements concerning complaining behavior (Table 5). They are clearly ambivalent given the competition for first place among the following statements: "I am embarrassed to complain regardless of how bad the product was" (6.1) and "Most of the people I know who complain about things are neurotic" (5.7).

On the other hand, duty and obligation score near center place, although still more than one-half the potential full agreement with (reading from the lowest) "It really feels good to get my dissatisfaction and frustrations off my chest by complaining" (3.7), "I always complain when I feel dissatisfied because I feel it is my duty" (3.9), and "Most

**Table 5**  
**Attitudes Toward Complaining Behavior**

(Scale of 1 to 7. 1 = "I strongly DISAGREE with this statement"; 7 = "I strongly AGREE with this statement")

Description of worth	MEAN SCORE	RANK
"Complaining just leads to more frustration"	3.6	7
"Complaining about anything to anyone is distasteful to me"	2.9	8
"Most businesses will cheat you if you don't stand up for your rights"	4.0	4
"Complaining is mostly done by people with little else to do"	2.9	8
"I am embarrassed to complain regardless of how bad the product was"	6.1	1
"Complaining is a consumer's right, not an obligation"	5.7	2
"Most of the people I know who complain about things they buy are neurotic"	2.3	9
"Complaining isn't much fun, but it has got to be done to keep business on its toes"	4.8	3
"I always complain when I am dissatisfied because I feel it is my duty"	3.9	5
"It really feels good to get my dissatisfaction and frustrations off my chest by complaining"	3.7	6

businesses will cheat you if you don't stand up for your rights" (4.0).

Lowest of all are those intimations that complaint behavior does not find favor without doubt, i.e., "Most of the people I know who complain about things they buy are neurotic" (2.3), and tying for eighth are "Complaining is mostly done by people with little else to do" and "Complaining about anything to anyone is distasteful to me" (2.9 each).

#### Types of Action (Complaining Behavior) Taken

Private action, that which is most deadly to manufacturers, marketers and retailers ranked very high in

the types of complaining behavior respondents report having taken (First, Third and Fourth of eleven possible actions from which respondents were asked to elect) (Table 6). "I warned my family and friends about the brand, product, or store" (43.6% of respondents), "I decided not to buy that brand of VCR again" (31.4%) and "I decided to stop shopping at the store where I bought the VCR" (14.2%) constitute a clear warning that people will complain in their own way, demonstrating least in the way of an open challenge to the sellers but nonetheless a clearly defined commitment to punishing the offending parties. What respondents are emphatically least likely to do is to contact a lawyer, go to Small Claims Court, or take some other legal action (0.2%), to contact a governmental agency or a public official to complain (0.5%), or to contact a private consumer advocate or consumer organization to complain (0.9%).

**Table 6**  
Types of Action (Complaint Behavior) Taken

Action	% FREQUENCY OF MENTION	RANK
I decided not to buy that brand of VCR again	31.4	3
I decided to quit using that kind of VCR altogether	7.5	7
I decided to stop shopping at the store where I bought the VCR	14.2	4
I warned my family and friends about the brand, product, or store	43.6	1
I returned the VCR to the seller for a replacement or refund	13.7	5
I contacted the store to complain	32.1	2
I contacted the manufacturer to complain	12.0	6
I contacted the Better Business Bureau to complain	2.6	8
I contacted a governmental agency or a public official to complain	0.5	10
I contacted a private consumer advocate or consumer organization to complain	0.9	9
I contacted a lawyer, went to Small Claims Court, or otherwise took legal action	0.2	11

**Reasons for Noncomplaint Behavior**

People do not always complain (Olshavsky, 1977). Respondents reflect strong apathy in those instances in which they did not complain about their VCR or some other electronic product (Table 7). Asked to pick one of five reasons for taking no action, 44.6% of all respondents indicate "I wanted to do something about it, but never got around to it". The second largest group, 26.6%, agree that "I didn't think it was worth the time and effort". Apathy signals a lack of motivation to act in a challenging way to parties perceived as offending and, not surprisingly, is present in this population characterized by substantial high negative self evaluation and a desire to perform privately rather than outwardly in their acts of complaining behavior.

**Table 7**  
Reasons for No Complaint Behavior

Reason	% FREQUENCY OF MENTION	RANK
I didn't think it was worth the time and effort	26.6	2
I wanted to do something about it, but never got around to it	44.6	1
I didn't think that anything I could do would make any difference	10.9	4
I didn't know what to do about it or where I could get help	6.1	5
Other	11.9	3

**Extent of Characteristic Concern About Evaluation of Others**

Respondents may be somewhat ambivalent about the fact that evaluation is taking place. (Table 8) The first ranking item in a 5 to 1 scale (5 = "Extremely characteristic of me" and 1 = "Not at all characteristic of me" is "I am concerned even if I know people are forming an unfavorable impression of me" (3.8) and the second ranking is "Other people's opinions of me do not bother me" (2.8). Third and fourth ranking items in frequency of mention are "I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone" (2.7) and "If I know someone is judging me, it has little effect on me" (2.6). Fear of one's shortcomings being noticed, that people will find fault and that others will "not approve" rank lowest among the concerns expressed by respondents as a whole. Worry and apprehension tend to rank in the center of these twelve evaluation scale attributes.

**Attitude Toward Complaining**

The preliminary results in Table 9 and Table 10 tend

**Table 8**  
**Extent of Characteristic (Typical)**  
**Concern About Evaluation of**  
**Others**

Evaluation type	MEAN DEGREE OF CONCERN	RANK
I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference	1.8	9
I am concerned even if I know people are forming an unfavorable impression of me	3.8	1
I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings	1.8	10
I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone	2.7	3
I am afraid that others will not approve of me	1.7	12
I am afraid that people will find fault with me	1.8	11
Other people's opinions of me do not bother me	2.8	2
When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking of me	1.9	8
I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make	2.6	4
Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me	2.0	6
I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things	2.0	7

to support the role of the "attitude towards the act of complaining" (ATC) construct in mediating the link between the consumer's unsatisfactory experience and their reported complaint behaviors (Richins, 1981; Day, 1984). Those with a more favorable ATC were more apt to indicate "wanted to, but never got around to it" as a reason for not complaining and less likely to offer "not worth the time or effort", "wouldn't make any difference" and "didn't know what to do about it" than those VCR owners with a less favorable attitude. They were also more likely to cite "advertised

'special' out of stock" and "store personnel unwilling to provide a refund" as reasons for dissatisfaction, and less apt to cite "amount less than it was supposed to be" than those with a more negative ATC.

**Table 9**  
**Results of the Difference of Means**  
**Tests: Reasons for Dissatisfaction**

Variables of Interest:	Attitude Towards Complaining	Fear of Evaluation	Interview vs. Dropoff
Frequency of Dissatisfaction (in past 12 months)	NS	.055	NS
Reasons for Inaction	.013	NS	NS
<u>Reasons for Dissatisfaction</u>			
Charged higher price than advertised	NS	NS	NS
Quality poorer than expected	NS	NS	NS
Advertised "special" out of stock	.007	.0	NS
Damaged product	NS	NS	NS
Amount received less than it was supposed to be	.080	.026	NS
Product did not correspond to ad impression	NS	.064	NS
Damaged, unsealed or faulty container	NS	NS	NS
Sales clerk made false or misleading product claims	NS	.094	.055
Store unwilling to provide refund or exchange	.018	NS	NS
Unclear or incomplete instructions	NS	.064	NS
Misleading package	NS	.001	NS
Unfriendly or discourteous store personnel	NS	.083	NS
VCR now obsolete	NS	NS	NS

In terms of the reported actions themselves, those respondents with a more positive attitude towards



**Table 10**  
**Results of the Difference of Means**  
**Tests: Action Taken**

Variables of Interest:	Attitude Towards Complaining	Fear of Negative Evaluation	Interview vs. Dropoff
<b>Consumer Reactions</b>			
Quit the brand	.068	.008	NS
Quit using VCR altogether	.071	.029	NS
Quit store where purchased	NS	NS	.050
Warned family and friends	NS	NS	NS
Returned for refund/replacement	NS	NS	NS
Contacted store to complain	.030	NS	NS
Contacted manufacturer to complain	NS	NS	.028
Contacted BBB to complain	.062	NS	.004
Contacted a government agency or public official	NS	NS	NS
Contacted private consumer advocate	.019	.023	.038
Took legal action	NS	NS	NS

complaining were more likely than the others to "quit the brand", "quit using that kind of VCR altogether", "contact the store to complain", and "to contact the Better Business Bureau". Interestingly, those VCR owners with a less favorable ATC were more likely to "contact a consumer advocate" to represent their interests. Finally, those with a positive attitude were more likely to report engaging in "public" complaint behaviors (chi sq. = 6.9343, prob. = .031) and much more likely to feel that complaining is "worth the time and effort" (chi sq. = 14.7551, prob. = .005) than those VCR owners with a less favorable attitude.

#### Fear of Negative Evaluation

The results in Table 9 and 10 also tend to support the moderating role of pressures in the social environment in the relationship between dissatisfaction and reports of complaining (Nantel, 1985). Those respondents with a

greater fear of "being evaluated unfavorably by others" (FNE) were more frequently dissatisfied than those with less concern. The VCR owners with a greater FNE score were also more likely than others to report "advertised special out of stock", "amount received was less than anticipated", "VCR did not correspond to ad impression", "false or misleading claims by a sales clerk", "instructions were unclear or incomplete", "misleading package" and "discourteous or unfriendly store personnel" as reasons for their dissatisfaction.

These results, coupled with the fact that those VCR owners with a greater fear of negative evaluation also had a less favorable attitude towards complaining (chi sq. = 19.5678, prob. = .001) suggest that those with a greater FNE are more likely to accumulate rather than resolve their dissatisfactions by complaining. Indeed, this reluctance to complain also evidenced itself in those instances where these respondents reported taking action. Those VCR owners with a greater FNE score were more likely than others to decide "not to buy the brand again" ("private"), "quit using that kind of VCR altogether" ("private"), and "contact a private consumer advocate" to complain on their behalf ("third party complaining" See: Robinson, Valencia and Berl, 1980).

#### Social Context of Reporting

The results presented in Table 9 and 10 also offer some support for including the impact of the type of data-gathering situation itself on reports of complaint behaviors. The VCR owners in the drop-off condition were not less likely to cite "a sales clerk (who) made a false or misleading claim about the VCR" as a reason for their dissatisfaction. However, there was a tendency for the drop-offs to indicate that they had engaged in more "public" complaining than those who were interviewed. That is, the drop-offs were more likely to report that they had "contacted the manufacturer", the "Better Business Bureau", and a "private consumer advocate organization" to resolve their dissatisfaction. They were less likely to have "stopped shopping at the store" than those VCR owners who were interviewed.

Finally, these results -- coupled with the fact that those in the drop-off condition had a more favorable attitude towards complaining (F = 1.39, prob. = .016), felt that owning their VCR was important "in terms of how others see you" (F = 1.27, prob. = .081), and tended not to admit purchasing their VCR in discount stores (chi sq. = 12.1335, prob. = .007) -- suggest the need to test for the effects of the reporting context "setting" (Cook and Campbell, 1979) in CCB. Where present, the social nature of the data-gathering situation should be introduced explicitly into the analyses and model.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of this study were accomplished.

The findings relative to the fear of negative evaluations lend support to Nantel's (1985) "minor" modification of the Day (1984) model, namely that a dissatisfied consumer's susceptibility to social pressures mediates the relationship between dissatisfaction and complaining behaviors.

The findings relative to the consumer's "attitude towards the act of complaining" are consonant with those of

Richins (1981). That is, those respondents with a more positive attitude tended to report that they had taken more complaint actions than those with a less favorable attitude.

The findings indicate that the social setting of the interview (i.e., personal interview v. drop-off interview) need to be taken into consideration when designing a study of complaining behavior and interpreting its results.

Future research suggestions:

1. Is there a threshold of accumulated dissatisfaction or a particular kind of incident that will cause a high FNE consumer to complain publicly? Will their complaints have a high emotional content?
2. In both the face-to-face interview situation and the self-administered questionnaire, what instructions can be given to interviewer and to respondent that will narrow the gap between differences in respondent reporting of their personal values and complaint behavior?
3. Is a taxonomy of types of dissatisfaction and complaint, broken out by product, feasible?

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