AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINT BEHAVIOR AMONG CHURCH MEMBERS

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ABSTRACT

Understanding how church members complain when dissatisfied is a topic that has been neglected in the marketing literature. Academicians have done a good job in looking at complaint behavior in retail, industrial, and service environments. However, one area that has not been investigated is how church members complain. Researchers have been slow to make use of modern marketing techniques in non-profit areas. This article develops a typology of complaint behavior response styles and identifies a set of variables useful in predicting complaint styles in a church environment. This type of research is needed in order to help these organizations be pro-active in the areas of loyalty, satisfaction, and retention of church members.

INTRODUCTION

The service sector is the largest industry in the U.S. economy. Presently, the service sector represents 38.7 % of all establishments and accounts for 79 % of all employment. Projections for job creation in this sector will continue to be strong with it generating an additional 20.5 million jobs by 2010 (Berman, 2001). Given this tremendous projected growth, one might surmise that all segments of the service sector are growing rapidly. However, churches often not thought of as being part of the service sector have not benefited from the tremendous growth in the service sector. In fact, mainstream denominations in the United States have not seen any significant increase in worshipers over the last four decades ("Religious Makeup").

According to Wright (1996) the top five religions in the world are Christianity (33%), Islam (20%), Agnostics (15%), Hinduism (13%) and Buddhism (6%). Of these five religions, Christianity has had the most arduous time in satisfying and retaining worshipers (Parsons 1997). According to the U.S. Center of World Mission, the Christian religion is growing at a 2.3% annual rate, which is approximately equal to the growth rate of the world's population, while Islam is growing at a 2.9% rate, allowing this religion to capture more membership over time than any other group (Parsons 1997). Growth projections indicate that Christianity will represent only 25% of the world's population by 2025 down from 33% (Huntington 1998). Given the projections that forecast Christianity's decline, an anecdotal example is provided to demonstrate the need for retention strategies and policies to maintain a church's membership. One such retention strategy is that of managing the various forms of complaint behavior in churches.

Anecdotal Example for the Retention of Church Members

In one northeast Texas city there are approximately 456 churches that serve an area with a population of roughly 80,000 people. If one were to assume that everyone was an active member of a church in this town, there would be approximately 175 worshipers for each church. According to the Barna Research Group, about 36% of Americans attend church regularly, ("Religious Makeup"); leaving an average of 63 committed worshipers for each religious organization in this city. Obviously, with only 63 worshipers attending any given church, meeting the churches financial obligations just to keep the doors open would tend to be problematic. Given this scenario, all churches should recognize that maintaining their existing church body is essential to the churches' viability. In fact, the average U.S. service establishment loses half of their customers to customer disloyalty within five years, hence organizational performance declines 25 to 50% (Gnash, et al. 2000). Though the Gnash, et al.

(2000) study did not include churches, it can be inferred that the pursuit of loyal church members should be a priority. In order to create church (brand/store) loyalty, the job of managing satisfaction among church members will be key.

This paper will extend the literature in the area of satisfaction and complaint behavior to a unique part of the service sector, namely churches. Churches in today's modern world need to understand how complaining behavior is manifested by their members in order to be pro-active in protecting their loyalty, satisfaction, and retention. More specifically, church administrators need to know how church members are likely to complain and what characteristics of members are useful in predicting their complaining style. To address these issues, this research has the following objectives: (1) test for the existence of a multidimensional structure of complaint behavior in a church setting, (2) identify an appropriate number of clusters representing unique complaint response styles by church members; (3) describe each complaint response style derived from church members; and (4) identify a set of predictor variables useful in determining membership into each church complaint response style.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cutler and Winans (1999), in a review of marketing literature involving churches, found that of all the articles published since 1976, only three papers have been empirical in nature. Several reasons have been posited for the lack of empirical research on churches. First, churches have not seen the need to market their product. Second, academicians have not seen the need to demonstrate marketing techniques relevant to churches and similar nonprofit organizations. Third, churches have tried to maintain the belief that the practice of marketing and recruitment are two unholy terms churches should not employ (Fewster 1980). Whatever the attitude or reasoning supporting the void of marketing research pertaining to churches, it should be noted that all organizations today, both profit and nonprofit are facing increasingly competitive environments.

The central theme in the academic literature regarding the marketing of religious organizations has focused on uncovering the "dynamics of consumer preferences" (McDaniel 1989). In 1995, Mehta and Mehta investigated four dimensions related to church member satisfaction that include (1) church environment; (2) pulpit ministry; (3) music ministry; and (4) and congregational participation. They found congregational participation ($R^2 = 76.67$) to explain more variance in member satisfaction than the other three dimensions, but all dimensions were statistically significant (church environment $R^2 = 76.08$; music ministry $R^2 = 73.24$; and pulpit ministry $R^2 = 66.74$). In addition to these dimensions, they found that the worshiper's denomination and gender were highly associated with member satisfaction, along with the number of times attending church, and the amount of charitable giving.

Saunders (1999) extended the limited empirical marketing research of churches and began to address the issue of retaining church members. Saunders explored the level of satisfaction with regards to specific church attributes. Her research identified thirty-seven attributes that were associated with member satisfaction. Using factor analysis, these thirty-seven variables were reduced into ten factors. The factors included church programs, social service opportunities, worship services, member support, physical and social ambience in the worship service, congregational harmony, church time and place, Sunday School content, Sunday School leadership opportunities, community obligations, church convenience and image, and administrative communication. These factors were found important to member satisfaction and would likely lead to increased member retention for a church.

Our study will extend the investigation of complaint behavior by employing it to the service sector, namely churches. As our guide, we will rely upon Jagdip Singh's (1988, 1990) work concerning complaint behavior. Our research is exploratory, as limited empirical research has been done on complaint behavior in a religious setting. Even though Saunders (1999) began to identify

factors likely related to satisfaction and retention of church members, the literature has not addressed questions such as what specific types of complaint behavior might arise when a member is dissatisfied, and/or what variety of complaint behavior response styles might exist in a church organization. A brief review of the consumer complaint behavior literature will guide the direction and methodology of our study.

Complaint Behavior

The study of complaint behavior began as part of the broader study of consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Bearden and Mason 1984; Day 1984; Day and Landon 1977; Jacoby and Jaccard 1981; Oliver and DeSarbo 1988; Yi 1990). A general model of the complaining process supposes that as dissatisfaction within an exchange situation increases, the probability of some type of complaining behavior increases (Hansen, et al. 1997). Singh (1990) made several important contributions to the study of complaint behavior. First, he developed a typology of consumer complaint response styles. The complaint styles he developed were labeled passives, voicers, irates, and activists (Singh 1990, p. 80). Once he had identified these complaint styles he tested several variables that could predict the response styles. He found episode-specific variables such as judgments and the nature of the dissatisfying experience, along with personal variables such as prior experiences, alienation, and attitudes towards complaining to be the best predictors of complaint style. Dart and Freeman (1994) extended Singh's research to an organizational setting, using purchasers of accounting services. Finally, Hansen, et al. (1997) formulated a typology of organizational buyer complaint responses in a business-to-business environment, involving tangible products.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

In order to accomplish our research objectives, a questionnaire was developed from the items used to measure four components of worship by Mehta and Mehta (1995). These components included (1) church environment, (2) pulpit ministry, (3) music ministry, and (4) congregational participation. In addition, we decided to add a fifth component called pastoral supervision. This addition was prompted by some of the recent problems our society has had with pastor/priest ethical and moral accountability. Our study made use of the scale developed by Singh (1990) to measure dimensions of complaint behavior. After the questionnaire was developed, an administrative pastor and a retired pastor reviewed the questionnaire for content, relevancy, and clarity. After their suggestions were implemented, the questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 300 church members selected from an overall population of 900 church members in a non-denominational church located in Northeast Texas. The mailing contained a cover letter written by the administrative pastor of the church requesting participation, the questionnaire, and an envelope with return postage to the authors. The overall response rate for this study was 37%. This rate of response is in line with other complaint behavior research (Singh 1990; Dart and Freeman 1994). To assess the potential for non-response bias, a time-trend extrapolation test was used and no significant differences were found between early and late respondents (Armstrong and Overton 1977).

Data Collection

Respondents were asked to remember a dissatisfying experience that occurred at a church, not necessarily the participating church. Respondents identified their experience by selecting from a list of common dissatisfying experiences compiled and created from empirical studies on churches (Mehta and Mehta 1995). Once a dissatisfying experience was identified they were asked how they expressed their dissatisfaction using Singh's (1990) complaint behavior scale that was adapted for a church setting (the complete questionnaire is found in Appendix A). The questionnaire also made use of an adapted version of the SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, et al. 1988) scale to measure quality. The respondents indicated their quality

perception on a five-point Likert scale. The items measured were tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Demographic measures such age, marital status, gender, denomination, attendance habits, etc. were also measured for the purpose of predicting complaint behavior and for building a sketch of the respondents.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the methodology of Singh (1990) and Hansen, et al. (1997). The first step was to identify how each respondent complained given a dissatisfying experience. Once the complaint behaviors were identified a factor analysis was performed. The factor scores from this analysis were entered into a hierarchical cluster analysis to identify the number of clusters representing complaint behavior response styles in this church setting. Next, discriminant analysis was employed to check for convergent validity in the complaint behavior scale. Analysis of variance was used to create descriptions of the clusters derived from the complaint behavior, SERQUAL, and the demographics variables. Finally, stepwise discriminant analysis was utilized to identify a set of predictors useful in distinguishing between each cluster representing complaint behavior response styles in this church setting.

RESULTS

Complaint Behavior

The complaint behavior scale was factor analyzed to identify its dimensional structure. The latent root criterion and the scree test criterion were used to identify significant factors represented by the data. A four-factor solution best represented the data. These results are similar to previous studies (Singh 1990; Dart and Freeman 1994; Hansen, et al. 1997), with one exception. The previous studies had identified only three dimensions derived from Singh's complaint behavior scale. Interestingly, our factor analysis created a fourth dimension of complaint

behavior from the church data. In Table 1 we have listed the items, classified them by dimension, and reported factor loadings, eigenvalues, and coefficient alpha.

Dimension one was labeled no action because it describes the respondent as doing nothing. Doing nothing is a common complaint behavior recognized in the literature (Warland, et al. 1975; Landon 1977). However, we did not anticipate a second item (i.e. engaging in complaint behavior to a governing body of the church) to load on the same dimension. A potential explanation for this is that it might be believed complaints to such high profile representatives in a denomination probably would be unfruitful or a waste of time, with the governing body referring the complaint back to the local church. This appears to be a plausible explanation unless the complaint was prompted by an extremely high profile incident (such as a pastor/priest molesting a child), then it would be expected the governing body would act. However, in most cases of lesser importance one might consider complaining to the governing body as effective/ineffective (however one looks at it) as not complaining at all.

Dimension two was labeled voice because it describes the respondent engaging in a mild form of complaint behavior such as asking, phoning, or writing the church staff to take care of the problem. This type of behavior can be profitable because, in a rather benign manner, it alerts the church staff to a problem that exists. Therefore, the staff has the opportunity to correct the problem and satisfy the member quickly and discreetly.

Dimension three was labeled private action because it describes the respondent engaging in negative word-of-mouth communication with members of the church, friends, relatives and co-workers. It includes the respondent deciding to leave his/her existing church to attend another. One can imagine a church member deciding to leave the church after a dissatisfying incident occurs without giving the church staff much of a chance to fix the problem. In fact the consumer literature has reported for quite some time that less than half of all consumers who face a dissatisfying experience complain (Andreasen and Best 1977; Wilkie 1986; Riechheld and Teal 1996).

Table 1
Rotated Factor Pattern for the Complaint Behavior Items From Church Data

Item	No Action	Voice	Private	Public
CCB1	**-.838**	-.251	-.038	.095
CCB2	.344	**.811**	.104	.038
CCB3	.001	**.885**	.128	.151
CCB4	-.208	.125	**.858**	.133
CCB5	.209	.256	**.793**	.087
CCB6	.460	-.208	**.599**	.213
CCB7	**.618**	.121	.032	.478
CCB8	.359	.036	.186	**.782**
CCB9	.001	.093	.142	**.921**
CCB10	-.009	.078	.075	**.901**
Eigenvalues	3.537	1.724	1.329	1.129
Coefficient Alpha	**.5661**	**.7683**	**.6999**	**27**
Overall Alpha	**.7814**			

The items were as follows:
CCB1: Decided to do nothing about the dissatisfying experience.
CCB2: Immediately complained to church staff about the experience.
CCB3: Complained to church staff by phone or writing.
CC4: Complained to friends, relatives, and co-workers about the experience.
CC5: Complained to members of the church about the experience.
CC6 Decided to go to another church.
CCB7: Complained to overall governing body of the church.
CCB8: Complained to licensing authority or professional organization.
CC9: Complained to civil leaders in the community.
CC10: Decided to take legal action against the church.

Negative word-of-mouth is deleterious to a church's reputation, and the church staff should be alert to this type of activity in order to promptly react and diffuse this type of complaining behavior.

Dimension four was labeled public action because it represents complaining to a licensing authority, to civic leaders in the community, or taking legal action against the church. This form of complaint behavior represents the most detrimental type of complaining and could threaten the church's very existence.

Identification of Response Styles

In order to identify complaint response styles the factor scores derived from the factor analysis were used as input into the cluster analysis.

Cluster analysis is an exploratory method, without a-priori expectations of groupings. The purpose of this procedure is the classification of our data according to natural groupings found in complaint behavior (Hair, et al. 1998). To identify the appropriate cluster solution a dendrogram was prepared using the Ward's method and Euclidean distance solution (Green and Tull 1978). From this analysis, an initial set of four clusters were identified, each cluster representing a particular complaint behavior style.

An analysis of variance was run to determine which complaint items were significantly different across the four clusters. Table 2 lists each item and its corresponding F-statistic. The data analysis in Table 2 shows all items from the scale to be significant at the .01 level. To assess convergent validity, discriminant analysis was

Table 2
F-Ratios of Each Complaint Response Over the Four Clusters

Complaint Item	Sum of Squares	df	MS	F	p
Did Nothing	60.282	3	20.09	13.91	.000
Complained	46.838	3	15.61	10.70	.000
Write or phone	21.549	3	7.183	4.574	.005
*Complain to friends and others	42.377	3	14.12	9.255	.000
Complain to a member	45.906	3	15.30	10.00	.000
Go to a new church	89.838	3	29.94	20.66	.000
*Complain to the governing body	20.557	3	6.852	4.373	.007
Complain to the licensing body	34.685	3	11.56	18.18	.000
*Complain to the civic leaders	38.288	3	12.76	66.85	.000
Take legal action	46.840	3	15.61	86.78	.000

*These items were eliminated from final solution by discriminant analysis.

Table 3
Standard Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Functions		
	1	2	3
Did nothing	-.316	.257	.684
Complained	.265	-.489	-.783
Write/phone	.145	-.221	.690
Members	-.295	.533	-.258
Go to New Church	-.458	.788	.096
Licensing	-.186	.500	.083
Legal Action	1.127	-.011	-.022

Summary of Canonical Discriminate Functions

Functions	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Corr.
1	4.343	61.8	61.8	.902
2	1.909	27.1	88.9	.810
3	.781	11.1	100.0	.662
Test of Function	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
1 through 3	.036	240.732	21	.000
2 through 3	.193	119.240	12	.000
3	.562	41.828	5	.000

used. The individual complaint behavior items were used as independent variables, with the four clusters as the dependent variables. Of the ten items in the complaint behavior scale only three items were eliminated from the solution by the discriminant algorithm (complained to friends and family, complained to overall governing body of the church, complained to civic leaders in the community). Table 3 lists the three standard canonical discriminant functions, along with each variable's coefficient as well as each function's eigenvalue, the percent of variance explained by the function, and the function's canonical correlation. Each of the three functions was significant at the p < .000 level and was able to classify 92% of respondents in their appropriate cluster group, thus giving evidence for convergent validity.

Description of Complaint Response Styles

A profile was created of each type of church complaint response style as described by the clusters. In order to provide evidence for external validity, one-way ANOVA was used with the response styles as the dependent variable and the items in the complaint scale as independent variables. The same procedure was also used with the SERQUAL dimensions as independent variables. The ANOVA shows how each variable differs across clusters and is instrumental in developing a more precise description of the clusters (See Table 4).

Analysis of variance showed that only two dimensions in SERQUAL were significantly different across the four clusters. These dimensions represent perceptions of reliability and

Table 4
Brief Description of the Four-Cluster Grouping Using Complaint Actions

Sign. Diff.	Complaint Actions Cluster	MEANS 1	2	3	4
1-2,1-3	Most likely to do nothing	2.28	3.65	4.46	3.20
1-3,1-4 2-3	Least likely to complain	3.87	3.50	1.84	2.66
2-3,3-4 2-4	Less likely to write or phone	3.86	4.40	3.16	2.77
1-3,2-3 3-4	Less likely to complain to friends	3.25	2.40	4.53	2.40
1-2,2-3 1-4	Least likely to complain to members	3.55	1.90	3.38	2.22
1-2,1-4 2-3 3-4	Less likely to go to new church	4.09	2.00	4.83	2.70
1-4	Least likely to complain to governing body	4.25	3.50	3.84	2.80
1-2,1-4 2-4,3-4	Least likely to complain to licensing body	4.78	4.14	4.76	2.80
1-4,2-4 3-4	Likely to complain to civic leaders	4.85	4.85	4.76	2.80
1-4,2-4 3-4	Likely to take legal action	4.87	5.00	5.00	2.80

Table 5
Demographic Variables Significantly Different Across Clusters

ANOVA	SS	df	MS	F	P
1. Respondents were asked the number of children at home.	17.76	3	5.92	2.87	.041
2. The quality of religious experience at your church	6.26	3	2.08	3.45	.019
3. If the dissatisfying experience at your church was resolved satisfactorily would you leave the church?	12.87	3	4.29	4.42	.006

Post Hoc Tests For Differences in Clusters	1	2	3	4
1. Number of Children	1.431*	2.176	2.636*	1.600
2.Quality of Religious Experience	6.441*	6.381	6.000	5.727*
3. Not resolved would leave	4.431*	3.937	4.636	3.250*

Table 6
Description of the Four Cluster Grouping

Cluster One-The Captivated
- Most likely to do nothing about dissatisfying experience.
- Least likely to complain immediately to church staff about dissatisfying experience.
- Less likely to complain to friends, relatives, and co-workers.
- Least likely to complain to members of church.
- Less likely to go to another church.
- Least likely to complain to governing body.
- Least likely to complain to licensing body.
- Least likely to complain to civic leaders.
- Less likely to take legal action.
- Strongly agreed that when they had a problem with something or someone, they showed sincere interest in solving it.
- Strongly agreed that the church staff was always willing to help.
- Strongly agreed the church staff was never to busy to respond to their request.
- This group had the 1.43 children.
- This group was very pleased with their religious experiences in church.
- This group disagreed with statement - if the dissatisfying experience you had with the church was resolved satisfactorily, you would leave the church.

Cluster Two-The Meddler
- Less likely to do nothing about a dissatisfying experience.
- Less likely to complain immediately to church staff about dissatisfying experience.
- Least likely to complain to staff by writing or phoning.
- Most likely to complain to friends, relatives and co-workers.
- Most likely to complain to members of church.
- Most likely to go to another church.
- Less likely to complaint to licensing body.
- Least likely to complain to civic leaders.
- Least likely to take legal action.
- This group disagreed with statement but not as strongly as cluster one - if the dissatisfying experience you had with the church was resolved satisfactorily, you would leave the church.

Cluster Three-The Inquirer
- Least likely to do nothing about dissatisfying experience.
- Most likely to complain immediately to church staff about dissatisfying experience.
- Likely to complain to church staff by phone or writing.
- Least likely to complain to friends, relatives, and co-workers.
- Less likely to complain to members of church.
- Least likely to go to another church.
- Less likely to complain to governing body.
- Less likely to complain to licensing body.
- Less likely to complain to civic leaders.
- Least likely to take legal action.
- Least likely to believe that when they had a problem with something or someone, they showed sincere interest in solving it.
- Least likely to believe that the church staff was always willing to help.
- Least likely to believe the church staff was never too busy to respond to their request.
- This group had the 2.63 children.
- This group strongly disagreed with statement - if the dissatisfying experience you had with the church was resolved satisfactorily, you would leave the church.

Cluster Four-The Irate
- Less likely to do nothing about dissatisfying experience.
- Likely to complain immediately to church staff about dissatisfying experience.
- Most likely to complain to church staff by phone or writing.
- Most likely to complain to friends, relatives, and co-workers.
- Likely to complain to members of church.
- Likely to go to another church.
- Most likely to complain to governing body.
- Most likely to complain to licensing body.
- Most likely to complain to civic leaders.
- Most likely to take legal action.
- This group was most satisfied with their religious experiences in church.
- This group was neutral to this statement- if the dissatisfying experience you had with the church was resolved satisfactorily, you would leave the church.

statements of responsiveness by the church staff. Post hoc tests were run to find out where the differences were located. Results showed only one item (when you have a problem with something or someone at church, they show a sincere interest in solving it) to differ significantly across the four clusters with regards to the perception of reliability index. Two items that represented part of the responsiveness index were significantly different across clusters one and three. They included the church staff is always willing to help their members, and the church staff is never too busy to respond to your request.

The same process was done using demographics variables. Three demographic variables were found to be significantly different across clusters. They included the number of children in a family, the quality of religious experience in the church, and whether or not they would leave given the dissatisfying was not resolved (Table 5). From this analysis, a sketch representing each response style is provided in Table 6.

Identification of Predictors of Church Member Complaint Response Styles

In the last step of the external validation process, each significant index in SERQUAL and the three significant demographic variables were used to predict group membership in the clusters representing complaint response styles. Stepwise discriminant analysis was used to differentiate between a-priori groups. In this procedure, the stepwise analysis should identify the best combination of variables capable of predicting membership in the clusters. To determine which variable had the best discriminating power, partial F-values were calculated for each of the independent variables. This analysis produced an optimal solution that included the responsiveness index and the demographic variable measuring whether or not the respondent would leave the church if their dissatisfying experience was not resolved. Using these two variables, a simultaneous discriminate analysis was run. The discriminant solution was able to classify respondents in their appropriate cluster group at a

rate of 76%.

DISCUSSION

Our study is the first to develop complaint response styles using church members. In creating these complaint response styles, we relied on a well documented methodology used frequently in the marketing literature (Singh 1990; Dart and Freeman 1994; Hansen, et al. 1997). Using this method, our study found differences and similarities in our response styles as compared to previous studies. First, when measuring the dimensionality of our complaint behavior scale, we found it to consist of four dimensions of complaint behavior which we labeled no action, voice, private, and public action complaints. This is generally considered a departure from past studies, where only three dimensions of complaint behavior have been found voice, private, public dimensions (Singh 1988).

Dimensions of Complaint Behavior

The first research objective in our study was accomplished by identifying four dimensions of complaint behavior in a church setting. The first dimension, labeled no action, included two items: doing nothing about the dissatisfying experience and engaging in complaint behavior to the governing body of the church. These findings are surprising because there was no theory to indicate that two such different items would load on the same factor. One potential explanation for this result is that complaining to the governing body of the church might have been perceived by respondents as ineffective as do nothing about the dissatisfying experience. It would seem that the respondent believed that unless the dissatisfying experience was extremely controversial or high profile, the governing body of the church would probably remain neutral (See Table 1). It should be noted that complaining to a governing body of the church was an adapted item used for this study and corresponded to the item in other studies analogous to complaining to a governing board or trade association. Further research using respondents from different congregations may

prove this finding to be unrepresentative of the true dimensionality of complaint behavior in a church setting or support our unique finding.

The second dimension, labeled voice, consisted of two items: immediately complaining directly to the church staff and by writing or phoning the church staff of the dissatisfying experience. Our study found that complaining directly to the church staff loaded on a similar dimension noted by Singh (1990), and Dart and Freeman (1994) studies. In the Singh and Dart and Freeman studies, the authors found immediately complaining directly to the appropriate party to load on the voice dimension. In our study it makes sense to label these two complaint actions as a voice dimension because they are of the same nature and degree of dissatisfaction. It should be noted that this form of complaint behavior is the first type of behavior a church member might engage in when dissatisfied. It is also the kind of action a church staff should promote because it gives the church the opportunity to immediately correct the problem..

The third dimension of complaint behavior, labeled private, included: complaining to friends, relatives, or other church members and possibly finding another church. This dimension is most like Singh's (1990) private dimension in which he saw the consumer using private complaints first in order to reach a solution and then, if not satisfied, finding another vendor. In the case of the switching consumer, this form of complaint behavior represents frustration on the part of the respondent in that he/she most likely has made several attempts to resolve the problem through normal channels and has been unsuccessful. Unfortunately, many businesses and churches lose good customers / congregation members without ever knowing why they left.

The fourth and final dimension was labeled public. It included complaining to the licensing authority, to civil leaders, or by taking legal action against the church. This dimension was most like what Singh (1990) and Dart and Freeman (1994) called the third-party complaint dimension. Further testing in the non-profit and church setting needs to be done, but our results suggest that these are the four dimensions of complaint behavior in

a church setting, where doing nothing when dissatisfied (no action) and voice complaints (complain directly to the church staff, or complain by phone or letter) are considered as two different dimensions.

Complaint Response Styles

Our second research objective was accomplished when we were able to identify four distinct complaint response styles of church members. These dimensions resulted in the formation of a typology consisting of four different complaint response styles. However, since our church complaint response styles were built using four dimensions of complaint behavior, we observed a slightly different mix of complaint responses representing each cluster. Therefore, unique names were chosen to try to describe these groups.

The first group was labeled The Captivated. The captivated group was the most satisfied group of the four and demonstrated no inclination of ever using any form of complaining behavior in a church setting. One interesting characteristic of this group was that they had the least amount of children. This demographic factor may be significant in that the respondent believed any dissatisfying experience which arose at the church was unlikely to affect them in any adverse way. Since fewer children belonged to this group, they generally did not have to worry about negative aspects of their worship experience affecting their children.

The second group representing complaint response styles was labeled The Meddler. The Meddler was not quite as satisfied as the captivated group with their church experience; however they were in no means ready to give up on this church. When faced with a dissatisfying experience they were more likely to use private action complaints such as complaining to friends, relatives, and co-workers, including other church members. This group tended to rely on negative word-of-mouth communication mostly in private party situations. However, if they decided that the problem was not going to be solved, The Meddler represented the group most likely to leave. This

group is potentially the most difficult group to please, as some of their complaint actions do not allow the church staff the opportunity to solve the problem. In most cases by the time the problem was identified by the church staff, these members were likely to have left the congregation. In addition, this group of complainers tended to engage in negative comments to others outside the church, possibly preventing prospective members from joining.

The third response style was labeled The Inquirer. The Inquirer represented members of the church who complained immediately when a dissatisfying experience took place. They were also least likely to do nothing and least likely to engage in negative word-of-mouth communications to friends, relatives, or co-workers when dissatisfied. In every sense this group offers the church the best opportunity to fix the problem before any other complaint action was contemplated.

Finally, the last response style was identified as The Irate. The Irate were church members most likely to rely on public complaint action. The Irate stated they would complain to the governing body of the church, to civic leaders in the community, and even consider legal action when dissatisfied. Also, they were more inclined to leave the church when a dissatisfying experience was not resolved.

External Validity

Our third objective in this study was accomplished when we validated the complaint behavior scale by testing for predictive validity. The discriminate solution used to predict membership in each cluster was found accurate at a 76% rate. Our results were similar to past research regarding complaint behavior (Singh 1990; Dart and Freeman 1994; Hansen, et al. 1997). Our study found three variables that could be beneficial to church staff in classifying complaint behavior response styles among church members. First, our study found that most of our respondents were very forgiving when a dissatisfying experience took place in church. They stated that if the church staff and/or

administration took steps to correct the problem when notified, they would be satisfied and continue to attend that church. The other two items that were included in the discriminant solution were part of SERQUAL measuring responsiveness. The first question asked respondents if they thought the church staff was always willing to help when a problem occurred. The second question asked if they thought the church staff was never to busy to respond to their requests. All groups basically agreed with both of these questions; however, there was a significant difference between the response given by The Captivated group and the response given by The Inquirer group. As noted, the Captivated were described as totally satisfied with their church experience. Likewise, The Inquirer stated they were also generally satisfied with their church experience. However, The Inquirer's judgment on issues of church satisfaction seemed to be ultimately affected by their concerns for the child's experience at church. For this reason, The Inquirer group seemed to be the most definite about issues of satisfaction in the church. For example, when a dissatisfying experience occurred, they were most likely to complain immediately to the church staff. If they were not able to complain personally, they were likely to complain to the church staff by phone or writing. The Inquirer group also stated that if the dissatisfying experience was not solved satisfactorily, they would leave the church. Interestingly, all variables included in the final predictor solution of complaint response styles in church members had to do with church member's concern over the amounts of responsiveness, empathy, and commiseration displayed by the church staff and administrators for members of the congregation.

LIMITATIONS

Our study has certain limitations. First, the exploratory nature of the study and the use of a single congregation limit the generalizability of these results. Second our survey had a response rate of 37%. Because measures taken to determine the extent of nonresponse bias resulted in no

significant findings, we feel the response rate was acceptable, but disappointing. Third, the church respondents, who took part in this study, were predominantly made up of church members representing the Judeo-Christian faith. One could surmise that, since the respondents are currently church members, a large portion of these people would not engage in the extreme forms of complaint behaviors. Our study does give one the impression that these kinds of extreme complaint activities are few and far between in a church atmosphere. However, this conclusion may not be sound as future studies expand the population of respondents to diverse denominations. Finally, this paper assumes each complaint behavior demonstrated by the respondent is relational. A church member's complaint behavior response could vary greatly, given different situations.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper successfully merged the study of complaint behavior into a church setting. This empirical research has shown the study of complaint response styles to be just as relevant in churches as they are in retail establishments, service organizations, and industrial relationships (Singh, 1990; Dart and Freeman 1994, Hansen, et al. 1997). Our results show that the dissatisfaction of the worshiper and the type of complaint behavior he/she engages in has a direct bearing on the retention of that church member. Complaint behavior should be encouraged in a church setting, so the staff has an opportunity to correct the problem and retain the worshipper.

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Appendix A

Please recall a dissatisfying experience, which arose as a result of attending church, participating in church activities, or being exposed to church activities on or off the church property. If nothing from the list matches your dissatisfying experience, please write a one or two word description of the incident. There are no right or wrong answers, so please give us your honest responses to these questions. Thank you for your time and effort. Check only ONE incident that applies:

___ a. irrelevance of pastor's sermon	___ k. ambiguous sermon presentation
___ b. over reliance on guest speakers	___ l. excellence of choir
___ c. selection of hymns and songs	___ m. lack of congregational participation due to song leader or choir master
___ d. emphasis on collection of tithe and offerings.	___ n. improper use of monies by church staff
___ e. amount of time allowed for meditation	___ o. amount of time allowed for congregational prayer.
___ f. lack of emphasis on traditional components (for example baptism, communion, responsive readings, etc.)	___ p. lack of emphasis on youth or children's ministry
___ g. inadequate supervision of children during ministry opportunities	___ q. inadequate teaching ministry at the youth or children's level
___ h. lack of oversight regarding key ministries	___ r. irrelevant or deleterious counseling provided by church leaders
___ i. moral or ethical behavior by church staff	___ s. availability of church ministers
___ j. other _____	Rank your top five potentially dissatisfying experiences. ____ ____ ____ ____ ____

After the above incident occurred how did you express your dissatisfaction?
      SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neutral D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Decided to do nothing about the dissatisfying experience.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Immediately complained to church staff about the experience.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Complained to church staff by phone or writing.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. Complained to friends, relatives, and co-workers about the experience.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Complained to members of the church about the experience.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Decided to go to another church.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Complained to overall governing body of the church.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Appendix A (cont.)

8. Complained to licensing authority or professional organization.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Complained to civil leaders in the community.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. Decided to take legal action against the church.	①	②	③	④	⑤

In this section we are trying to obtain an overall impression of your beliefs about church.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neutral D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. When the church promises to do something it does so.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. When you have a problem with something or someone at church, they show a sincere interest in solving it.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. The church generally performs their services right the first time.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. The church provides services at the time it promises to do so.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. The church keeps members informed about when services will be performed.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. The church staff gives expeditious service to members.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. The church staff is always willing the help their members.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. The church staff is never too busy to respond to your request.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. The behavior of church staff instills confidence in you.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. You feel safe in your dealings with church staff.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. The church staff is consistently courteous to you.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. The church staff has the knowledge to answer your questions over a broad range of topics.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Appendix A (cont.)

13. The church staff gives you individual attention.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. The church staff has your best interests at heart.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. The church staff understands your specific needs.	①	②	③	④	⑤
16. The church uses today's modern technology.	①	②	③	④	⑤
17. The church's physical facilities are visually appealing.	①	②	③	④	⑥
18. The church staff always appears neat and well groomed.	①	②	③	④	⑤
19. The materials used during services are visually appealing.	①	②	③	④	⑥
20. The materials used during services are visually useful.	①	②	③	④	⑥
21. The church offers convenient service times.	①	②	③	④	⑤

These questions provide an idea on how certain general beliefs about life could determine how one responds to these situations. There are no right or wrong answers. What is important is that your answers reflect what you honestly feel.
1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often

1. I like to gossip at times.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. There have been occasions when I have taken advantage of someone.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. I'm always willing to admit it when I have made a mistake.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. I always practice what I preach.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.	①	②	③	④	⑥
8. I never resent being asked to return a favor.	①	②	③	④	⑥
9. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. At times I really insist on having things my way.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Appendix A (cont.)

Background Information
This section is to help us understand if different people have unique problems in their church experiences.

Membership in a church congregation is:

1. Very important	①	②	③	④	⑤	Very unimportant.
2. Requires a lot of time	①	②	③	④	⑤	Requires little of my time.
3. Risky to join.	①	②	③	④	⑤	Is not a risky to join.
4. Provides many benefits	①	②	③	④	⑤	Does not provide many benefits.

1. Please identify the denomination you are affiliated with.

① Baptist   ④ Jewish   ⑦Mormon

② Catholic   ⑤ Lutheran   ⑧ Presbyterian

③ Church of Christ   ⑥Methodist   ⑨ Other _____

2. Please identify your status

① Single   ③ Divorced

② Married   ④ Widowed

3. Gender

① Male   ② Female

4. Number of children in household _____.
    Number under 10 years _____.
Number 10-18 years _____.
Number over 18 _____.

5. What is your age _____.

6. Classify your status at this church.

a. ____Non-member
b. ____Frequent visitor
c. ____Church member.
If member, how long? _____.

7. Pick the most applicable reason for going to this church.

a. ____ family church you grew up in.
b. ____ pastor/minister.
c. ____ location.
d. ____ times of service.
e. ____ programs offered.
f. ____ other

8. Attendance Habits.

a. ___ weekly.
b. ___ 2-3 per month.
c. ___ once per month.
    d. ___ less than once per month

9. How do feel about the quality of your church and church staff?

①	②	③	④	⑤
Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied

Appendix A (cont.)

10. How do you feel about the quality of religious experiences from your church?

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Terrible	Unhappy	Mostly Dissatisfied	Mixed	Mostly Satisfied	Pleased	Delighted

11. If the dissatisfying experience you had with the church was resolved satisfactorily would you

SA=Strongly agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; Strongly disagree.

		SA	A	N	D	SD
a.	Recommend your church to others?	①	②	③	④	⑤
b.	Attend church more?	①	②	③	④	⑤
c.	Become more involved in church activities?	①	②	③	④	⑤
d.	Tithe more?	①	②	③	④	⑤
e.	Leave the church?	①	②	③	④	⑤

Thank you for participating in this survey. This information will be made available to your church at a later date.