Katelyn Ruiz, MA
Andrews University

Welcoming Nonverbal Behaviors: A Case Study of Group Communication and Visitor Impressions
“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”

-Colossians 4:5
Antecedents to Attribution

Beliefs
Information
Motivation

Formation of Expectations

External Locus of Control
Internal Locus of Control

Communication Exchange

Situational Factors
Dispositional Factors

Consequences of Attribution

Behavior reveals attribution of affectation.

Positive Violation
Negative Violation

Behavior Absent
Behavior Present

"Communicator likes me."
"I do fit in here."

"Communicator does not like me."
"I do not fit in here."
Nonverbal Communication

Communication Context

- Dispositional Factors
- Situational Factors

Sender
Group Member
Intended Message of Welcome
Kinesics
Proxemics
Chronemics
Nonverbal Message
Receiver
Group Non-Member
Interpreted Message

Positive Violation of Behavioral Expectations
Encounter Perceived as Welcoming

Negative Violation of Behavioral Expectations
Encounter Perceived as Not Welcoming
Qualitative Case Study
Data Collection and Measurement

- Ethnographic Participant Observation
  - Self-reporting reflective survey
  - Video/Photo elicitation interviews with standard open-ended question protocol

- Interaction Analysis
  - Coding of nonverbal components (reported and observed in video)
  - Comparing frequency of behaviors

- Attribution Theory, Expectancy Violations Theory
# Post-Interaction Survey Results

## Rate Worship Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Somewhat Good</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Good</th>
<th>Not at all Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## How Would you Define Church Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Open</th>
<th>Somewhat Open</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Open</th>
<th>Not at all Open</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## How Welcome Did you Feel as a Visitor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Welcome</th>
<th>Somewhat Welcome</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Welcome</th>
<th>Not at all Welcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## How Likely You are to Return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Likely</th>
<th>Somewhat Likely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Likely</th>
<th>Not at all Likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nonverbal Elements

- **Proxemic** = Use of Space (environment)
- **Kinesic** = Use of Gesture (social/cultural)
- **Chronemic** = Use of Time (temporal factors)
Positive Nonverbal Behaviors

**Kinesics**
- Visitor meets Pastor
- Member Approach
- Hug/Physical Contact
- Happy/Laughing
- Member-Visitor eye contact
- Friendly tone of voice
- Member gets visitor a seat
- Greeter introduces visitor to another member
- Greeter stationed in sanctuary to welcome people before or after the service to a “Floater”
- Greeter remains at station after service begins
- Observing happy, visiting members
- Smile
- Comfortable pews
- Friendly nod from members sitting close to visitor
- Handshake

**Proxemics**
- Given a bulletin
- Classrooms labeled
- Warm temperature inside
- Uncluttered doorway, straightforward entrance
- Invite visitors to sit closer to the front
- Member opens door
- Reuniting with previously introduced member
- Time in the service set aside to welcome visitors
- Greeter takes time out to greet guest / Longer conversation

**Chronemics**
Results

- 20 student volunteers
- 6 Sabbath service visits
- 1 church
- 257 pages of transcribed interview data

- 19/20 Participants indicated likely to return
- 2.7 encounters equates positive experience
- 26 Positive vs. 21 Negative behaviors
“The greeter was awkward, but that’s because it’s a volunteer job, so it’s not like they’re really taught anything” (9)
Multi-Disciplinary Nonverbal Awareness Training

- **Medicine**: Ishikawa (2010)
- **Business**: Goman (2008, 2011)
- **Public Relations**: Fearn-Banks (2011)
- **Education**: Simonds and Cooper (2011), Ruusuvuori and Perekyla (2009)
- **Psychology**: Bangerter and Oppenheimer (2006)
- **Communication**: Burgoon, Bonito, et al. (2006)
“When I walk in somewhere with a lot of people, I expect a lot of interaction, but it’s like everybody came to do their own thing... interactive would be receiving a warm welcome both at the door, and in the church, and everybody recognizes that your face is new and getting excited” (19).
“There was a second where I wondered if I would be greeted at all. Having that second of guess, feeling a bit lost can give a bad impression to a guest and put a tiny bit of fear in them” (13).

“Sometimes you don’t expect people to go out of their way to greet you, but someone who is coming in and is maybe new to the church, you would expect that at least the greeter would greet them and also, if they sit down, maybe one or two people could shake hands and welcome them to church” (12)
“I think it’s really important that when you first walk in, that person you meet really sets a tone for the entire church experience. You want to make the visitors feel like they made a right choice in coming here and that you’re absolutely happy that they came here because they could have not come! They could have stayed home, they could have gone to another church, but no. They decided to come to you” (1).
“When someone comes to your home for the first time, you don’t simply open the door and go on with what you’re doing, you know? You at least acknowledge them and say, ‘Welcome to the house.’ You don’t even have to know about them in general, you’re just allowing them to feel as though they’re part of this... this group that has already been, you know?” (16).
Proxemic Recommendations

- Label classrooms and list what part of the service is currently occurring.

- Walk with visitors; travel some distance with them to point them in the right direction.

- Welcome from in front of the pulpit/table/obstacle instead of from behind.

- Hospitality Training
Chronemic Recommendations

- Have a time set aside in the service to welcome visitors and invite them to events (personally or from the front).
- Keep a greeter at the door stations even after the service begins.
- Assign a greeter to walk through the sanctuary both before and after the main service.
- Hospitality Training
Kinesics
Recommendations

- Smile when eye contact is made.
- Introduce visitors to another member / pass them off.
- Turn toward those in your pew.
- Hospitality Training
Changing Church Culture

Individual

Group

Present

Recognized

Pleasant

Remembered

Patient

Retained
Who can welcome visitors?

“It doesn’t have to be somebody with a title. It can even be a member of the church who sees you walk in and doesn’t know you. They can say, ‘Hey, you’re new here. Do you need help with anything? If you’re looking for something or someone, just feel welcome to ask for anything you need.’ That will make a huge difference” (8).
Where one or two are gathered...
(Matthew 18:20)

- We can welcome angels into our midst.
(Hebrews 13:2)