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## Courtesy on Campus: How Far away does a Person have to be Before the Door is Held?

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**Courtesy on Campus:****How Far away does a Person have to be Before the Door is Held?**Kristen Frederick<sup>8</sup>

*Many times while coming to the doors of a building the person who entered or exited before just lets the door shut in others' face. It was thought that the door was less likely to be held ten minutes before a class period started (when people tend to be more rushed) than ten minutes after a class period starts. It was also thought that men are more courteous in public than women. The fundamental attribution error is used to explain peoples' behaviors in public. The concept behind this is, people tend to do things because of an internal disposition like personality rather than an external situational disposition. Observations were made in a classroom building during the passing period between classes on Lindenwood University campus. Information was collected like the time the door was held, the gender of the person holding the door (holder), the gender of the person the door was held for (holdee), and the distance the holdee was from the door.*

Everyday people enter and exit buildings, sometimes without even opening the door. Many people who open a door tend to hold it open for people behind them and some do not. Do people hold the door for others just because they are too close to let the door shut in the others' face? Or does distance have any significance on door holding behavior? It is thought that people are less likely to hold the door for others 10 minutes before a class period begins (when they tend to be more rushed), than 10 minutes into a

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class period even if somebody else is five feet away. When people are in a rush they tend to ignore any other person or the wellbeing of any other person. This behavior is easily explained when looking at the fundamental attribution error. What is meant by the fundamental attribution error is it is used to help understand and explain what happens in social settings. We tend to explain behavior as an internal disposition, like personality traits, abilities and motives as opposed to external situational factors.

Levine, Reysen, and Ganz (2008) did a study on the fundamental attribution error using a sample of 24 cities in the United States. Levine and colleagues proposed that there are three types of helping; direct help vs. indirect help or giving what one has, informal help vs. formal help or planned, serious vs. non-serious help (2008). The researchers tested these types of helping behaviors by conducting four field studies. The first was dropping a pen; the researcher would “accidentally” drop a pen in front of a subject. The subjects were scored as helping if they picked up the pen and called to the researcher to inform him/her of the pen being dropped (Levine, et al., 2008). The second experiment was having a hurt leg and “accidentally” dropping a pile of magazines in front of a subject. The subjects were classified as helping if they either offered to help or helped without first offering. (Levine, et al., 2008). The third experiment was changing a quarter; the researcher would ask a person if they had change for a quarter and were considered helpful if they checked their pockets for change (Levine, et al., 2008). The fourth experiment was an observation of walking speed. The researchers measured out a distance of 60 feet and timed subjects as they walked the total distance in order to get a good indicator of pace of life (Levine, et al., 2008). After conducting a one-way MANOVA with region being the independent variable and the three types of helping

behavior as the dependent, the results did not reveal a significant regional difference.

The researchers compared the sex differences of each helping behavior and found that men helped more than women. There was a difference; however, in pace of life, women had a slower pace than men (Levine, et al., 2008). After looking at this research it is apparent that even if a person is in a rush he/she might still help another person.

Patricia Oswald proposes that people try to explain others' behaviors by engaging in perspective-taking activities (Oswald, 1996). She is looking at altruistic helping, which is a considerate concern for others' wellbeing (Oswald, 1996). She explains that there are two types of perspective taking; cognitive perspective taking and affective perspective taking. Cognitive perspective taking is the ability to recognize and understand the thoughts of others (Oswald, 1996). Affective perspective taking is also referred to as affective recognition and is the ability to identify and understand how another person is feeling (Oswald, 1996). Oswald assembled participants into groups but was individually assigned a perspective-taking task. The results of the study were that the perspective-taking condition significantly influenced altruistic behavior (Oswald, 1996). When looking at gender differences in altruistic helping the amount of time volunteered did not differ significantly between the genders (Oswald, 1996). This research helps to identify that gender differences do not play a role in helping behaviors.

Taking a look now at whether or not mothers and children's psychological problems affected prosocial development Hay and Pawlby tracked children's development from birth to the age eleven (Hay & Pawlby, 2003). Hay and Pawlby defined prosocial behavior as behaviors which are positively reactive to others' needs and wellbeing (Hay & Pawlby, 2003). The researchers used all types of data collecting

methods and used parents, teachers, the children themselves as informants of the behaviors (Hay & Pawlby, 2003). The first part of the experiment was to interview the mothers when they were pregnant and judged the level of postpartum depression. The second part of the experiment was visiting the families at home on when the children were four-years-old. The researchers assessed the mother's past and current psychopathology (Hay & Pawlby, 2003). Children were also rated on the psychological problems by the parent's word. Another researcher was brought in to assess the mother's and children's psychological wellbeing without being aware of the results from the previous researcher. The second researcher rated the cooperativeness of the child and interviewed the mother (Hay & Pawlby, 2003). The third experiment was run on the child's eleventh birthday and assessed the mother's current psychological state and compared it to the past assessments. The mother again gave insight into child's psychological problems (Hay & Pawlby, 2003). A second researcher again came in without knowledge of the previous researcher's findings and interviewed the child. The results of the study were at the age of four the children who participated in the cooperative task with their mothers had significantly fewer problems (Hay & Pawlby, 2003). At age eleven, children diagnosed with significant emotional disorders were not any different than other children in showing prosocial behaviors (Hay & Pawlby, 2003). After reviewing this article, it is a little clearer that maybe childhood experiences play a role in helping others as an adult.

Harbaugh and Krause looked at children's altruism in public (Harbaugh & Krause, 2000), again suggesting that childhood events lead to adult behaviors. The researchers looked at the development of altruistic and free-riding behavior in 6-12-

year-old children (Harbaugh & Krause, 2000). The researchers conducted experiments with children randomly assigned to groups of six. The researchers gave the children poker chips and told them at the end of the experiment they could use the tokens to buy items (Harbaugh & Krause, 2000). The researchers gave the children a cup and an envelope and asked them to put the tokens they wanted to keep in the cup and the ones they would contribute in the envelope. When tokens were placed in the envelope the whole group would receive more back than if the children were to keep the tokens in their cup (Harbaugh & Krause, 2000). The results of this study indicated that more children contributed two tokens more than any other amount (Harbaugh & Krause, 2000). Looking at the behavior results of the study, there is little evidence that the subjects learned to free-ride during the experiment (Harbaugh & Krause, 2000). Overall, the results showed that children gave more over time (Harbaugh & Krause, 2000), which says that children are as concerned with others' wellbeing as adults.

Maybe religion plays a role in altruistic helping. Religion provides specific reinforcements and punishments (Saroglou, et. al., 2005). The researchers conducted experiments to test if religiousness negatively associated with indirect aggression (Saroglou, et. al., 2005, p. 326). The results of this study found that men were less religious than women and that religiousness was negatively correlated with aggressive behaviors (Saroglou, et. al., 2005). So, maybe being religious plays a role in helping behaviors because being concerned with others' wellbeing is highly sought after. A second study was conducted to test if religious people would help people, who were close to them more, like family members, rather than a stranger (Saroglou, et. al., 2005). The results of this study were that participants varied on their willingness to help and

that those who were close to the participant, like family members, were helped more than those not known (Saroglou, et. al., 2005). This indicates that people will help others who are friends or family members more than people they do not know. This goes along with the current study that people who walk in or out of a door will hold it open for a friend, co-worker, or relative over somebody else who is also going through the door.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

In this study the subjects were undergraduate students of Lindenwood University taking classes in Young Hall. This building is used for classes and is flooded with students throughout the school day. Observations were done in the front of the building from a bench in the main entrance hallway. There were 50 subjects observed for door holding behavior ten minutes before classes have started (when people are more in a rush) and ten minutes after classes have started (when people are not so rushed).

### **Materials and Procedure**

To be able to judge the distance the person having the door held was from the door, I first used a tape measure to measure out the distance of the path leading up to the front door of Young Hall and marked every foot with a dry erase marker. I stationed myself on a bench in the hallway of the main entrance to Young Hall so the path (Appendix A) and the door were easily viewed for observations. After setting up, I collected data writing down the time of the door holding, gender of the door holder, the distance the other person was from the door, and the gender of the person the door was being held for on a data sheet (Appendix B).

## Results

Unfortunately the hypothesis, people are less likely to hold the door for others ten minutes before a class period begins (when they tend to be more rushed), than ten minutes into a class period even if somebody is five feet away was not supported statistically. In order to determine whether people were more likely to hold the door longer for others 10 minutes into a class period compared to 10 minutes before a class period, a point-biserial correlation analysis was conducted with time of observation as the dichotomous variable and distance between the door holder and the person following as the continuous variable, it was found that the rush ten minutes before class compared to ten minutes after class have began and the distance the other person was from the door did not have a relationship . It did not matter when the door was held for another person,  $r = .080$ .

A 2 (gender of door holder) X 2 (gender of person door being held for) chi-square analysis for the gender of the door holder and the gender of the person the door is being held for was also conducted. After conducting a chi-square for the gender of the door holder and gender of the person the door was being held for it was apparent that men held the door more for women than for other men. But, these results were not statistically significant enough to mean anything,  $\chi^2 (1) = .965$ ,  $p = .326$ .

## Discussion

The results indicate that there is no a relationship concerning the time of day the door holding behavior happens and there isn't really any significance in gender differences in door holding behavior. The results did not support my hypothesis, people are less likely to hold the door for others ten minutes before a class period begins (when



they tend to be more rushed), rather than ten minutes into a class period even if somebody is five feet away. The reason there was not any significance or a relationship in the data could be because of repeat subjects in the building. While conducting research in a classroom building gets many subjects, a researcher also acquires many of the same subjects; this is definitely true if data collection is done on the same days of the week at the same times. There were a few limitations for this study and they would be the amount of subjects observed, the difference in the times classes begin, and the time observations were done. Things to do differently for this study would be to pick a specific day of the week to do the observations, like only Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays or just Tuesdays and Thursdays; that way there is not a time difference when the classes start. Another thing I would change would be trying to find more of a gender difference in door holding behavior. I would accomplish this by observing a male dormitory building and a female dormitory building. This study allowed me to learn a lot about the behaviors of others and why they tend to help others. Even though there was not any significance or a relationship of my data I think with a bigger sample there could be a chance of the statistics being significant.

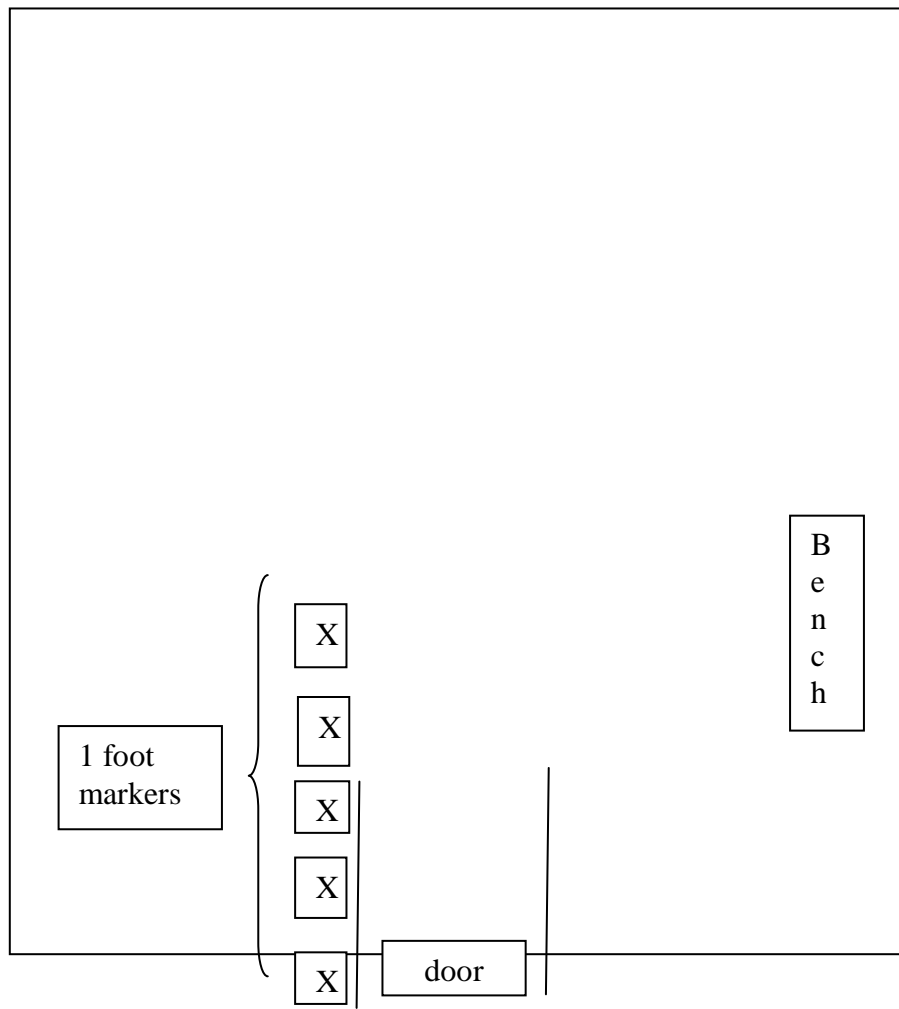
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### Appendix A



YOUNG HALL FRONT ENTRANCE

