

THE INTERACTION OF THE DOOR: HOW ONE  
ASKS FOR IT TO BE OPENED AND THE  
RESPONSES OF THOSE WHO DO

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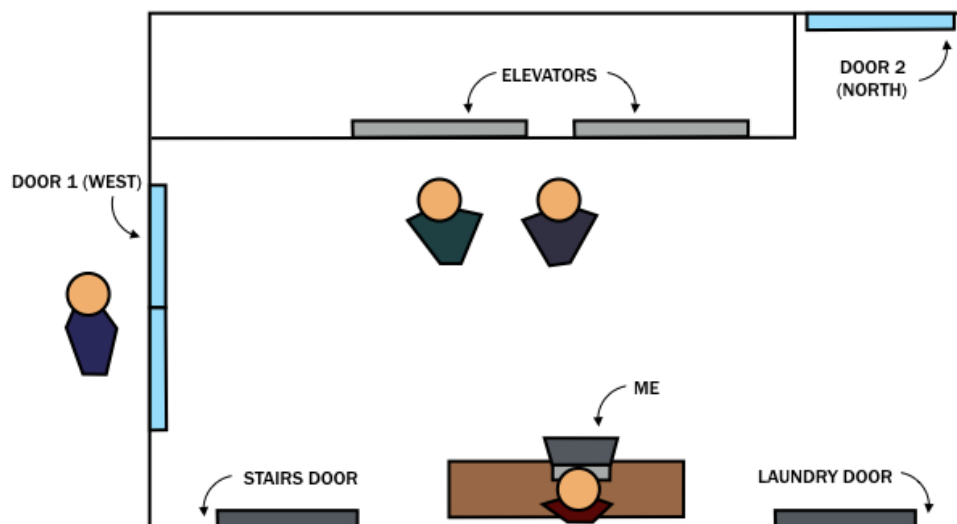
Abstract:

It is not an uncommon phenomena to see individuals, inside the lobby of a building, open the door for someone at the door. The goal of this study was to understand how one asks to be let in, the responses of those inside the building to that request, and further interactions. We used an ethogram for pre-determined behaviors that were applied to six categories, three for those asking and three for those opening, in terms of the prompt given, ability to open the door, how the door was opened, and subsequent responses. Surprisingly, we found that the most common prompts were to simply stand at the door and stare inward. Most people within the building would open the door if they were heading out or would nudge it open while waiting for the elevator. Additionally, most of those asking *could* get in, but preferred that someone open the door for them. These results were surprising as they indicate that eye contact, for the majority of the time, is enough to both indicate a desire to be let in but have someone do that for them. Additionally, if individuals could not attract the gaze of someone inside, they would not look to them for aid and would either open it themselves or wait for another available person.

Introduction:

Imagine yourself in a lobby, waiting patiently for the elevator. To your left are doors to enter the lobby that require the use of a card key that only residents have. A person is walking up to those doors from the outside. Would you open the door for them? Some say no: they would never think about opening the door when someone was capable; but many said yes. No other animal would perform this behavior, why would they expend energy and remove that protective check of residency? However, many people think nothing of it, they would do it without even questioning *why*.

In this observation study, I wanted to explore what leads people to open the door for another. Specifically, are there certain prompts that a person trying to get in gives, how does the person who can open it react, and any further interactions. I conducted this study in the lobby of the Tamarack apartments where I could have a clear view of those waiting for the elevator and those approaching the doors (this can be seen in Fig. 1). It was both convenient and has a consistent flow of students coming in and out throughout the day.



**Figure 1:** Model of the lobby with my position, people waiting at the elevators, and a person approaching the door.

#### Data / Methods:

To collect observation data of the interactions of individuals, I noted the behaviors of each based off of ones I had initially declared in an ethogram. I defined the person or persons wanting to enter the lobby as ‘asker(s)’ and those who could open the door from inside the lobby as ‘doer(s)’. I wanted to note the behaviors of the asker in terms of **(R1)** an initial prompt to open the door, **(A1)** whether they had the means to open the door themselves, and **(R3)** a response to doer’s response to their prompt. For the doer, I recorded the **(R2)** response to the asker’s prompt, **(A2)** how they opened the door, and **(R4)** if they had any response to the final response of the asker. Both the doer and asker behavioral categories are represented by Fig. 2. I made note of the characteristics of the people in terms of gender (M: Male, F: Female) and race (W: White, A: Asian, I: Indian, H: Hispanic, B: Black). As only second-year students can live in this building, age was not a significant factor.

#	ASKER					DOER				
	Gender	Race	(R1) prompt	(A1) can open	(R3) response to (R2)	Gender	Race	(R2) response to (R1)	(A2) how open door	(R4) response to (R3)

**Figure 2:** The chart represents the categories for which data was recorded for the asker, doer, and ‘#’ for the door involved (we had two to choose from).

Moreover, I had an ethogram (modeled by Fig. 3) as behavioral options for each category. To collect data, I sat on a bench in the lobby where I would be able to clearly see the faces of both the askers and doers. Although the lobby does have two doors, Door 1, the west-facing one, is primarily used as it is the main door. Door 2 was used infrequently and is not an appropriate door to study as the slot to enter the card code is not on the door but on a wall, unseen by those in the lobby, as it is used for wheel-chair access. Therefore, I primarily concentrated on Door 1. I used my laptop to record the observations by filling in the appropriate, pre-identified behaviors, for each category for each individual. I conducted this study across two days, a Thursday and Wednesday, both in the late afternoon, 4:10-5:10 pm and 5:40-7:00 pm respectively. I chose this time because I thought there would be a good flow of individuals as classes usually end around that time and people are heading out to dinner. Over the course of these two days, I recorded  $37 + 28 = 65$  individuals. My observations can be viewed at this link: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1DdfKGB\\_97Z6elkMWeCecPcUbH7yVufsDGQdsBRViXI0/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1DdfKGB_97Z6elkMWeCecPcUbH7yVufsDGQdsBRViXI0/edit?usp=sharing). I've also included a brief example of them in Fig 4.

	BEHAVIOR DESCRIPTIONS	CATEGORIES
K	knock on the door	R1
W	wave hand	R1
V	said something like "hello?"	R1
P	point with finger	R1
B	beg with hands in prayer position	R1
SS	stand at door and stare into lobby	R1
SP	stand at door but stare at phone	R1
SPP	sit down outside and stare at phone	R1
S	smile	R1, R2, R3, R4
N	node	R1, R2, R3, R4
A	have a card key and either have it out or attempt to insert it	A1
B	want a person to open the door but it is unclear of whether they have the means to open it themselves although we assume they usually do	A1
C	waiting for someone to let them into the building (usually waiting for the friend to come get them)	A1
W	make eye contact and walk over to the door	R2

A	either no eye contact or acknowledgement	R2, R3, R4
PA	on phone and no acknowledgment	R2
H	hold the door open so the person can pass without having to touch the door	A2
N	nudge the door open by bumping it usually with knee, hip, or hand	A2
O	fully open the door because they were already exiting	A2
T	verbal thanks like “thank you”	R3
P	look back at phone	R3, R4
W	verbal welcome like “your welcome”	R4

**Figure 3:** Ethogram of all the behaviors I defined, tried to identify, and would apply to the appropriate category.

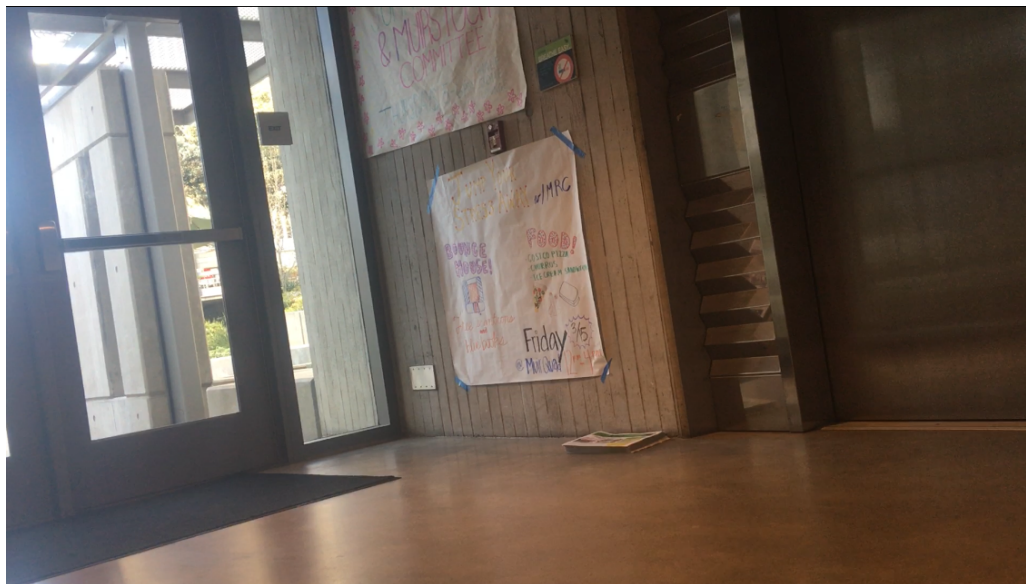
	ASKER						DOER					
#	G	R	R1	A1	R3	Comments	G	R	R2	A2	R4	Comments
1	M	A	SS	B	A	has food in hand	M	A	W	H+O	A	hold open but walks out of lobby
1	M	A	N	A	A		F	B	W	H+O	A	
							F	B	W	H+O	A	

**Figure 4:** Example of data collected during Day 2. The first row of data indicates that this took place at Door 1 (1), the asker was a male (M) and Asian (A), just stood at the door and stared in (SS). The doer was a male (M), Asian (A), and walked over to the door (W) when he saw the asker standing and staring. I assume that the asker could enter because he had food in hand and I have seen him in the building before (A). The doer opened, held open the door, and walked out (H+O). Other than that, there were no acknowledgements to the actions of each other (A). The next two rows can be read similarly but this case has 1 asker and 2 doers.

As I was the only observer, it was not able to conduct a traditional inter-observer check. Instead, because I had identified which behaviors I was looking for during the first day, I wanted to see whether, a week later—for the final day, if I was able to use the same behaviors without having to go back to the definitions and notes I have myself which would indicate that they seemed reasonably obvious to identify. During the first day of recording observations, I noted a major challenge in recording observations. I wanted to ensure that the subjects would not ask me to open the door so I tried to keep my attention locked on my computer, typed continuously, and wore headphones to seem like I was blocking out sound (though nothing was being played). If I did not keep my head down and my attention focused away from the door, then people would either knock or turn their head trying to capture my gaze in the expectation

that I would open the door or they might have felt uncomfortable having someone watch them. This brought up the issue of intervention: I could not open the door for them because I was not a participant. However, I could not have a sign indicating that I could not do so because I was conducting research as my goal was to do disguised participant observation. Therefore, it was a challenge to balance not participating by acting as though I was engrossed in work (and oblivious) and observe primarily out of the corner of my eye during the interaction (after they had entered or exited the lobby, I could study them without obstruction).

Due to the issues I had faced with the asker's trying to gain my attention, during the second day, I decided I wanted to test out a theory. I wondered if the lack of someone's gaze—not being able to see their eyes—would be enough to know they would not be able to attract their attention and communicate a desired action. To do this, for every few people, I tried to orient my body farther and farther away from Door 1, aiming more towards Door 2. Because I got to the point where my face and gaze was directed nearly opposite of Door 1, I had to use a camera (see Fig. 5) to record the interactions of people that I later reviewed to check my observations.



**Figure 5:** Screenshot of the video I took of the door and elevator. I realized later on that this is technically a private, not public place, and because of that I did not have consent of the subjects which is why I have not included any in this image.

The tables modeled by Fig 6 and 7, illustrate the observations recorded during both days. These only include observations based off of the ethogram although we had 10 occurrences of unique behaviors that are easily seen in the data collection on the Google Doc. For R1, the initial prompt, “stand and stare” (SS), was the most popular choice at 41.4%. For A1, the ability of the asker to open the door, “wait for someone to open” (B) was the most popular option at 40.6%. For R3, the response to the response of the doer, it was equally likely at 48.0% for the asker to say “thank you” or not acknowledge the doer at all. For A2, the way in which the doer opened the door, it was most common, at 39.1%, for them to open the door as they were leaving the building. For R4, the response to final response of the asker, most, 70.3%, of doers did not acknowledge the asker. There was only once instance in which there was an asker at Door 2. All the rest of the observations took place at Door 1. We also had a wide range of characteristics, covering all racial groups and both genders.

		ASKER				DOER					
R1: prompt	# Observations	A1: can open?	# Ob	R3	# Ob	R2	# Ob	A2	# Ob	R4	# Ob
SS	12	B	13	T	12	W	21	O	9	A	19
SP	7	C	12	A	12	A	5	N	8	W	4
S	4	A	7	S	1	PA	2	H+O	4	N	2
K	3					S	1	H	2	S	2
none	3										

**Figure 6:** Table for the number of observations for each pre-determined behavior that we determined in the ethogram that was identified for each category (example R1) for the asker and the doer. To read the chart, each row, for each category, has a different behavior.

		ASKER				DOER					
R1: prompt	% Observations	A1: can open?	% Ob	R3	% Ob	R2	% Ob	A2	% Ob	R4	% Ob
SS	41.4%	B	40.6%	T	48.0%	W	72.4%	O	39.1%	A	70.3%
SP	24.1%	C	37.5%	A	48.0%	A	17.2%	N	34.8%	W	14.8%

S	13.7%	A	24.1%	S	4.0%	PA	6.9%	H+0	17.4%	N	7.4%
K	10.3%					S	3.4%	H	8.7%	S	7.4%
none	10.3%										

**Figure 7:** Same as Fig 6 except the observations are shown in percentages that are comparable to those within its column. For example, for the observations of R1, we see that SS (stand and stare) is by far the most common and at 41.4% of the prompts.

### Discussion:

Going into this report, solely based on personal experiences, I expected people to both either nod or smile to those waiting in the lobby to attract their attention, as well as say “thank you” when people did. The results show the opposite: the majority of askers stand at the door and stare into the lobby or at their phones. The doers in the lobby typically will open the door when walking out or will nudge the door open while waiting for the elevator. After that interaction, both parties have no acknowledgement—no eye contact, no gestures, nothing. Although I did not record gaze, those majority of times when an asker stared into the lobby, he or she made eye contact with a doer. It seems as though we only need the eye contact of another to indicate the desire of an asker and a response by the doer. No prompts are necessary for this to be successful. I could not find correlations between a behavior and response as this is solely observation, but askers whom just looked in and stood by the door when doers were presented were almost always met with success in that a doer opened the door. Additionally, most of the askers could get in, but preferred that someone open the door for them. This indicates that they expect someone to understand their intention and perform this action.

This indicates that, because a prompt is not necessary, we do this interaction without much consideration, almost automatically, as we can quickly figure out what an individual wants with very little projected information. This almost unconscious action has led to more questions: why do people really open the door if a prompt is not the main motivator? I have five predictions: (1) “reciprocity:” you would expect the same done to you if your roles were reversed, (2) “altruism:” simply out of a desire to be kind, (3) “minimal effort:” why not open the door, which is only a few feet away, as they have time to kill



before the elevator is available, (4) “social norms:” a social pressure to act a certain way, and (5) “positivity:” want to feel like a nice person. These are potential motivations that need further, future study but they nonetheless may play a role.

For the second round of data collection, I attempted to see what would happen if I angled myself farther away from Door 1. In class we learned that seeing where the knees of a person point to can indicate where their attention lies. Additionally, I hypothesized that if you cannot see the eyes of someone, you have no hope of catching their gaze, so they will not try to. This is all anecdotal as it was tangential from my research topic, but I did identify a number of interesting observations. If individuals could still see my eye(s), some would still try to get my attention by waving or knocking, even if I was “engrossed” in work with my laptop out and headphones in. Even if they could still somewhat see my eye(s), they would still try. However, once they no longer could, as my head was directed completely towards Door 2, looking at the videos, people did not even glance in my direction. This impaired my ability to record observations in-person but it was successful in not being seen as a potential doer. On the other hand, it was interesting that individuals would not look to me for aid and would either just open the door themselves or wait for another available person to open the door. This indicates that we are always tracking the gaze of individuals around us and can assume limited success in having a request met without eye contact.

The most major limitation of this assignment was the issue of intervention and my “solution” to avoid those trying to attract my attention. This led to the issue of trying to record observations out of the corner of my eye for the most part. This clearly indicates that my observations may not be valid, especially as I recorded high numbers of no acknowledgement, possibly due to the fact that I may not have been able to see more subtle behaviors like smiling or nodding. In the future, it would be more practical to record the behaviors of the participants as being in-person had its issues in the form of a potential observer effect, intervention, and accurate recording. It would also be interesting to identify the motivations of those whom open the door as many seem to do so without understanding why.