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Laterality in the gestural communication of wild chimpanzees

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Manuscripts

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4 1 **Laterality in the gestural communication of wild chimpanzees**
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3 24 **Keywords**
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6 25 chimpanzee; gesture; handedness; laterality; communication
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11 27 **Running header**
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14 28 Laterality in chimpanzee gestural communication
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18
19 30 **Abstract**
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22 31 We examined hand preference in the intentional gestural communication of wild
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24 32 chimpanzees in the Budongo forest, Uganda. Individuals showed a tendency to be
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26 33 lateralized; on average, their absolute bias was around 0.25. Lateralization was
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28 34 incomplete even in individuals with major manual disabilities. Where individuals had a
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30 35 stronger preference, this was more often towards the right hand; moreover, as age
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32 36 increased, the direction (but not the extent) of hand preference shifted towards the right.
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34 37 While the gestural repertoire as a whole was largely employed ambilaterally, object-
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36 38 manipulation gestures showed a strong right-hand bias.
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46 **Introduction**

47 Analyses of hand preference in great apes have focused disproportionately on food-
48 related manipulation: for instance, picking up food,^{1,2} getting food out of containers,^{3,4}
49 processing natural foods,^{5,6} tool use while foraging,^{1,7,8} and begging for food;⁹⁻¹¹
50 however, see Marchant and McGrew^{12,13} for a broad analysis across limb functions. In
51 chimpanzees, captive studies have often reported strong individual and population level
52 right-hand biases,^{3,9,11} whereas studies conducted in wild populations largely report
53 ambilateral preferences in most manual tasks, with the exception of tool use. Tool use
54 appears to be highly lateralized in each individual but in no consistent direction in the
55 population.^{8,12} In the light of recent evidence from human studies, that hand preference
56 can vary markedly within individuals depending on the task in hand,¹⁴ it has become
57 increasingly important to examine great ape hand preferences in contexts other than
58 feeding, ideally in wild populations living under ecologically relevant conditions.

59 In our species, right-handedness and left-hemisphere laterality for language have
60 long been considered related, making studies of manual laterality in great ape
61 communication an obvious starting point. Great apes have a rich, elaborate repertoire of
62 gestures that they use in an intentional manner to communicate about specific goals to
63 other individuals.¹⁵⁻²⁰ Recent studies of gestural communication in captive chimpanzees
64 have reported both individual and population level right-handedness,^{9,21} with an increase
65 in right-handedness when gestures are produced together with vocalizations.¹¹ However,
66 to date, work on hand use in gestural communication has been limited to captive groups,
67 in particular to the use of gestures in begging and pointing for food; moreover, the
68 strongest effects were found in individuals with a history of human rearing.^{9,11}

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4 69 We recently conducted the first systematic study of gestural communication in a
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6 70 wild community of chimpanzees. This presented us with the opportunity to examine hand
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8 71 preferences in a very large database of gestures, produced across a full range of
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10 72 situational contexts, by all ages and sexes, and under ecologically relevant conditions.
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18 **Method**

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20 76 We define gestures as discrete, mechanically ineffective physical movements of the
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22 77 whole body, limbs and/or head, used in intentional communication (i.e. directed to a
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24 78 specific audience and towards a specific goal). Chimpanzees employ a repertoire of at
25
26 79 least 66 gesture types in their communication. We took it that a gesture was being used
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28 80 intentionally if it (or a sequence of gestures separated by <1sec) was accompanied by one
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30 81 or more of the following: checking of the recipient's state of attention, waiting for a
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32 82 response and, if none, then showing persistence or elaboration in further gesturing. (See
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34 83 Hobaiter & Byrne, 2011²⁰ for a full description of the repertoire and the criteria for
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36 84 intentional use.) A number of gesture types involve actions that would not easily reveal
37
38 85 any lateral bias, for example: Clap (both palms brought together with audible contact),
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40 86 Pirouette (signaler spins on their vertical axis) and Present-sexual (signaler approaches
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42 87 backwards, exposing swelling or anus to recipient). We excluded these gestures, and
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44 88 restricted our analyses to gestures of the hand and arms.
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53 90 *Subjects*
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3 91 At the start of data collection in October 2007, the Sonso study community of
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5 92 chimpanzees consisted of 81 named individuals. Following Reynolds (2005),²² we
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8 93 defined age groups as follows: infants (0-4yrs11mnths), juveniles (5yrs-9yrs11mnths),
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11 94 sub-adults (10yrs-13yrs11mnths♀/14yrs11mnths♂) and adults (14yrs♀/15yrs♂and over).
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14 95 Using these categories, the initial group composition was 32 adults (7 males and 25
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16 96 females), 16 sub-adults (10 males and 6 females), 15 juveniles (6 males and 9 females)
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18 97 and 18 infants (3 males and 15 females). Over the course of the 22-month study, there
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20 98 were 10 deaths or long-term disappearances, 6 immigrations and 5 births, leaving the
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22 99 final total at 82.
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26 100 A number of Sonso chimpanzees suffer from injuries caused by snare traps left in
27
28 101 the forest by bush-meat hunters from the local villages. In some cases the snare traps
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30 102 sever tendons resulting in paralysis and in particularly severe cases may cause amputation
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32 103 of the limb. The limitations of individual chimpanzees were well known and data from
33
34 104 individuals missing limbs or with damage to the whole hand or foot were examined
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36 105 separately.
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42 107 *Procedure*

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44 108 Observations were made on chimpanzees within the Sonso community during three field
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46 109 periods between October 2007 and August 2009 (October 2007–March 2008; June 2008–
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48 110 January 2009; May 2009–August 2009). We employed focal behaviour sampling
49
50 111 (Altman, 1974),²³ and filmed all instances of intentional gestural communication; in each
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52 112 instance the data recorded included the signaler, recipient, gesture type, and limb(s) used;
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54 113 for a detailed method and analysis protocol see Hobaiter & Byrne 2011.²⁰
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6 115 *Analysis*
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8 116 In any analysis of laterality it is important to ensure statistical independence in the data,
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10 117 and each datum must represent a choice of limb unaffected by external influences from
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12 118 the physical or social environment. For full details of the restrictions applied to the data
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15 119 set to ensure independence, see ESM: Independence in the data.
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18 120 To measure the direction of hand preference, both for individual chimpanzees and
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20 121 within particular gesture types, we used the hand preference index (HI). HI is calculated
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22 122 as $(R-L)/N$, where R=frequency of right-hand use, L=frequency of left-hand use and
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24 123 N=total use. The index varies between -1.0 indicating complete left-hand use, through 0.0
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26 124 (no preference), to +1.0 indicating complete right-hand use. Because the data are likely to
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28 125 include a different balance of use among the potential set of gesture types between one
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30 126 individual and another, and some gesture types may always be more lateralized than
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32 127 others, we needed to normalize the data to avoid confounding these effects. We dealt
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34 128 separately with (a) any possible effect of gesture differences in laterality upon individual
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36 129 chimpanzees' laterality estimates; and (b) any possible effect of individual differences in
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38 130 laterality upon laterality estimates for gesture types. Thus, we first calculated an
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40 131 individual's HI for each gesture type, and then calculated the individual's mean HI across
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42 132 gesture types. Similarly, we first calculated a gesture type's HI for each individual who
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44 133 contributed data, and then calculated the gesture type's mean HI across individuals.
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50 134 To measure the strength of hand preference, irrespective of direction, we used the
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52 135 absolute hand preference index (ABS HI), calculated as $ABS\ HI = \sqrt{HI^2}$. This varies
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55 136 from 0.0 (no preference) to +1.0 (complete hand preference in either direction). As with
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3 137 the direction of hand preference, we calculated an individual's ABS HI after averaging
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5 138 across gesture types, and for gesture types after averaging across individuals.
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8 139 In order to test whether or not individuals or individual gesture types were
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10 140 significantly lateralized in either direction we employed Goodness of Fit tests. This
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12 141 required us to pool an individual's data across gesture types (and across individuals in the
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14 142 case of gesture types), which runs the risk that pseudo replication may bias the findings;
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16 143 the results are discussed with this in mind. Goodness of Fit tests were only applied to
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18 144 individuals or gesture types that matched the requirement of a minimum expected 5-cases
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20 145 in each cell. In practice, as the null hypothesis was a 50/50 distribution between left and
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22 146 right hand use, this restricted the analyses to individuals or individual gesture types with
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24 147 10 or more gesture instances. Then, where the data were sufficiently homogeneous, a
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26 148 pooled Goodness of Fit test was used to verify whether or not generalizations, that
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28 149 appeared possible from analyses of individual chimpanzees or individual gesture type,
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30 150 were significant when examined at a broader level of analysis. For example, we
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32 151 compared all object manipulation gestures with all non-object manipulation gestures, and
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34 152 male chimpanzees with female chimpanzees. All means are shown with standard
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36 153 deviation; all statistical tests are 2-tailed.
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48 156 **Results**

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50 157 We recorded a total of 5026 gesture instances produced with concurrent evidence of
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52 158 intentional usage, distributed across 66 gesture types. When restricted to gestures suitable
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54 159 for examining any laterality effects, this reduced to 1274 instances across 20 gesture
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3 160 types: our analyses are all based on this sample, to which 54 individuals contributed data
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6 161 (individual range=1-191 gestures, 1-15 gesture types).
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10 163 *Do individuals show a hand preference when gesturing?*

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12 164 Absolute hand preference strengths (ABS HI) ranged from 0.0 to 1.0: from no bias to
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15 165 complete hand preference. (To avoid pseudo replication, we averaged the hand preference
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17 166 scores for each of the gesture types a chimpanzee used.). For the population, the mean
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20 167 ABS HI was 0.38 ± 0.32 (n=54). However, as can be seen in Figure 1, the only individuals
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22 168 that showed either zero or complete hand preference were those with less than four
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24 169 gesture instances, and individual variation in hand preference appeared very high with
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27 170 small samples. When we accordingly excluded individuals with fewer than 20 gesture
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29 171 instances the range of individual preference decreased, to 0.02-0.67 (n=21), and the
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31 172 population mean ABS HI became 0.25 ± 0.15 . An alternative way of estimating the true
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33 173 degree of lateral bias in this population is the mean, weighted by the number of gesture
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35 174 cases per individual, which gives an ABS HI of 0.26.
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41 176 *Are lateralized hand preferences in one particular direction?*

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43 177 Hand preference scores (HI) range from -1.0 to 1.0 (to avoid pseudoreplication, we
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45 178 averaged the hand preference scores for each of the gesture types a chimpanzee used.)
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48 179 For the population, the mean ABS HI was 0.15 ± 0.48 (n=54). However, once again,
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50 180 individuals with very low numbers of gestures produce spuriously extreme hand
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52 181 preference scores (see Figure 2). If we consider only individuals with more than 20
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54 182 instances of gesture use contributing to their individual hand preference index (n=21), 9
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3 183 had a left-hand preference and 12 a right-hand preference (range of individual preference
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5 184 -0.31-0.67; population mean 0.10 ± 0.28). Of these, only 5 were significantly lateralized,
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8 185 four to the right (Janet: $n=28$, $g=5.31$, $df=1$ $p=0.02$; Hawa: $n=29$, $g=6.04$, $df=1$, $p=0.01$;
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10 186 Zefa: $n=47$, $g=7.91$, $df=1$, $p=0.005$; Nick: $n=85$, $g=20.63$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$) and one to the
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12 187 left (Zed: $n=66$, $g=4.97$, $df=1$, $p=0.04$); the group as a whole was too heterogeneous to
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14 188 combine (heterogeneity goodness of fit G : $g=55.55$, $df=20$, $p=0.00003$). Eleven of the
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16 189 individuals with 20+ instances of gesture use had hand indices of >0.25 or <-0.25 , i.e.
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18 190 showed clear lateralization. Among this more lateralized group, two individuals showed a
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20 191 left-hand preference (HI range $-0.3 - -0.36$) and eight showed a right-hand preference (HI
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22 192 range $0.26 - 0.67$); this difference was not significant (Exact binomial test two-tailed,
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24 193 $n=10$, $p=0.109$).

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32 195 *Is there an effect of age on individual hand preference*

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34 196 For this analysis, individuals were assigned to four age groups: infants, juveniles,
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36 197 subadults and adults. As the study was conducted across 3 years, individuals frequently
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38 198 contributed data to more than one age-group, so the total number of ‘individuals’
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40 199 included in age related statistics ($n=114$) was larger than the actual number of
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42 200 chimpanzees in the population ($n=54$), and the sample size for each ‘individual’ was
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44 201 smaller than in other analyses. In this case, employing our previous restriction to
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46 202 individuals with 20+ gestures would eliminate the majority of individuals (from $n=114$ to
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48 203 $n=15$), so we relaxed the criterion to include individuals with 10+ gestures ($n=38$).

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51 204 We found a significant effect of age on the direction of hand preference (One-way
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53 205 Anova: $F=3.16$, $df=3,34$, $p=0.037$), with individuals becoming more right-handed with
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3 206 age (Figure 3). There was no effect of age on the strength of hand preference (One-way
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6 207 Anova: $F=1.34$, $df=3,34$, $p=0.261$).

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10 209 *Do snare injuries determine hand choice?*

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12 210 We examined the gesturing of 8 individuals with major snare injuries (hand amputated or
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15 211 paralysed). Six of the snare-injured chimpanzees preferred their healthy hand; one
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17 212 preferred the snared-hand, but only 2 cases of gesture use were recorded; and one
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19 213 individual had severe snare-injuries to both hands. As a group the snare-injured
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21 214 individuals were more lateralized than healthy chimpanzees (healthy group: $n=21$, mean
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23 215 ABS HI= 0.25 ± 0.15 , snare-injured group: $n=8$ mean ABS HI= 0.68 ± 0.32 , t-test: $t=5.07$,
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25 216 $df=27$ $p<0.0001$). However, injured individuals varied greatly in their degree of hand
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27 217 preference (ABS HI snared individuals: range= $0.12-1.0$). Only 2 of the 4 individuals
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29 218 suitable for statistical testing with a binomial test (gesture cases $n>10$, individual data
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31 219 pooled across gesture types) were significantly lateralized (Zig: $n=35$, $p=0.04$; Kana:
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33 220 $n=20$, $p<0.0001$), both in the direction of the less injured hand.

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41 222 *Does lateralization vary among gesture types?*

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43 223 Within the 20 gesture types suitable for analysis of lateralization, strength of hand
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45 224 preference scores (ABS HI) for each type ranged from 0.0 to 1.0, with mean 0.38 ± 0.32 .
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47 225 (To avoid pseudo replication, we averaged, for each gesture type, the scores of each
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49 226 chimpanzee who contributed to the index.) However, as with the ABS HI scores for
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51 227 individual chimpanzees (Figure 1), variation in the ABS HI scores of gesture types
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53 228 decreased with an increase in the number of gesture instances. If analysis is restricted to
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3 229 gesture types with 20+ instances of the gesture type (n=8), the ABS HI range is 0.01-0.32
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6 230 and the mean ABS HI is 0.20 ± 0.11 .

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8 231 Within the repertoire we found no clear direction in hand bias: 10 gestures had HI
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10 232 index scores of less than zero, indicating some left-hand preference, and 10 above zero,
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12 233 indicating right-hand preference. The mean HI index for all gestures studied was 0.04
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15 234 ± 0.50 (n=20; see Figure 4); when gestures with fewer than 20 cases were eliminated, this
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18 235 rose to 0.17 ± 0.15 (n=8).

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20 236 While pooling individual data runs the risk of introducing pseudo-replication, we
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22 237 felt that given the low levels of hand preference within the population this might be
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25 238 worthwhile for investigating hand preference across gesture types. Twelve gesture types
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27 239 had 10 or more instances of use (after pooling across all individuals) and could be tested
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30 240 for hand bias with individual goodness of fit tests. Five of these showed a bias, one to the
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32 241 left (Arm shake: n=11 $g=4.82$, $df=1$ $p=0.028$), four to the right (Big Loud Scratch: n=222
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34 242 $g=4.63$ $df=1$ $p=0.031$; Object Shake: n=261 $g=5.85$ $df=1$ $p=0.016$; Object move: n=103
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36 243 $g=6.13$ $df=1$ $p=0.013$; Hand fling: n=44 $g=7.58$ $df=1$ $p=0.006$); all other gestures were
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38 244 non-significant (Slap object with object, Punch object/ground, Arm swing, Slap object,
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40 245 Reach, Leaf clipping, Arm raise). The variation across gesture types was too
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43 246 heterogeneous to pool into a single repertoire score (heterogeneity goodness of fit
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45 247 $G=21.04$, $df=11$, $p=0.033$), indicating that the use of different gesture types did not fit a
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48 248 single pattern of hand bias. However the fact that two right-biased gestures involved
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51 249 object use led us to carry out an additional analysis

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53 250 We investigated whether or not object manipulation (OM) was a significant factor
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56 251 by separating OM gesture types from non-object manipulation (NOM) gesture types. OM
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3 252 gestures were found to be sufficiently homogenous to combine, and the combined OM set
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5 253 showed a significant right-handed bias (OM total $G=11.98$, $df=2$, $p=0.003$; pooled
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8 254 $G=11.31$, $df=1$, $p=0.0008$; heterogeneity $G=0.67$, $df=1$, $p=0.414$). NOM gestures were
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10 255 also found to be sufficiently homogenous to combine, but in this case the combined NOM
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12 256 set did not have a significant hand bias (NOM total $G=19.54$, $df=10$, $p=0.034$; pooled
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14 257 $G=2.85$, $df=1$, $p=0.091$; heterogeneity $G=16.69$, $df=9$, $p=0.054$).
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20 259 **Discussion**

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22 260 Communicative gestures of wild chimpanzees at Budongo show very flexible hand use:
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24 261 none of our subjects employed a single hand exclusively, and estimates of the strength of
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26 262 hand preferences decreased with increasing amounts of data. Nevertheless, none of these
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28 263 chimpanzees displayed perfect ambilaterality; there were consistent hand preferences
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30 264 even in individuals with extremely large sample sizes; and the community as a whole
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32 265 showed a slight right-hand bias.
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36 266 If one requires that an individual's hand use be significantly lateralized to be
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38 267 classified as a preference, then our findings correspond to Level 1 in McGrew and
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40 268 Marchant's suggested framework 'most individuals in a group (or deme or species) are
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42 269 ambipreferent and only a minority of individuals are lateralised to either side to varying
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44 270 degrees'.¹³ Perhaps one of the most striking examples of incomplete lateralization is seen
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46 271 in the snare-injured group of chimpanzees: although they had more pronounced hand
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48 272 preferences than healthy chimpanzees, individuals persisted in gesturing at times with
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50 273 their injured hand even in the face of massive physical deformity (e.g. complete
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52 274 amputation of one hand).
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3 275 A possible explanation for this striking flexibility is that there is an environmental
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6 276 benefit for ambilaterality in chimpanzee gestural communication; in other words, being
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8 277 able to use either hand confers some advantage to a communicating individual. In termite
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10 278 fishing complete lateralization was found to confer a small but significant advantage,
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12 279 with 100% handed individuals more efficient in gathering termites;⁸ this might explain
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15 280 the tendency towards lateralization in chimpanzee tool-use. The circumstances are
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17 281 different for gesturing, however. Feeding chimpanzees are rarely engaged in other
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20 282 activities, in marked contrast to gesturing chimpanzees who may well be grooming,
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22 283 travelling, or playing at the same time. In addition, tool use usually occurs on the ground,
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24 284 in open areas, whereas communication may occur anywhere: while hanging from a
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27 285 climber, or travelling through dense undergrowth. Under these conditions it may be that
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29 286 the ability to communicate with either hand - and, by doing so, to avoid having to stop
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31 287 any concurrent activity or locomotion - represents sufficient advantage in maintaining
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34 288 flexible use of either hand, even in the face of massive physical pressures such as
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36 289 permanent injury. Testable predictions of this theory include (a) an individual's manual
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38 290 lateralization should decrease when forced to operate in more difficult locations, for
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40 291 example when using tools to break into arboreal beehives; (b) an individual's gestural
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42 292 lateralization should increase in less complex environments with no other concurrent
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44 293 activities, for example in captivity.

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48 294 Despite the strong evidence for ambilateral hand use in gestural communication in
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50 295 the wild Sonso chimpanzees, it is difficult to completely dismiss the pattern of small but
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52 296 consistently right-handed biases we have found. More individuals favoured their right-
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55 297 hand to some extent, whether we consider all individuals, only individuals with more than
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3 298 20 cases of gesture use, or only individuals with stronger hand preferences. Mean
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5 299 population hand preference, after correcting for any bias from either individuals or
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8 300 gesture types, was to the right. Individuals become more right handed with age. The one
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10 301 gesture class that showed significantly lateralization, the object manipulation gestures,
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12 302 was lateralized to the right.

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15 303 Our finding that right-hand use increases with age supports the similar findings
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17 304 from captivity⁹ and suggests that this is not, as has been suggested,¹³ simply an effect of
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19 305 human enculturation or exposure to a human designed environment.

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22 306 Perhaps our most interesting finding is that of the striking right hand bias in object
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24 307 manipulation gestures, which highlights the potential task-specificity of hand preferences.
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26 308 Although several (less lateralized) gestures involve the use of an object or the ground *as a*
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28 309 *substrate* (for example, object slaps or stomps), in the case of the (lateralized) Object
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30 310 shake or Object move gestures, the object is *actively manipulated*. In captive gorillas,
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32 311 hand preferences for uni-manual actions have been found to be affected by target
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34 312 animacy, with inanimate targets eliciting increased right-hand use.²⁴ Those authors
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36 313 suggested that ape brain structures involved in object manipulations, such as tool use,
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38 314 may have served as a precursor to those involved in language processing, so that a pre-
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40 315 existing bias to left-brain processing led to the left-lateralization of language. Data from
41
42 316 wild gorillas are consistent this suggestion. The hierarchically-organized food processing
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44 317 skills of wild gorillas have been noted as ‘syntactically’ structured, like a phrase-structure
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46 318 grammar.⁶ And several of these food-processing routines showed significant right-
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48 319 handedness⁵. Our findings on chimpanzee gesture, however, suggest an alternative or
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3 320 additional explanation for human right-handedness: that language might have been
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5 321 'scaffolded' on a primitive substrate for intentional communication in great ape gesture.
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11 12 13 324 **Acknowledgements**

14
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19
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27
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4 416 **Figure captions**
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8 **Figure 1.** Absolute hand preference index (ABS HI) for individual Sonso chimpanzees
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10 (n=54) plotted against each individual's total number of gesture instances, of the 20
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12 gesture types coded for laterality. The mean across individuals, weighted by the number
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14 of gesture cases, is indicated as a single line.
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20 **Figure 2.** Hand preference index (HI) for individual Sonso chimpanzees (n=54) plotted
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22 against each individual's total number of gesture instances, of the 20 gesture types coded
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24 for laterality.
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31 **Figure 3.** Black bars represent mean absolute hand preference index (ABS HI) for each
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33 age group, plotted on a scale of 0-1; White bars represent mean hand preference index
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35 (HI), plotted on a scale of -1 to +1. Only individuals with 10 or more gesture instances
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37 contributed data to the group mean.
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44 **Figure 4.** Hand preference index (HI) of individual gesture types (n=20), plotted against
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46 the frequency of observed instances.
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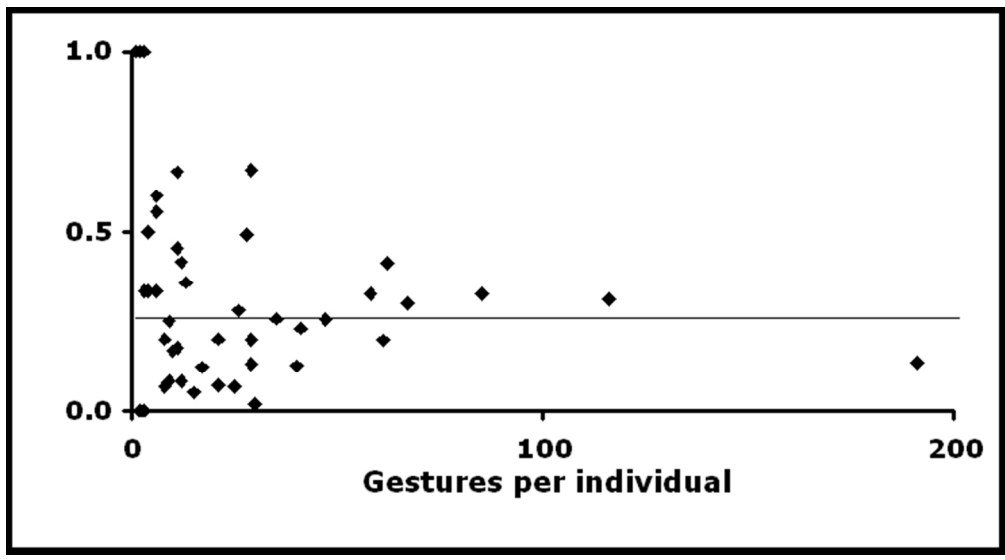


Fig 1
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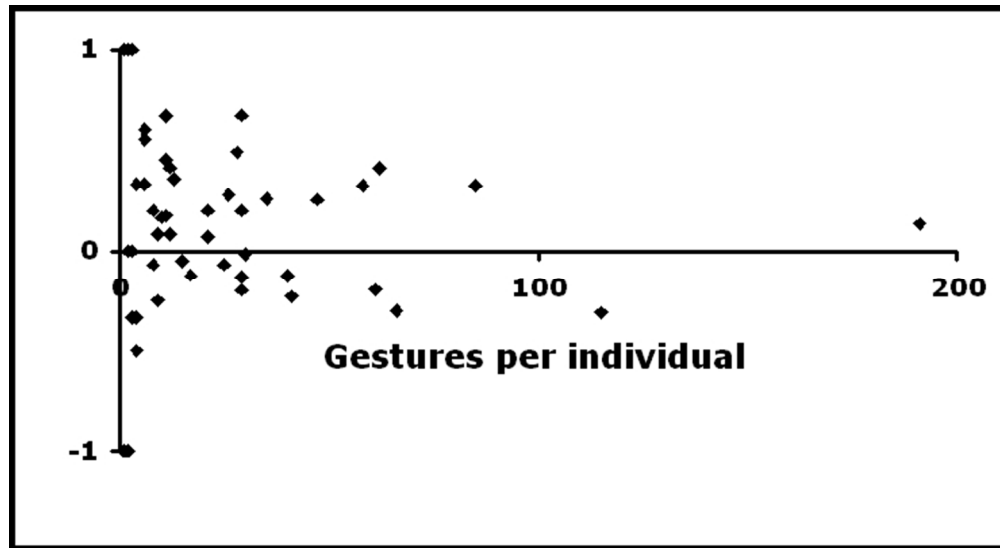


Fig 2
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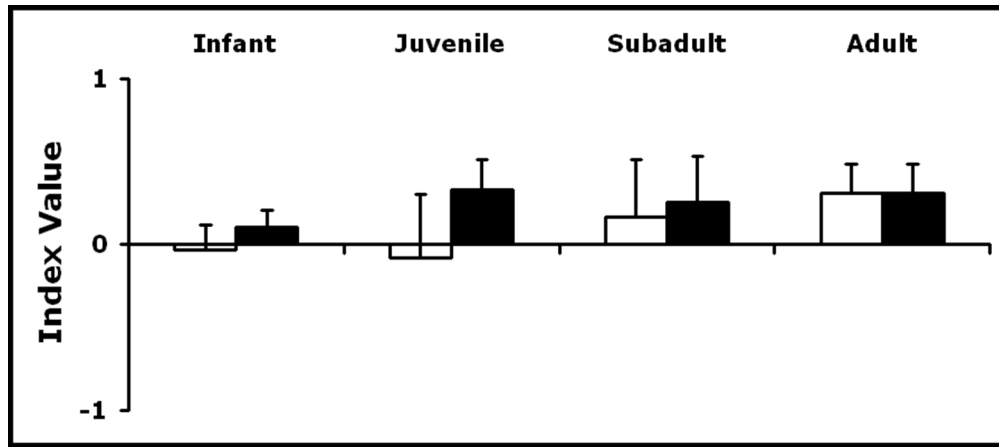


Fig 3
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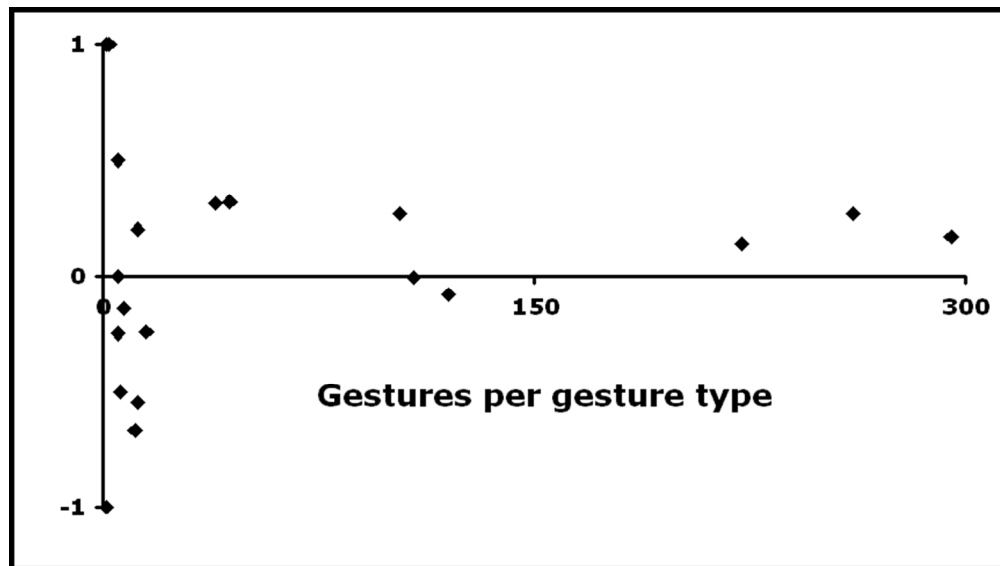


Fig 4
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