

In the preface of *Gestures* by Desmond Morris, it is stated "... social intercourse depends heavily on the actions, postures, movements, and expressions of the talking bodies."¹ According to multiple dictionary sources, a gesture is "a movement usually of the body or limbs that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude."² Most commonly, gestures are made with the hands. Hands are important because they express many emotions involuntarily. Where emotional states are concerned, gestural information may be even more important than verbal. It is interesting to observe the social environment in which hand gestures are being used by today's generation of youth. Profanity is taken a little more lightly in today's world, both verbally and non-verbally. People express themselves more freely with it. This realization led to the question, "*Has Pop Culture inevitably absorbed the counter-culture of symbols and gestures?*"

The use of hand gesture can be seen as a way for people to access information more privately than if it was spoken vocally. When people use offensive gestures, they are also expressing their emotions in a way that gets across to their audience. When a person is upset at another and does not want to engage in physical or violent contact they will often resort to using gestures as a way to express their frustration.

There is an increase of evidence pertaining to use of profane gestures in America due to a growing celebrity popularity of hand signs. In both rural and urban areas of the country, there is wide usage of gestures, like "The Middle Finger." This gesture is known for sparking a reaction in the person that the finger is given to. The reaction can be pleasant or not so sweet depending on the addresser and person being addressed, their relationship and their personal upbringing. Usually when people speak in heated conversations gestures are used as a sort of translation to further emphasize their words. Offensive gestures seem to enhance the main idea of the conversation when used at every stage of sentence structure, however they can be distracting when used repetitively.

Gestures can be easily misused, depending on the orientation of the hand or the cultural context. Gestural Conversations refer to the action of the body matching rhythms of the voice. "*The voice can place emphasis on any word, the body cannot do the same.*"³ Thus it is crucial that hand gestures motion in the correct direction as to which the speaker is speaking. If the gesture is off with the vocal dialogue, it can be confusing, for example, when it comes to using the "V-sign," depending on the time. When the sign is used can result in negative or positive affect on the viewer. An almost scandalous "V-sign" photo is that of Conservative leader Mrs. Thatcher making a Palm-Back V-sign at a moment of triumph, following an election gain. Due to her hand position, according to some cultures she appears to be using the insulting version of the gesture, however she meant to give "Victory V-sign."

When traveling to foreign countries American people are often unaware of their usage of offensive hand gestures, like the "Vertical Bull Horn." In America it is used frequently at rock concerts but in other countries, this gesture is known to be as a "*gross*

¹ Morris, Desmond. *Gestures*. London. Cape. 1979. Page 1.

² Morris. *Gestures*. Page 1.

³ TMucci (Producer). (2009). *Observing Body Language*. Available from <http://www.youtube.com>

insult of a special kind.”⁴ In America it is seen as a way to indicate good music but in some European countries, it is used to indicate to someone that their wife has cheated on them.⁵ When concluding my research, I found that offensive gestures in America are not necessarily offensive to Americans because they are tolerated more often than not. Where as in foreign countries a majority of the gestures we use are seen as disrespectful.

Inspired by the creations of graffiti artists of the 80s and 90s, my art piece consists of a self-standing billboard that features five cast molds of hand gestures that are painted colors in order of dislike. By the completion of my project, I know it will vary in how people perceive my cast molds because it is a very subjective piece. This is basically what I am trying to state with my project - that gestures are typically not universal in meaning.

In Conclusion, I chose to do my final project on offensive hand gestures due to the fact that they can be interpreted in different ways depending on the region and the attitude of the gesturer. As of most recent years, it is seen as an almost immature form of communication. I plan to bring attention to hand gestures as not only an art form but also as a testament to the influence of Pop Culture on today’s youth.

⁴ Morris. Gestures. Page 40.

⁵ Lefevre, Romana. Rude Hand Gestures of the World: A Guide to Offending without Words. Texas. September 7, 2011



Kaushik. *Vertical Bull-Horn*. "Rude Hand Gestures Of the World." Amusing Planet. October 8, 2011. <http://www.amusingplanet.com/2011/10/rude-hand-gestures-of-world.html>



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