

Being left handed



What do Marilyn Monroe, Paul McCartney, Billy the Kid, Pablo Picasso, and Leonardo DeVinci have in common? On the surface, not much. But on closer inspection, one can see a small similarity: they are all left-handers. Years ago, being a lefty was considered an ill-omen. In Colonial days, it was thought that the left hand was the devil's hand. Being left-handed could even get a person accused and convicted of witchcraft. Even within the past century, left-handedness was frowned upon. Teachers and parents of a young lefty would sometimes tie the left hand behind the child's back to discourage use. Nuns in Catholic schools would give a tap in the wrist with a ruler to chastise the child for using his or her left hand. Due to these punishments, there are few true left-handed people in their sixties or older. Those who are left-handed usually have equal or greater use of their right hand, due to years of forced usage. In 1994, being left-handed does not hold the stigma that it used to. Today, 10-15% of the world's population is left-handed, and the number is growing. The growth in number of southpaws could be due to the fact that left-handedness is no longer taboo. The left-to-right ratio has narrowed so much in the past few years that companies are now making products to suit lefties' needs, including rulers, ladles, Turkish coffee pots, notebooks, scissors, knives, ice cream scoops, and saws. Most people do not realize that some of these items can cause hassles for the average lefty. For example, spouts on coffee pots are usually placed for easy pouring when the handle is in the right hand, which holds true for soup ladles and measuring cups. The binder on a notebook presents problems for lefty students: the metal spiral rests under the arm, which causes discomfort when writing. No one knows what causes left-handedness, but some scientists have come up with a few theories. One is that left-handedness is

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genetic. This is plausible since studies show that a child is 20% more likely to be a lefty if one of his or her parents is left-handed. There is, however, no concrete proof that handedness is a trait carried in the genes. Another theory asserts that left-handedness is due to trauma in the womb that leads to a dysfunction in the brain's left hemisphere, causing the right side to take over motor control. Also, many left-handed people were born through a process which may have required the use of forceps causing damage to the left side of the head. This would have forced the right hemisphere to take control of higher functions such as speech and writing. Still, others believe that it is a learning process which determines left or right handedness. Most babies reach for things and play with both hands, but by the age of three to six, children show a clear preference for one hand over the other. Parents who try to encourage left-handedness may continually place toys or objects in the left hand or left side. There are several organizations around the United States developed to make life easier for lefties. Some manufacture "lefty-friendly" items. There is a left-hander's desk calendar which boasts having within its 365 pages "all the facts, fun, and foibles about being a left-hander." There is also a left-hander magazine which includes facts, surveys, research studies, a contest for lefty of the year, interviews with celebrity lefties and a catalog of lefty products. Left-handedness is not a disability; lefties have quite a few advantages over their right-handed counterparts. Because southpaws depend on a completely different side of the brain than righties, they are often more creative, intuitive, and imaginative than other people. They have the element of an unexpected power in the left arm when boxing, playing tennis, and baseball which makes lefties harder to beat. Because the creative right hemisphere is dominating the logical left

hemisphere, lefties tend to be more artistic, musically inclined and original in thought. Being a lefty is not so bad. If one disregards ink smudges on hands and shirt sleeves and chalk dust on the length of the arm when writing on the blackboard, there really are not too many negative points. Left-handedness virtually ensures a unique perspective of the world, and will hopefully, someday become as common a trait as right-handedness. ?