

injecting sodium amobarbital into the carotids to determine lateralization. An aphasic injection response denoted the dominant hemisphere. Well, I stayed clear of the Psychiatry department for the next few years!

As I labored through courses and examinations, seated on chairs fitted with writing tablets on the right, many a supervisor gently probed “did you have a disabling accident?” as I stifled a groan, my outstretched left arm and hooked hand in position, racing against time!

In 1993 I landed on this side of the pond, in Brooklyn, NY. I saw more left handers in a room in a week’s time, than my 30 odd years put together! And seats existed, for us! I breezed through residency, plonking on the computer keyboards with my left hand, mouse snug in my right. Now, during fellowship, learning to work my way around the cardiac catheterization unit designed for the right-handed, was a new hurdle. However, I successfully trained my right hand to gain arterial access, in the right groin. Nowadays, with radial arterial access being preferred, left-handed trainees may have it easier than before.

Enough about me, all I can say is that I never took this as a burden or a curse. Like most left-handed individuals, I just adapted to the environment. Functional MRI, (safer than Wada’s test!) has proved that just 10% of left-handers process language in the right brain, thus most of us have Broca’s area in the left brain. Scientific research has done a reasonable job in debunking loads of misinformation floating around. For example, the notion of perinatal brain damage being a cause, and that left handers die 7 years earlier than right handers, has been disproven, thanks to studies using exceptionally large databases like the ongoing UK BIOBANK project, set up in 2010.

Ultrasound studies in pregnancies over the last decade showed that most,

but not all 2nd and 3rd trimester fetuses who preferentially sucked the right thumb went on to be right-handed, and those preferring the left thumb, mostly became left-handed. A host of other life factors may play a role, including birth weight, season of birth, and locally prevalent cultures in the given area. 10 % of the world’s population are left-handed and seen more in men than women.

The dark sinister implications of the left-handed being associated with the occult have long been prevalent.

da Vinci, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg, Oprah Winfrey, along with some recent American presidents, Bill Clinton, George W Bush, and Barack Obama. British royalty has its share with Prince William and his son George inheriting the trait from Queen Victoria. Cricket-greats like Sachin Tendulkar writes left-handed, but batted right-handed, Garfield Sobers was fully left-handed. No, left handedness does not confer superior intelligence, or creativity, there is an infamous list of left-handed criminals and terrorists including the Boston

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(Latin for left is sinister, or being gauche French for left, being careless) Mercifully better sense has prevailed, but the curiosity remains! Ancient Israelites, however, saw them in a different light. Ehud, a left-handed Judge, deftly slew a rival Moabite king. Also, it was not clear if the unusually high prevalence of left-handers in the tribe of Benjamin was genetic or acquired for military prowess. In contrast, Hindu Buddhist and Islamic cultures still consider the left hand unclean, with the left hand designated for ablution. In Asia, less than 1% of the Chinese population are left-handed!

An honor roll of left-handed includes Einstein, Newton, Leonardo

Strangler and Jack the Ripper!

The UK BIOBANK project, functional MRI and transcranial Doppler flow imaging have been invaluable research tools, and at least 41 genetic loci related to handedness have now been identified, making it a polygenic trait. Next, studying what makes some ambidextrous would be enlightening. From the days when left-handedness was synonymous with the Devil’s hand, we have indeed come a long way,

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