



# The Left-Hander Syndrome: The Causes and Consequences of Left-Handedness

*Stanley Coren*

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Nine out of every ten human beings are naturally right-handed. Those who were *not* right-handed were feared, shunned, or forcibly retrained in many periods and cultures. Indeed, some members of fundamentalist sects still regard left-handers as in league with the devil, and prejudices against left-handers are reflected in the multiple associations of right with good and left with bad that have become enshrined in everyday language and folklore. A “left-handed compliment” is actually an insult, and the dictionary definition of left-handed includes the terms “awkward,” “clumsy,” “ill-omened,” and “Illegitimate.”

In his summary of scientific research into sidedness, Stanley Coren rapidly dismisses the notion of the southpaw as somehow tainted. Increasingly we are coming to understand, however, that left-handedness does have social, educational, medical, and psychological implications.

Coren uses entertaining examples to illuminate the paths of research he has followed, and answers vitally important questions such as: What are the neuropsychological and behavioral implications of differences for left-handers themselves, as well as for their parents, teachers, spouses, children, counselors, and physicians? How can we determine our own patterns of sidedness? Are they encoded in our genes? And, very importantly, how can we make the world more comfortable and safer for left-handers? Coren persuasively argues that left-handers are an invisible minority who must define themselves and organize for self-protections in the same way that more visible minorities have done. Much (though not all) of the risk to which left-handers are exposed derives from the fact that the tools they use and the machines they operate are designed for right-handers, a flaw that given heightened public awareness would be easy to correct. Coren advocates a change in the way the right-handed majority treats its left-handed minority to eliminate the risks left-handers face.

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