

Right Brain Left Brain

By: Steve Gillman, January 31, 2006

The concept of "right brain left brain" refers to the two hemispheres of your brain. Some amazing experiments involving people who've had the corpus callosum cut taught us most of what we know about the differences between the two sides. The surgery is performed on epileptics to reduce the incidence of seizures, and it isolates most of the right hemisphere from the left hemisphere.

For a typical experiment, a divider allows a participant to see two objects - say, a cup with the right eye and a lemon with the left. When asked what they see, they'll say they see a cup, and nothing more, because most people process both language and information from the right eye with their left brain (left hemisphere). However, when they write down what they see, using their left hand, they'll write "a lemon," because both the left hand and eye are controlled by the right side of the brain.

Of course, you have only one brain, and the two hemispheres work together normally. These split-brain experiments show how distinct the two sides really are, though. When the corpus callosum is cut it is as if there really are two brains. What have we learned from these experiments then?

Left Brain

For more than 90% of right-handed people and 70% of left-handed people, the left hemisphere:

- Processes things more sequentially.
- It is more rational, logical, analytical, and objective.
- It looks at the parts.
- It handles normal speech.

If you want to stimulate and strengthen the thinking processes of your "left brain," talk about things as logically as you can. Also, picking apart an argument or something you read can exercise this part of the brain too. While there is little hard evidence as to the effects of specific exercises, talking or working on your analytical skills are safe things to do, so experiment freely.

Right Brain

Again, the following is true for most people. The right hemisphere:

- Handles things in more random and subjective manner.
- Is responsible for "hunches" and other intuitive processes.
- Looks more at wholes, and is best at pattern-recognition.

If you want to exercise your "right brain," sing. Stutterers find that they don't stutter when they sing, because it is handled differently than regular speech. Writing or reciting free-form poetry and studying maps may help as well. Again, these are not proven by scientific studies yet, but there is no danger in experimenting in these areas.

Right Brain Left Brain Dominance

Most of us seem to favor one style or another of thinking, and this may be an indication of the dominance of one or the other hemisphere. For example, it seems likely that the choice between joining the debating team or the art class in school has something to do with which side is dominant. You have probably noticed that left-handed people, who presumably have a more developed right hemisphere, are more often artists.

If you want to be more "whole brained" in your approach to things, you can start by working on your weakest areas, using some of the tips above. Also, you can bring both sides into whatever you do. For example, metaphors, a right-hemisphere process, can be used in logical (left hemisphere) debate. Artistic work can include more analysis. Can this really help balance your thinking? Probably. time and more research will tell. In the meantime, it cannot hurt to more fully use your right brain and left brain.