

## *The Diversity Experienced by Left-Handers: Reports of Five Different Generations*

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### **Abstract**

This research aimed to understand how people experience the condition of being left-handed. It was possible to locate the difficulties faced by this group, the advantages of being left-handed, discussing the significance of this difference, and the myths and prejudices faced throughout their lives. A theoretical study was conducted to clarify the concept of, left-handed throughout history and conceptions about this condition. We worked with non-directive interviews, focusing on the life stories in the pursuit of understanding the constitution of the person. Five women between 23 and 82 years old, represented different generations, which allowed us to identify changes in how school and society realized and acted in relation to the left-handed. The data demonstrate varied experiences, with cases of repression of handedness by family and school, and others in which there was no objection. Difficulties remained in the material aspect, such as using scissors and desks, for example. Common form, found that this difference reaches a minority group, even if it involves some difficulties, is not a negative experience. We found that the left-handed accepts and is pleased with his condition, he feels that belongs to a group in which people recognize and value, and although throughout history left-handedness has been considered something allied to evil and negative, today there is a new look. The left-handed like to be different, to stand out among the rest.

Keywords: handedness, left-handedness, school and family.

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## **Introduction**

The term lefthanded decades ago was related to the sinister, evil, dark and forbidden. It was as if being left-handed was a disgrace, a catastrophe, or even a criminal act. Today society understands the left-handed person as someone who prefers or is more skilled with the left side of the body, which does not necessarily imply a disadvantage or maladjustment to the most diverse environments and activities.

There are many discussions about the issue of laterality. There are two major strands that try to explain it. One of them understands that laterality is essentially biological and another attribute this aspect to the interaction of the organism with the environment. We understand that the latter are in constant interaction and need to be seen as a whole.

When we conducted some interviews with left-handers, we could see that the use of the left side has a biological determination, that is, there is a tendency for such use, but there is also an influence of the environment. In fact, two of the respondent underwent significant interventions, to the extent that their "biological" tendencies were modified by the school and / or the family.

We understand that both the primary social group (family) and secondary (school) are important roles for the conduction of lefthandedness. It is the function of these places and their human resources to help the children in their development, respecting their being.

The left-handed child differs little from the right-hand child. The main aspect that makes this condition special is the difficulty of handling some unadapted objects. It is necessary to provide a pair of left-handed scissors so that they do not suffer and work hard to carry out the tasks of everyday school. No less important is the school desk. To avoid the student having to squirm to study, the proper desk is extremely relevant. But is that all that changes? Does it mean that if we buy the materials, everything is quiet? And are not left-handed people any smarter? More artistic?

There are still so many statements that people hear about the lefthanded. I remember several situations in which I received a tremendous amount of assumptions about my condition. Some are positive, like having beautiful handwriting or being smart; others not so much, that we are all clumsy and distracted.

In doing this study, we learn from people's speech very rich aspects about what is to experience lefthandedness. As we chose to do so with subjects from different generations, we were able to follow the social and cultural aspects of each age and understand the relevance of the environment for the formation of the left-handed citizen.

## **Conclusions**

Left-handedness is identified as the preference or greater performance with the left side of the body, being it with the hand, legs or even the ocular laterality. There are people who have homogeneous laterality, that is, they are totally left-handed or right-handed; others may present a partial laterality, in which they perform different

activities, in different ways, that is, in some situations they use the right side, in others the left side; there is also contradicted laterality when there is interference in the "natural" tendency.

Left-handedness is not just a biological issue. Although we believe that we are born with a tendency, it is in the environment and in social interactions that we will define ourselves more precisely as left-handed or right-handed. In this research, we perceive the strong influence of the family and the school so that laterality manifests concretely.

In addition to a biological and a social aspect, there is in left handedness a fact that stands out: the identification of left-handed people with this condition and with the group of people who share the same characteristic. We have seen that lefties are proud to be like this, they like to be different.

We can see that although there are some difficulties for this group, especially with the use of scissors, the school wallet, can opener and other materials, there are many ways to overcome them. Whether you are using adapted materials, learning to do it your way or even with your right hand.

We also note that when there is a difficulty of another nature in the life of the left-handed person, it overlaps. We can infer that the difficulties of being left-handed compared to the disorders that a more serious obstacle brings, becomes an irrelevant condition.

Some families were responsible for encouraging or repressing their children to follow this "natural" trend. We heard stories of family members who did not allow the left hand to be used in any way. In counterpoint, we also heard cases of help and support from the mother so that the person had the best possible experience as left-handed.

In the educational spaces it was no different. We noticed the posture of some teachers, who were encouraging, and others, especially those related to sports, indifferent to the condition of their students, did not contribute to their development as left-handed athletes. We also found in one of the statements of our interviewees, a student of a religious college in the 1930s, the total prohibition of the use of the left hand by the nuns. Without possibility that it was different, it followed thus, to the point of being considered left-handed, but considered as a right-hand person.

We can also find different positions in society as a whole. In past times, left handedness has been associated with the devil, evil, dark side and the negative. It was forbidden and a taboo to be left-handed. Over the years, these concepts have undergone changes, and nowadays, left-handed people rarely face this type of prejudice. At most, it occurs on the part of older people or as a joke. However, these myths built historically have left their remnants.

This is strongly noticed in our language. Entering someone's home on the right foot indicates luck here in Brazil. Waking up with the left foot is the justification for a bad day. Just to mention two simple examples.

Although there are these myths, there are others neither so negative, or rather, very positive, that are part of everyday life: that the lefties are smarter, have the most beautiful handwriting, are good in sports. None of this is scientifically proven, but it is part of the symbolic universe of many social groups.

Nowadays left-handers seem to forget these past prejudices and care more about not being the same as most, standing out in front of so many similar people in this world, as if it were good to be different today. We find this aspect in the speech of all the subjects interviewed.

Although currently being left-handed is not a problem, it is necessary that educational spaces are prepared to receive them. We note the lefties complaint of the lack of left-handed school desks in classrooms. It is very important that this right is respected.

In families, a special look is necessary when the child begins to give the first indications of his laterality. Leave the objects in the center, so she chooses which hand to pick, and does not specifically point her to one side or the other. Allow the person to manifest freely in their uniqueness.

Each person is constituted in a unique way, through the experiences he or she has, of the people with whom he or she establishes meaningful relationships. To be able to present, in this research, a little of the reality of the lefthanded and its constitution was a pleasure. Knowing that this group of people is happy with their condition and feel prestigious in sharing their experiences was enlightening. We hope that looking at the left-handed person is always careful, because although they like to be as they are, there is no denying that they are different.

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