

# Split-brain theories gaining popularity, scientific credence

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Are you thinking with only half your brain?

Do you slow down your decisions while you weigh all the evidence? Do you discount your hunches; refuse to accept your intuitive feelings?

A lot of people do that — and they're missing a powerful part of the thinking process, according to certain researchers and educators whose ideas are becoming both popular and controversial.

You may be a left-brained literalist or a right-brained visionary but, given appropriate training, the dual-brain believers say, you should be able to shift gears and put your right or left brain into overdrive at will.

Ability to make this barely perceptible switch might influence the way you handle people, how you react to crises and challenges and how you make decisions. In your career, it could make the difference between being a bookkeeper, a middle-manager or the boss.

The idea, originating in California, that differ-

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ent modes of thinking may originate in one side or the other of the brain is already affecting three of the most influential areas of American life: education, management training and advertising.

A close watch of advertising, for instance, will detect cars promoted for "left brain thinkers" because of their engineering and for "right brain" customers looking for luxury. (If this sounds like a replay of an engineering sales pitch to men and a luxury sales pitch to women, it is: The right brain is supposed to be the feminine side of everyone's thinking.)

Educators, particularly those in the arts, suggest that de-emphasis of artistic studies robs children and adults of important decision-making powers. Some industry training programs are beginning to test fledgling managers for their intuitive powers as well as logical, problem-solving ability.

Here's how the idea works:

The left brain has been shown scientifically to be the center of speech, arithmetical problem-solving, and analysis. It is the closest in nature to a computer: data in — add, subtract and divide by known variables — equals data out. Damage to that part of the brain can destroy the injured person's ability to communicate.

The right brain sums up at a glance, recognizes a face, knows the way home from downtown or realizes that a speeding car is bearing down on you. What people often call a "gut feeling" actually comes from the right side of the brain, the split-brain advocates believe. It may say "go" when the analytical left brain says "wait." Another word for right brain in this context is intuition.

Caltech neurobiologist Dr. Roger Sperry won

the 1981 Nobel Prize in medicine and physiology for his studies of separate hemisphere brain function. He demonstrated the separate roles in work with epileptics who had surgery that severed the nerve fibers between the two halves of the brain.

Sperry's work has been described as "spawning a revolution in popular psychology and philosophy." Other scientists have suggested, however, that the Nobel prize winner's work is being used too broadly for unscientific arguments. English neurologist-playwright Jonathan Miller has deplored "the politicizing of the brain" in the pop psychology movement.

The right brain is supposed to be more open to new ideas than the old-data-burdened left.

Author of a best-selling book, "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain," (J.P. Tracher, Los Angeles, \$9.95), Monica Edwards recently conducted a conference in Miami on right brain function for art teachers.

The right brain is neglected in Western culture and education, said Ms. Edwards. Art and music, which the right brain accepts more readily than the left, are the first to go when educational budgets are cut, she said. And yet art studies, by putting a person into closer touch with the right brain, sharpen the powers of observation.

Ms. Edwards' book, which works on the premise that even the least artistic of people can learn to draw, is aimed at teaching people to see more clearly what is in front of them. It is largely a book of observation techniques.

Most people's drawing ability is arrested around the age of 10, Ms. Edwards writes, when school-work moves into more arithmetical or word-oriented pathways. Decades later, adults will draw a face, for instance, the same way they drew it as a child. The powers of perception — right brain powers, Ms. Edwards says — are frozen when they should be developed alongside the left brain's step-by-step logic.

If General Motors, Ford and Chrysler executives were as good at art as they are at reading balance sheets, the American auto business might be in better shape, Ms. Edwards suggested in an interview.

American business leaders are "object-oriented" thinkers, she said. Japanese businessmen, by contrast, look at their task in the way artists study an object they are about to draw — they see the object and its surrounding "negative space." The big picture. "The Japanese regard the object and the surround (sic) as of equal importance," said Ms. Edwards. (To get the idea, look at something near you, then concentrate on the edges, the space

Narrowly focused on one object, the big car, as the only thing for the American motoring public, Detroit automakers paid insufficient attention to "changes that were occurring in the surround," including the American public's growing acceptance of smaller cars, said Edwards.

Logic lost out to vision — the Oriental visionary overtook the American business thinker. More flexible Japanese manufacturers shifted gears in the 1970s to meet the demands of the changing situation, said Edwards. American auto makers were locked into "the way we've always done it."