



## Unconventional Wisdom

Richard Morin, Columnist

### More Evidence That Lefties Have the Right Stuff

Left-handed men who attended at least a year in college go on to earn significantly more than their right-handed classmates -- even more reason they'll be celebrating International Left-Handers Day on Sunday.

"Among the college-educated men in our sample, those who report being left-handed earn 13 percent more than those who report being right-handed," said economist Christopher S. Ruebeck of Lafayette College. Ruebeck and his research partners, Joseph E. Harrington Jr. and Robert Moffitt of Johns Hopkins University, reported the findings in a new working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

And lefties, stay in school: Those who finished all four years of college earned, on average, a whopping 21 percent more than similarly educated right-handed men. Curiously, the researchers found no wage differential among left- and right-handed women.

They based their conclusions on an analysis of data from the federally funded National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, a nationally representative survey of approximately 5,000 men and women first interviewed in 1979, when they were 14 to 21 years old. Their analyses was based on the 1993 follow-up survey, when respondents were 28 to 35. Left-handers made up about 10 percent of their sample and the population as a whole.

While evidence of a wage gap was unequivocal, explanations for the disparity proved more elusive. Differences in biology and brain function are two possibilities. Nor do the

researchers know why they didn't see a similar effect among women.

"We do not have a theory that reconciles all of these findings," they admit.

The study is the latest to suggest there's something special about lefties. Other researchers have found that left-handers are over-represented on university faculties, as well as among gifted students, artists and musicians.

### The Missing Baby Girls in the Year of the Horse

Old superstitions die hard -- and in South Korea, beliefs in astrology remain so strong in that fertility rates plummeted and thousands of abortions were performed in 2002 because parents didn't want to give birth to a daughter in the dreaded Year of the Horse.

To South Koreans, the Year of the Horse is viewed as a particularly bad time to have a girl, Jungmin Lee and Myungho Paik report in the latest issue of *Demography*. Koreans, as well as people in several other Asian countries, have believed since antiquity that each person is destined to possess certain characteristics depending on where his or her birth year falls in the 12-year astrological cycle.

These beliefs are still so deeply held that couples delay having children in a horse year, induce abortions if they believe their baby will be a girl or deliberately misreport their daughter's birth year, the researchers found.

Between 1970 and 2003, the overall fertility rate dropped by about 8.9 percent in South Korea in the horse years of 1978, 1990 and

2002, only to quickly rebound, wrote Lee, who teaches at the University of Arkansas, and Paik, a graduate student at the University of Texas. In 2002, fertility declined by 7.5 percent.

"The decrease in fertility in 2002 is, by and large, due to birth timing," they found. There are approximately 29,900 missing girls or female pregnancies: 86 percent by birth timing, 3 percent by misreporting and 11 percent by abortion -- a positive sign, these authors suggest, since more than 20 percent of the fertility decline in 1990 was due to parents deciding to abort female fetuses.

"The large effect in 2002 has an important implication: zodiacal preferences have not disappeared, indicating that zodiacal preferences survive rapid social changes accompanied by economic development and social propaganda against the culture of the Horse," they concluded.

### **Analysis Shows 'IQ Gap' Closing**

There's new evidence that the disparities in the IQs of blacks and whites may have narrowed by about a third in the past three decades.

"The constancy of the black/white IQ gap is a myth," William T. Dickens of the Brookings Institution and James R. Flynn of the University of Otago in New Zealand write in a Brookings working paper to be published in *Psychological Science*. "Blacks have gained 5 or 6 IQ points on

whites over the last 30 years," they write, suggesting that the differences in black and white IQ scores stem from environment and not something hard-wired into the races.

The researchers analyzed nationally representative samples of blacks and whites on four different tests of cognitive ability.

### **Who Would Have Thought? *Math Minors and Really Fast First Impressions***

*"Can Business and Economics Students Perform Elementary Arithmetic?"* by Lionel G Standing, et al., *Psychological Reports*. A Canadian researcher and his colleagues administer 10 questions from a third-grade arithmetic test, and only 40 percent answer all the questions correctly.

*"First Impressions: Making Up Your Mind After a 100-Ms Exposure to a Face"* by Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov, *Psychological Science*, Vol. 17, No. 7. Princeton researchers find that people shown a head shot for a tenth of a second and asked to judge the subject's attractiveness, likability, trustworthiness, competence and aggressiveness made essentially the same judgments as they did when their viewing time was increased.

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