Aesthetics and the brain

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The age-old question as to what constitutes beauty has been subjected to yet another wrinkle. Research has been presented showing that left-sided brain people perceive beauty differently than right-sided ones. Beauty is and has been perceived through the ages through individual eyes. Perhaps different cultures encourage different zones of desire and contentment; also, people of different ages may have different views. Whatever the cause or conditioning, our visions encourage that beautiful zone. Is it due to our youth’s environment, perhaps where our mother’s left side of the brain influenced our concepts early, relating to beauty?

When I was presenting cosmetic periodontal techniques in Sicily, Italy, at a congress dedicated to aesthetics in dentistry, Dr DeLucca, an exquisite prosthodontist with exceptional aesthetic prosthetic results, brought up factors and questions regarding the effects of aesthetics from the right and left sides of the brain as well as the male/female dominance in their respective spheres.

The brain has been relegated to different functions on its left and right side in several factors. The right side is said to be more analytical, more detailed, as well as more scientific, mathematical, computeristic, logical and analytical. In general, the right side is usually related to males. The left side of the brain is, in general, attributed to the female gender. Its characteristics are said to be non-verbal, intentional, emotional, excellence in spatial relationships, and good colour perception.

In the past 20 plus years of dentistry, aesthetics has changed the face of the profession. This is not meant to be a pun but an actual fact. The desire by patients to electively choose to have dentistry is a huge leap from its image of yesteryear. Not relying on motivation from pain or trauma, patients are eagerly trying to improve their
appearance orally. A wonderful bright smile can light up the face and the public is now aware of this fact. At about the same time that cosmetic improvement was encouraged by our profession, the profile of the dental school population started to change. The number of female dental students became more predominant than ever before in the United States. Was this the left side of the brain making its mark?

The initiating pioneers in the dental aesthetic field, Drs Irwin Smigel and Ron Goldstein, forged awareness to the public as well as dentists, and encouraged the patient to request looking better orally. In turn, they encouraged the dentist to provide the services that stimulated dental companies to research and provide better aesthetically appearing, yet formidable, restorative materials. Did it take these pioneers the use of the right side of their brain to forge this field of aesthetics?

In other countries throughout the world, the number of female dental school graduates has been higher than males for years. In addition, 85 per cent is the common percentage of female dentists practicing in many such countries. In the US, that number hovers at about 50 per cent.

Does the right side of the brain dominate our field with the necessary precision that is demanded? Have the materials in dentistry today improved so much that there is compensation in techniques to allow the left side of the brain’s activity to transcend and emit an aesthetic sensitivity for the patient’s appearance? Can the individual dentist utilise the left and right side of his or her brain as noted in today’s terminology by the expression ‘crossover’?

Will the economic turmoil of today affect the demand by patients for cosmetic dentistry beyond the necessary health requirements? I know that for me to find the answer regarding the male/female, left and right brain relationships, I should smilingly have to ask my wife.

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