



Left- or right-handed

Video transcript: Clip from *Countdown to Life: The Extraordinary Making of You* (BBC Two, 2015)

MICHAEL MOSLEY:

Boxer Tom Stalker is one of the 10% that favours the left. He has to live in a world skewed to the right.

In 2012, he captained Britain's most successful ever Olympic team. This might offer a clue to why natural selection hasn't bred out left-handedness.

TOM STALKER:

I'm just very awkward. If you ask any orthodox, they'll go, "He's just horrible, he's a nightmare, you know."

BOXING OPPONENT:

They throw shots from different angles.

I probably feel a lot more vulnerable against a southpaw than I do against an orthodox because of the feet.

He always has the foot on the outside, and so by him having his foot on the outside, it makes me having to adjust my feet a lot more, which sometimes I'm worried about adjusting my feet, which makes me makes mistakes.

MICHAEL MOSLEY:

We can be confident that the proportion of left-handers hasn't changed for 10 thousand years, because 10% of tools archaeologists uncover are for lefties.

It seems plausible that in the past, when battles between warring tribes were fought hand to hand, left-handers like Tom would have had an advantage.

So they were more likely to survive a fight and pass their trait onto another generation.

TOM STALKER:

Here you go again, look.

BOXING OPPONENT:

Me, I'm stuck.

MICHAEL MOSLEY:

If that's true, then you might expect more left-handers in sports like boxing, tennis, cricket and baseball.

And that turns out to be the case. There are more than three times as many left-handers in these sports than in the normal population.