

# The Science of Us

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No one could accuse the boy's self-appointed trainers of lacking ambition or being sticklers for ethical research.

Psychologist John Watson of Johns Hopkins University and his graduate student Rosalie Rayner first observed that a 9-month-old boy, identified as Albert B., sat placidly when the researchers placed a white rat in front of him. In tests two months later, one of the researchers presented the rodent, and just as the child brought his hand to pet it, the other scientist stood behind Albert and clang a metal rod with a hammer. Their goal: to see if a human child could be conditioned to associate an emotionally neutral white rat with a scary noise, just as Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov had trained dogs to associate the meaningless clicks of a metronome with the joy of being fed.

Pavlov's dogs slobbered at the mere sound of a metronome. Likewise, [Little Albert eventually cried and recoiled at the mere sight of a white rat](#). The boy's conditioned fear wasn't confined to rodents. He got upset when presented with other furry things — a rabbit, a dog, a fur coat and a Santa Claus mask with a fuzzy beard.

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