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## *Bedales Psychology Newsletter*

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Welcome

Hello and welcome to the first edition of the Psychology Newsletter! This is a newsletter made for anyone interested in studying the human mind and behaviour, not just psychology students. In this issue we will be giving a general introduction to the psychology course, what has happened in the case of little Albert and interesting articles and papers that we have read. We hope you enjoy!



### **History of Little Albert**

One of psychology's greatest mysteries appears to have been solved. "Little Albert," the baby behind John Watson's famous 1920 emotional conditioning experiment at Johns Hopkins University, has been identified as Douglas Merritte, the son of a wet-nurse named Arvilla Merritte who lived and worked at a campus hospital at the time of the experiment — receiving \$1 for her baby's participation.

In the study, Watson and graduate student Rosalie Rayner exposed the 9-month-old tot, whom they dubbed "Albert B," to a white rat and other furry objects, which the baby enjoyed playing with. Later, as Albert played with the white rat, Watson would make a loud sound behind the baby's head. After a number of conditioning trials, Watson and Rayner reintroduced the animals and furry items without the scary noise. Through the conditioning, the animals and objects that were once a source of joy and curiosity had become a trigger of fear. Watson had no reason to reveal Albert's true identity, and he never de-conditioned the child.

Little Albert's fate and identity have been a recurring question among psychology scholars. Beck and his associates scoured historical materials, conferred with facial recognition experts, met with relatives of the boy they theorized was Albert.

Eventually, the pieces of the puzzle came together. The attributes of Douglas and his mother matched virtually everything that was known about Albert and his mother. Like Albert's mother, Douglas's mother worked at a paediatric hospital on campus called the Harriet Lane Home. Like Albert, Douglas was a white male who left the home in the early 1920s and was born at the same time of year as Albert. What's more, a comparison of a picture of Albert with Douglas' portrait revealed facial similarities.



Sadly, the team also discovered that Douglas died at age 6 of acquired hydrocephalus, and was unable to determine if Douglas' fear of furry objects persisted after he left Hopkins.

Not much is actually known about the psychological state of 'Little Albert' after his participation in Watson et al., experiment on classical conditioning, as his identity was not revealed and the boy who the team of Psychology scholars does not know for sure if Douglas and 'Little Albert' were in fact the same person.



### **Bedales Psychology**



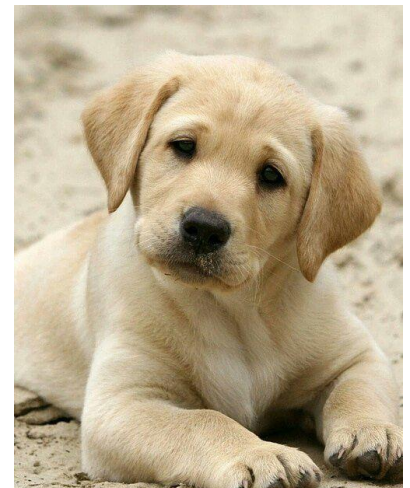
Following the exams this June, the psychology department has decided to teach lessons a little bit differently. Whereas before, the theory behind a topic was all taught in class, now students will read about their topic for the lessons and will then have discussions, apply the theory in real life situations and do essay practice in class. The exams showed that there is a very strong focus on essays and of course to get better grades we need to focus on the weak areas, which in this case is essay writing. This new way of teaching will help students become more independent learners helping them prepare for university. Revision sessions and extra lessons have been put in place for those who need a little bit more help grasping the knowledge.



### **Further Reading**

A neuroscientist, Attila Andics, at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, and his colleagues recently shed light on canine understanding of human speech. As is commonly thought, dogs can and often do respond to their owner's verbal cues based on aspects of paralanguage, such as voice quality, rate, pitch, volume, intonation and stress. But it has been discovered that dogs do in fact have the capacity to understand human language, regardless of the context it's used in. This study will likely shake up research into the origins of language, scientists say.

To conduct his research, Attila and his colleagues ran extensive neuroimaging in different dog breeds while their owners spoke meaningful phrases (such as: "well done!") followed by meaningless statements (such as: "as if"). All phrases were spoken in a neutral tone as well as in a praising tone. Using the gathered data, the scientists found that regardless of the trainer's intonation, the dogs processed the meaningful words in the left hemisphere of the brain, just as humans do. They did not process the meaningless words, however, which suggests a discernible difference between words that have meaning to dogs and those that don't. They further discovered another area of the brain that was activated in dogs



when they were addressed in a praising voice: the reward area. Meaning and tone enhanced each other, similar to humans.

My take on their research: dogs have clearly been domesticated for a very long time in history and have naturally evolved beside humans to a significant extent. It would be foolish to think this had no effect on the dog's cognitive development.

Cats, on the other hand, as we all know, have a much different attitude towards humans – they tend to be indifferent about our lives. Considering that cats have for a large portion of human evolution been predators and in strict avoidance of forming friendships with strangers; it seems to me that this clearly supports the idea of dogs developing cognitive abilities to process human speech as a consequence of evolving alongside us. You can read the full article at:

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/08/video-your-dog-understands-more-you-think>

I also highly recommend checking out the rest of the Science website: [www.sciencemag.org](http://www.sciencemag.org)

Nature vs Nurture in Psychology – article by Saul McLeod  
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/naturevsnurture.html>