

THE MAD SCIENTIST'S CLUB: SCIENTIST PROFILE

MONKEY SCIENTIST

LAURIE SANTOS

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN THE DEPT. OF PSYCHOLOGY AT YALE UNIVERSITY, CONNECTICUT.

She compares monkey and human thinking.



Job Description:

Laurie designs experiments to measure the thinking abilities of primates such as rhesus macaques in Cayo Santiago near Puerto Rico and capuchin monkeys in her laboratory in Connecticut. One experiment showed that a rhesus monkey will take a grape from an unwatched plate 90 out of 100 times. This is seen as evidence that monkeys think like us.

Biography:

When Laurie was young, she played with dolls, on the computer, and writing stories and poems. Her favorite subject was history. She like hearing about how people behaved in the past and why they did the things they did. Studying monkey behavior is actually very similar to studying history. Looking at the thinking and behavior of monkeys living today is a window into how our forefathers thought and behaved millions of years ago. Laurie grew up near the shore, so she kept a very big collection of beach glass. She liked how the sand and surf smoothed it out. The collection is still at her mom's house today.

She was a pretty good student in school, but had really bad penmanship. The most important learning tool for her is curiosity. Being a scientist is all about being curious and wondering about the ay the world works. She kept a journal which was like her own private blog with her thoughts and what happened during the day. Laurie planned to be a lawyer until she took a class in evolution and was fascinated. She really wanted to understand what made humans different from other animals. She started taking some psychology classes and got hooked. She's never looked back since. There have been times when she wanted to quit, but "science is all about working through difficult times," she says.

Laurie's advice for young scientists:

"My first pieces of advice would be to do what you love. If you like animals, get involved at your local zoo, even if it's just volunteering, or try starting your own pet-walking service. Whatever you like. Try to get involved now. My second piece of advice would be to read, read, read. Your library has lots of books on cool topics that you might be interested in. So you should dive in and learn more about what interests you."

For more information about Laurie's work, click on:

<http://www.yale.edu/monkeylab/Main/Research.html>