

#IAmABiologist

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What does your day-to-day look like as a neuroscience PhD student?

There is a lot of data analysis, coding (I find it satisfying to debug my code!), making pretty plots. I study innate behaviour in mice, so some of my days involve performing surgeries or running experiments. Other days, I'm reading papers.

What is your current topic of research?

I'm interested in how the brain processes competing interests. For example, when you accidentally burn yourself on the oven, you may feel discouraged from using it in future. How does your brain push beyond the fear when you're hungry? This research could have many implications, including for anxiety and PTSD.

From the biological sciences, why did you choose to study neuroscience?

I really enjoyed my Psychology class in high school, fascinated by the number of unanswered questions in the field. I took a gap year before university and took psychology classes at my local university. Learning about intriguing cases like that of Phineas Gage, I was hooked.

What are your career aspirations given your expertise and background?

I would like for what I do to help people, be it directly or tangentially. What drives me on the whole is to view my career path through this altruistic lens. If there is a small population that my work is helping down the line, I'd be happy. In terms of exploring paths outside of academia like the pharmaceutical industry - if that is where my vision takes me, I'd be content. In the world of pharma, I know that turnaround can be faster, for example.

Could you give us a brief picture of your career trajectory thus far?

In high school in the US, I loved writing and journalism. But my immigrant background also motivated me to do science. After studying Maths, Chemistry, Biology, Psychology, and History, I did a Master's in Neuroscience at King's. There, I really enjoyed the process of lab work researching spinal cord injuries.



What advice do you have for students who want to become biologists?

Try to persevere. With time, you eventually find your niche. Ultimately, getting experience in a lab environment is important for becoming a biologist. However, don't focus only on science - I've learned that no matter what you end up doing, it's important to learn how to present yourself as a human being. I've found inspiration in literature and global history, for example.

