Laura Flashman uses a combination of cognitive testing, anatomic imaging, and functional magnetic resonance imaging to understand the brain and behavior. Her work focuses on schizophrenia and other psychiatric diseases, mild cognitive impairment, early Alzheimer’s, and traumatic brain injury.

How did you decide to go into your field?
Before graduate school, I took a fantastic course in Behavioral Neurology at the Harvard Extension School. Each week the professor presented a case with the person present—one week someone with aphasia, one week someone with temporal lobe epilepsy, one week someone with spatial neglect. I was hooked and knew that I wanted to study neuropsychology.

If you weren’t a scientist, what would you like to be?
I would like to be an actress (I have been accused of being overly dramatic!), but I get stage fright. I think I probably would be an accountant.

Are there misconceptions people have about your work?
I deal with really basic misconceptions all the time when I talk to people about both neuropsychology (“Does that mean you can read my mind?”) and schizophrenia (“Isn’t that having multiple personalities?”).

What famous person, either living or dead, would you most like to meet?
I’d like to meet John Nash, the Nobel-Prize-winning mathematician [and the subject of A Beautiful Mind] who also suffers from schizophrenia.

What do you admire most in other people?
Integrity, intelligence, ability to share knowledge in a way others can understand, productivity, and a sense of humor.

What do you ultimately want to discover?
A way to improve the quality of life for people who suffer from severe mental illness.