



A Little Bit of Lacquer's Dr. Laura Scott

Becoming a doctor is a huge accomplishment unto itself, requiring years of study, sacrifice and discipline. But if you're a smart, driven, black Latina it can often feel like a Herculean feat. Dermatologist Dr. Laura Scott and her close cohort of friends created a bond that strengthened and protected them as they navigated and excelled at Harvard University and beyond. Today, under her Instagram handle LauraLacquer, she has a large and growing audience that look to her for inspiration and a little bit of lacquer.

Maria Murriel:

Since you're a fan of Latina to Latina, then you must check out Tamarindo podcast with Ana Sheila Victorino and Brenda Gonzalez. Tamarindo podcast features Latinx voices at the intersection of politics, pop culture and life. With the addition of Anna Sheila the show will also delve into wellness, stress detox and balance. Join in on the fun as hosts and guests discuss important issues impacting the Latinx community, the latest chisme and balance it all, con calma. Subscribe to Tamarindo podcast wherever you listen to podcasts, and tamarindopodcast.com.

Clip (Laura Scott):

Part of what clicked for me and part of what I hope to click for other people especially who came from backgrounds like me was giving up this idea of needing to save the world. Deciding that my life and how I live my life matters and deciding that, "You know what, I don't have to be what other people want me to be." Like giving myself that freedom to just go with what I wanted to do.

Murriel:

Dr. Laura Scott is a Harvard med school graduate and dermatology resident. When she's not in clinics or on rotations she's sharing her journey through medicine and motherhood on her blog, A Bit of Lacquer. Her candid Instagram posts touch on everything from an advice for aspiring medical students to the challenges of being a fully present mom for her three girls and a good doctor for her patients. Thank you for coming from drop off directly here to record in the five minutes you have to yourself once a week.

Scott:

Oh my gosh, yeah. It was just fine. Thank you so much for having me.

Murriel:

Doctors always get asked to diagnose people. What is the craziest thing you've ever been asked to diagnose?

Scott:

Oh my gosh. As dermatologists everything is visible, and some people feel so much more comfortable showing you anything. I've literally had a lady whip out her boob right on the elevator. I didn't know her. She just saw my white coat and it

says dermatology, and she literally just whipped out her boob on the elevator. In clinic I've seen a bajillion crazy things.

Murriel: Of course, but that's appropriate.

Scott: But it's appropriate. Right. That's the expectation. Patients should feel comfortable getting completely undressed. We see this all the time, and breasts I see all the time. But to have a complete stranger just be like, oh you're a dermatologist? What do you think this ... She just like completely like, palms, the nipple, lifted it up. It was like over here in your axillary fold. I was just like, "Wow." I did give her a diagnosis. I felt like I had to help. She went all out there. It's like, I feel like I have to help her. It was a little bit of intertrigo, which is very common. Especially here in Miami where it's humid. I made some over the counter recommendations, but I was like, "Okay."

Murriel: You can't just be giving away that medical care for free, though.

Scott: You can't, yeah. Then that becomes a liability issues, too. This is something that's super benign, and it's nothing bad, but you know, you can't take on that liability.

Murriel: Your mom is a nurse. Your dad also worked in healthcare. Do you feel like it was your destiny to become a doctor?

Scott: Absolutely not. No. My mom was a nurse, but she didn't know any other options and she just always wanted to be a nurse. I grew up watching her take care of my grandmother for quite a bit of time, and so I got to see that and I did always appreciate that role that she played. I thought it was a very noble service role, but early on in high school I was like completely down the wrong path. I didn't think that was actually something that was attainable for me. I was always an academic ... My grandmother was a teacher's assistant and she was just always about education. And so, I think growing up I was smart. I don't think I ever lost that. But you just lose the care to be smart. It becomes not cool to be smart. You're a nerd, all that stuff. If you come from schools like I went to.

Scott: Large, huge public schools where kids are sitting on the radiators, the teachers feel like babysitters. I just really lucked out with this one teacher who reminded me that I actually was smart, and it was nice to hear that from somebody who wasn't related to you.

Murriel: Your dad's African American.

Scott: Mm-hmm.

Murriel: Your mom is Puerto Rican.

Scott: Mm-hmm.

Murriel: What influence do those cultures have growing up in your house?

Scott: Everything. Both my parents always worked super duper full time. I'm actually very lucky for that. I'm very grateful that they did because my grandparents were in the

picture. I guess it's not just that they were working full time because like they could have been working full time and like me I had to put their kids in daycare, but my grandparents were all around. And so, every day after school my abuela would pick me up. I'd be with them from like probably 3:00 to 6:00 PM every single day.

Murriel: Is that why your Spanish is so good?

Scott: That's why I can speak Spanish. I wouldn't say it's so good, but no, I do consider I'm fluent.

Murriel: I remember watching an Instagram video where you were singing in Spanish and I was like, "Damn it, she speaks Spanish too on top of everything else?"

Scott: I am fluent, so they couldn't speak any English. My abuela knew how to speak like a tiny bit enough to like navigate the bus system. And my abuela refused to learn English. She didn't need to. Thanks to them, I am able to communicate in Spanish, which is really important, not just for my children but for my patients. Here in Miami I'd say the large majority of my patients speak Spanish. I am super lucky for that. But then every summer my parents never sent us to summer camp. We like stayed with my grandmother on my dad's side, so my African American grandmother and she still lived in the house that they had lived in all throughout my dad's childhood. Right in the hood. It became a hood. It used to be a very nice neighborhood for African American families. It was so important.

Scott: I was just always raised with all of the stories from her childhood, from her passing for white. She was a very light skinned African American woman, and then she married my grandfather who was much darker skinned. I remember the stories of her friends thinking it was so scandalous, and finally having to say like, "I'm black." She didn't realize that she was benefiting off of that, but clearly she was benefiting off of that. It was just always part of how we grew up knowing the foods that we ate, everything that was cooked, and just hearing all the stories was really formative for me.

Murriel: How do you think about it now, you and your husband Nathan as you raise your three girls?

Scott: For us it's just so important that they know their worth, and that they know their history. That they know they're dark skinned does make them different, but that that's not a bad thing. And that if anybody ever tries to tell them that they should realize that that person is wrong. I try so hard to protect them from internalizing any of the negativity they may have. I still remember so vividly, one of the first times we had all gone to the grocery store in Boston and this homeless lady, we were like going in and this homeless lady was coming in after us. Nathan held the door for her, and she literally said, "I don't need the help of no nigger. I don't need the help of no nigger and your little niglet." Because I had leaf in the baby carrier.

Scott: That was the first time, and don't get me wrong, we've heard it thrown around, and you know you get all the microaggressions and like-

Murriel: But thrown at you directly was different.

- Scott: This was the first time like in 2013 to be called a nigger, and to have my child be called the niglet. I was like, "Wow, this is still so ..." Again, we know that it's real. You can't be aware and keeping up with politics and not know that it's real, but to have it be that direct in your face I was like, "Wow, this is for real." My kids need to know that there is nothing at all wrong with them and they are fully capable of anything it is they want to do.
- Murriel: You've spoken pretty extensively about how growing up you were exposed to death and illness at a very young age. Your grandparents had diabetes, heart disease, you lost family members to gang violence, domestic violence, drug abuse. Those are all difficult memories. I wonder if there's one though that sticks out to you as having had the biggest impact on your life.
- Scott: Well, I'd say there's two. There's two that really impacted me in different ways. One was just seeing my grandmother suffer through diabetes, and for a while I must feel like I wasn't allowed to be upset about that because it's so common, but that doesn't mean it's not something to be upset about just because it's common, it means we need to do something about it. I was the one who would go with her to her doctor's appointments and I would translate for her in all her doctor's appointments. I just remember the doctor that she had, he was clearly very smart. He was in all other aspects seemed like a perfectly competent doctor, but he was so blameful in how he treated her diabetes. He was so paternalistic and saying, "You can't eat this anymore, and you can't eat that, and you're not checking your blood sugar."
- Scott: My grandmother just never even listened to him, which yes, that's her fault, but there were better ways to do it. To see her finally unfortunately have two strokes and see how that affected her memory, like my mom didn't even want me to visit her at the end because she didn't know who anybody was. To see how that unraveled and how I think a better doctor who was more culturally competent could have maybe had an effect. The other experience was my cousin and my aunt being murdered by my uncle. She had just gotten her senior pictures in the mail, and we had just like put up all of her senior pictures and then you get that news. And I still remember my mom like shriek when she got the phone call, and then like literally watching it on the news, like seeing the body bags pulled out the house.
- Scott: You're like, "Those are my people. My uncle did that." That was probably one of the most traumatic things you can undergo. My cousin ended up moving in with us, so we were even closer to that trauma. It was a constant reminder because he became my big brother. We're the ones who took them in. And so, I feel like I wasn't allowed to feel all that pain because he was the one who had the most pain. There was a lot of internalizing my experiences with that. Those were big for me, and I'm not like happy than any of those things happened, but I feel like you have to take everything that happens in your life as learning experiences, and figure out how you're going to live now that that's happened. For me it's always actually been you try to make it an empowering thing.
- Scott: Something that helps give you perspective. So that when I did bad on my MCAT, or when I didn't get into summer research program that I wanted to and a lot of

people for them that was like the biggest defeat they had felt and like the end of the world. I'm like-

Murriel: It's going to be okay.

Scott: "Guys, you have no idea."

Murriel: Let's talk then about getting into Harvard, which has got to be wild. Just getting the acceptance letter. And then matriculating. Because if we talk a lot about imposter syndrome, I feel like there's nothing like Harvard for imposter syndrome. I think that's especially true if there aren't a lot of people on campus who look like you and have the experience that you've had. What was your experience of entering the world that is Harvard Medical School?

Scott: I think we had a very different experience. And I say we, because we were very purposeful. I met my husband interviewing on the interview trail for medical school.

Murriel: Columbia?

Scott: Yeah. We met actually interviewing at Columbia. Then we met up again during this Harvard revisit weekend, and the group that we had there, I had met a most all of these people at different points along the interview trail. All minorities, all people who just had very similar values, those things come up really quickly. I think other people don't quite understand that if they don't come from similar backgrounds, but if you do you identify those things and they become topics of conversation really quickly. And so, for our Harvard revisit weekend, we were all there and we were like, "Guys, we have to just all come here. We can make this what we want if we just all come here, and we can support each other." That's what we ended up doing. I actually had an incredible group of best, best friends. I mean, one of the people in that group ended up marrying us.

Scott: And then the other one is like my best friend in the whole wide world. These people are now my people like for love for life.

Murriel: Forever.

Scott: For life.

Maria Muriel: I have been wearing glasses since I was six years old, and I still find it so overwhelming to go into a store and pick out a new pair. It's why I really love Warby Parker's free home try on program. You get to order five pairs of glasses and try them on for five days. I don't have to buy any if I don't want to. They ship them for free and included prepaid return label. Super easy. I just got my five pairs of glasses and love to trying them on in the comfort of my home on my schedule totally pressure free. I bought my last pair of glasses at Warby Parker so I already knew that I loved their quality and design, but it was so great to have the time and space to choose which pair was best for me. As usual, Warby Parker glasses start at \$95 including prescription lenses. Lenses come with anti-glare and anti-scratch puddings, and blue light filtering lenses are also available.

Maria Muriel: If you have an iPhone 10 make sure to download Warby Parker's app where you can use their brand new virtual try-on. It allows you to try-on eyeglasses, seeing the color, texture and size of each style just using your phone. Head to warbyparker.com/latina to order your free home try-on today.

Murriel: One of the things I hadn't thought about as someone who isn't a doctor is that if you take the MCATs, you go to medical school, you start sinking money into that education and then you have a moment where you think, "I don't know if I want to do this." You are down a river without a paddle.

Scott: You are so screwed.

Murriel: Screwed. And it seems from the response I watch from your followers, a lot of people have that moment where you wonder, "Is this still for me?" What was your moment?

Scott: My moment, I absolutely had that, and I think everybody does, which is why I'm so vocal about my experiences. My moment was really by the second year of medical school. You have this now big test looming ahead of you. Step one, which is the first step of your USMLE licensing boards that every doctor has to go through. Step one is the biggest test of your lifetime, basically. It dictates there's a lot we need to get a good score to make it to the next step. This is one that dictates what specialty you can go to. And so, I hit this point where I'm studying my butt off for this test. I'm not seeing my family because our breaks didn't match up. And when I did have a break I felt like I had to be studying. At the end of the day you're seeing your end of the tunnel, and it's all like miserable people, and it was just-

Murriel: "This is what I decided not to become an attorney." Because I was like, "I don't know any happy attorney."

Scott: Exactly. And it's really demoralizing, and it really like beats up on any type of motivation you had any desire to succeed. It's like, "Wait, what am I killing myself for?" Like, "Why am I not going out and having fun and doing all this stuff?" And you start to see-

Murriel: Wait. So then, how did you whip around?

Scott: The blog was my savior. I looked around a lot and I did a lot of looking around, but everybody I saw was unhappy in medicine. By this time I had already started the blog. I had started entering second year because I knew this was going to happen and I wanted to hold myself accountable for my normal human things that I enjoyed, like cooking and getting dressed. I was like, "We're going to still do this. I'm going to start this blog and take pictures so that I can do it and hold myself accountable." Thankfully, I kept up with it and I ended up joining a little community in Boston of like Boston bloggers. It just happened to overlap with my dermatology rotation, finally. And these doctors came in and it sounds silly, but they like came in, they looked great, they like knew how to dress, which again sounds silly, but it tells you a lot.

Scott: It tells you that these people at least have time to like get dressed in the morning. Most of them were genuinely happy, and they were like, before class would start they're like talking about taking their kids to the apple orchard that weekend, and doing this. And, oh yeah, they were setting up dinner. They were clearly colleagues and clearly enjoyed spending time with their families and it just became like this, "Wow. Okay. So there's something out there." I didn't know the dermatology was for me, honestly. I liked it and I was like, "Okay, so maybe this is what I'm going to do." That became my motivation to study one of the most, if not the most competitive specialties, but as I went through medicine, I actually like moved away from dermatology. For a while I was like back to liking surgery.

Murriel: To your point about our image of doctors, this will show that I'm older than you, ER. It's all about the-

Scott: Of course, George Clooney.

Murriel: ... adrenaline and heroism of saving a life. That's not what defines dermatology. It's not that minute to minute is this person going to make it or not that some people chase.

Scott: I think the part of what clicked for me, and part of what I hope to click for other people especially who came from backgrounds like me, was giving up this idea of needing to save the world. Deciding that my life and how I live my life matters. Deciding that, "You know what, I don't have to be what other people want me to be. And I don't even have to be what I wanted to be." Like giving myself that freedom to just go with what I wanted to do regardless of what I wanted to do five years ago, and I got there. There definitely weren't times where people would make jokes like, "Oh yeah, she decided she didn't want to be a real doctor." And I'm like ... I don't if we can swear on this.

Murriel: Go ahead.

Scott: "Fuck off." Like, really. It's cool because most dermatologists, we brag. They like to say that until you have to consult dermatology. Because we do actually have a few lines or ending things where like, "Dermatology saves the day." You can still do that.

Murriel: You got engaged, and you had your daughter Olivia in your third year of medical school.

Scott: That was a crazy hard time because one, this being like Latina and podcasts I'll say quite honestly, like my first concern was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm falling into that statistic." Like, "I thought I beat my odds of not getting pregnant in high school, not getting pregnant in college. Now they're still going to think of me as this like teen mom, even though I'm not a teen." Finally I was like, again, "Screw them. I don't care what they think." It literally happened the first month off my birth control. I don't think I even had a period yet. I remember just being like, "Fuck." But also like, this is what I've always wanted. It's just sooner than when I wanted it. But does that mean I shouldn't have it now just because it's earlier in my plan? Thankfully we got way past that, and Nathan's like, "No, we have to do this now."

Scott: “Are you kidding me?” Thankfully he was like just so gung-ho about it that I was like, “Okay, we got this.” Like, “You and me against the world.” That’s sort of the position that we took.

Maria Muriel: Hey, since you like our show, I want to take a minute to tell you about something new and exciting. Think about all the people you know. Then all the people that they know, all of those relationships will make complicated, interconnected web. Wonder Media Networks, brand new show, Web of WMN dives into what makes us who we are as individuals and communities. The host Jenny Kaplan starts things off by interviewing for women she knows from different parts of her life. Then each of those women pick someone to interview and so on. They talk about politics, gender, religion, and other facets of identity. Web of WMN is a new kind of podcasts that illuminates the intersection of relationships, identity, and community. Check out and subscribe to Web of WMN, spelled W-M-N, wherever you listen to podcasts.

Muriel: Dr. Scott, what is the biggest misconception about having a career in medicine?

Scott: That you can't have anything else. Again, I think a lot of it comes from watching these shows like ER and Grey's Anatomy and seeing that their lives, even if they try to have some semblance of a life, it always falls apart because medicine is this all encompassing thing. And yeah, maybe that's what it was, but it's not what it has to be in. It's not what it is any longer. That I think is the biggest misconception.

Muriel: What three things should a woman of color know that no one tells them, but you've learned, if they want a career in medicine?

Scott: I think most women of color will know this. Know that you're going to deal with all of the microaggressions, and they're just going to come at you all the time. Whether it's about your hair, whether it's getting the so calm and compliment of, “Oh, you're so well spoken.” I did my first presentation and that's always the thing. “You're so well spoken.” It's like, “Well, what the hell did you expect?” Those are the little microaggressions that everybody will have already experienced at any other point of getting into medicine. But just know that that doesn't end. You're still being a-

Muriel: Because there's a part of you that wants to believe. You say, “I go to Harvard med school and then that's done. We did.”

Scott: There's a part of me that wants to think that like you've made it. Mama, I made it, right? And that all of a sudden that white coat is going to protect you from something. But let me tell you, when we're driving, I'm still fearful for Nathan's life. If the cops start coming around and I'm like, “Oh my God, please don't let him get pulled over. Please don't let him get pulled over.” I don't think other people have to worry about that. The fact that we're doctors doesn't change any of that. We're not walking out in our white coats. Your accomplishments get, I don't want to say taken away from you, but it doesn't afford you any extra luxuries when you're outside. Of course it does because now we have more money, we have more knowledge, we have so much privilege. And so, I don't ever mean to not acknowledge that, the education and the status that we've worked for now does give us more privilege.

Scott: But at the end of the day, like it's not changing anything. At the end of the day, doctors are all humans and they're all coming in with their biases, and that's just going to be magnified in medical school, in medical training, on the wards. I would say, I always tell them, "Wear your raincoats, let it slip off of you. Because the other unfortunate thing is you're going to feel like you have to combat the stereotypes even more." And so, it's so hard to hold in your anger, but you're always trying to hold in your anger for fear of becoming that angry black woman or for fear of becoming that feisty Latina. And it's so frustrating, because you hear how other women, white women can voice their aggressions, and sometimes it's, "Oh, they're just a woman. It's her hormones." But they don't deal with the extra layer of what they look like, that it's their race or their ethnicity, whatever it may be.

Scott: I tell them where their raincoat, let it all roll off you. There are a lot of built in mechanisms now to give real feedback, and so I always use those avenues. I would tear down attendings who were racist or made assumptions. I would tear them down in the reviews.

Murriel: To doctors at home, but your social media paid partnership sustain a lot of your life. That must surprise people.

Scott: Oh yeah. Well, because again, people think your doctor, you've made it and they don't realize, well, one, even if we didn't have to take out loans, residency does not pay nearly enough. It was just very cool when things started rolling in and I was completely not my focus at all. It was more to hold myself accountable. And then when people started realizing what I was doing, a lot of girls were just getting motivation from it. They had never seen a young black doctor who also liked doing this, who like doing that. They always thought those things are mutually exclusive. I'd say it probably it wasn't until I had kids really that, that market sort of opens up the mommy blogger type of thing. More of my partnerships are along those lines. I'm very selective with my partnerships because I really do ... You have to stay authentic.

Scott: My biggest goal is to just create an empowering community of girls who know that they can do anything they want to do, and that anything can also be paying the bills by having a blog. And so, I like to show that that part of it too.

Murriel: There's a photo of you that I hadn't seen it until I prepped for this interview. There's a photo of you, Nathan and Olivia from your Harvard graduation.

Scott: Oh yeah. That one.

Murriel: You and Nathan are in your cap and gown and you have on black lives matter buttons. Olivia is at like peak, toddler, chubby and she has one of your stethoscopes and she's listening to Nathan's heart and that photo went viral around the time of your graduation. Why do you think it got the response it did?

Scott: We like to celebrate black excellence. We must celebrate black excellence, and I think that that's what came up. I think because we were wearing the black lives matter, and immediately identified it as like black excellence, but I think equally it

could have gone into any Latina excellence thing, but you know, people don't know your backgrounds based on a picture. There was a lot of debate about what my background was. He always has to settle ... Black guy always have to settle for some white girl, some Latino. They can never ... And I'm like, "Excuse me, actually he's half white and half black. If you really want to get technical, I'm more black than ..." But that's not how it works. It's not how it works.

Murriel: Not in a picture.

Scott: It really frustrates me that people try to box you in and they always wanted to find you in the way that works best for them, and what their expectations are. But, I think it went viral because we needed it to go viral. I wish more things like that would go viral because there's so much minorities just doing incredible things in science and law and politics and every field.

Murriel: When Olivia sees that picture, what do you want her to know about that day?

Scott: Well, I want her to know that she didn't hold me back from anything. That we did it all with her and for her. It's fun because I was actually pregnant with Ellie while I walked across the stage too. I think it was maybe three or four months pregnant with Ellie. For me it's really important that she just knows there are no mutually exclusive things. Maybe a few, but don't let anybody's expectations or what they deem possible define what's actually possible. Like, you can do anything if you want to. And it doesn't mean that you're going to do everything, but you can do anything, and you just have to want it bad enough. You have to find your tribe, you have to find your why because that's the biggest thing. At the end of the day you need to know your why.

You need to know it damn well, and it better be a good one. It can't be, "Because my parents wanted me to." Or, "Because I think it's prestigious." Those aren't going to last. Those aren't going to last. Those whys do not last. Just have a good why and you can do it. You can do anything. That's what I want her to see when she sees that. Usually now she just say, "I had a stethoscope, where's that stethoscope?" she tears down the playroom looking for the stethoscope. But someday she'll look at that picture and I think, I'm hoping that those are the things that you'll see.

Murriel: Dr. Scott, I have to go let you be Dr. Scott.

Scott: I've got an afternoon clinic coming up, yeah.

Murriel: Thank you for taking the time to do this.

Scott: Of course. Thank you so much for having me.

Murriel: Thanks for joining us today. Latina to Latina was originally co-created with Bustle. Now the podcast is owned and executive produced by Juleyka Lantigua Williams, and me, Maria Murriel was the sound designer on this episode. We want to hear from you. Tell us who you want to hear from and how you're making the show a part of your life. Email hola@latinatolatina.com. Remember to subscribe or follow us on RadioPublic, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or wherever you're listening.

CITATION:

Murriel, Maria, host. "A Little Bit of Lacquer's Dr. Laura Scott." *Latina to Latina*, Lantigua Williams & Co., April 8, 2019. LatinaToLatina.com

Produced by

