

Webinar N°9 - I want it! Career experiences by young scientists

within the SCNAT webinar series Achieving Gender Equality and Diversity in the Natural Sciences, held in 2021



Summary of inputs and conclusions

by Romaine Jean

I want it! This could be the slogan of the young women scientists who were invited to this last webinar in the series on gender issues in the natural sciences. I want more equality, less discrimination, I want to change the current situation of women.

Dr Gina Garland, Prof. Dr Adria Leboeuf, Dr Lucienne Tritten and Dr Mara Saenz de Juano Ribes are all engaged in promising scientific careers and have two things in common: they have chosen to combine a scientific career with a family life and have a wide range of interests, including science, arts and community engagement.

Gina Garland, from ETH Zurich, is a researcher in soil fertility and the protection of sustainable agroecosystems. She received a SNSF PRIMA grant to carry out a five-year research project. What makes a good scientist? she asks. The criterion for excellence cannot be based solely on the number of publications or on highly competitive criteria. "I like to follow my heart, I have to give meaning to my life. These are my priorities," says Garland. "I want to prove that a third way exists and continue my scientific career, on my own terms."

This vision is shared by Adria Leboeuf. She is also SNSF PRIMA fellow and studies social fluids in ants at the University of Fribourg. She is a member of the advisory council of the Swiss Young Academy, a network of young researchers. Her family has a scientific background, but she wanted to become an actress instead. In the United States, where she is originally from, she experienced discrimination in her academic career. She chose to take a leadership training course in Lausanne when she arrived in Switzerland. This gave her the will to pursue her vision. "You can do it" is her credo. She believes that the younger generation of scientists is more sensitive to gender issues. However, she says, it is very difficult to reconcile an academic career with family life. There is a constant conflict between the two.

This is confirmed by Mara Saenz de Juano Ribes, who has just returned from maternity leave. She is a postdoctoral researcher in the animal physiology group at ETH Zurich. Although her mother was a university professor in biology, she suffers, like many women scientists, from a legitimacy problem and has to fight against herself. Lucienne Tritten also comes from a family of scientists. A molecular parasitologist, she is currently in the final phase of her SNSF Ambizione-funded research at the University of Zurich. She is also a member of the board of the Swiss Society for Tropical Medicine and Parasitology. She is mother to two children and works at 80%. It is currently very difficult, if not impossible, she says, to combine an academic career with family life. In her experience and surprisingly, there is less support for working parents in Switzerland than in the United States. She also believes that the criteria for excellence in science need to be redefined, as they are still too marked by gender discrimination.

Website of webinar series

https://biol.scnat.ch/de/activities/uuid/i/d87a53d7-bac7-522f-957c-12f0d9ebc843-Achieving_Gender_Equality_and_Diversity_in_the_Natural_Sciences