



## Is this “still” a man’s world?

*Read the testimonials of key women amongst Solvay stakeholders about the gender gap.*

### Words from the Dean

I often wonder whether James Brown<sup>1</sup> would nowadays sing the same song, and have the same success as he had in the 60’s. The position of women in society has indeed drastically improved over the past century. Yet the issue of gender equality is still heavily debated in our society and as high as ever in the political agenda – with relentless efforts to improve things. Be it related to the accessibility to leadership positions, to the significant wage gap between men and women or to sexual harassment at work (cf. the ever growing evidence from Silicon Valley, the world technological hub<sup>2</sup>) or outside work (cf. Anita Folloni’s blog<sup>3</sup>), hardly a week goes by without upsetting news popping up. The problem related to the gender gap at work is global, probably with deep historical and cultural and religious influences. It is as well related to the branch of activity considered, with professions that are still heavily biased towards one gender or the other. Even the profession of economist or economic analyst is visibly criticized for being primarily –supposedly self-fulfilling - composed of men (cf. Diane Coyle’s FT article<sup>4</sup>). And economic [analyses like the ones performed by Professor Danièle Meulders](#) during her career in our faculty, provide ample evidence that the gender gap is far from being narrow. There is as well empirical evidence suggesting that countries with higher rates of gender inequality suffer from smaller productivity growth potentials (see Klasen, 1999<sup>5</sup>). But summarizing the vast scientific or journalistic literature on gender inequality, its roots and consequences, is certainly not my objective, it is not my specialization area and would not fit the format of a newsletter. This newsletter is however a good opportunity to inform our readers on the School policy in this respect, and present some stylized facts.

In a nutshell, progress has been made over the past few years, and we are still struggling in some important dimensions. The broad policy of the school is to have at least 40% of each gender in every aspect of its governance and for all its stakeholders. Our International Advisory Board has paved the way: headed by Dominique Leroy, it is composed of more than 50% women. The administrative staff of the school is

actually composed of a vast majority of women, including several leadership positions (examples include the head of administrative staff, the pedagogical advisor, the corporate relations manager, career services manager and the international relations officers, among others). Improvements are noticeable with the student body, where nearly 37% of our 3,200 state-funded students are women. Strong variations still occur across degrees, however, with our two Ph.D. degrees and the Executive MBA being at about 30%, our two Bachelor degrees fluctuating around 35% and the Master in Management Sciences at 47% of women in class. The lead is reached by the Advanced Master in Creativity Marketing, which includes 56% of women. Progress has been made as well with our faculty. In 2012 less than 20% of our professors were women, against about 30% nowadays. There is indeed ample room for improvement, but we are heading in the right direction. Of the five international faculty members recruited this year, three are women. Academic leadership positions are as well fulfilled by women, with two Vice Deans (Academic Programs with Estelle Cantillon and Academic Affairs with Marjorie Gassner) being particularly active and playing a pivotal role.

But beyond these few strategic objectives and broad policies of the school what matters is to defend and diffuse our values, to contribute to the debate. This can be achieved by exchanging viewpoints, understanding each other’s perceptions. The remainder of this newsletter precisely aims at diffusing our stakeholders’ perception on the gender issue. I am particularly thankful towards Giusi Genduso for having set up this newsletter, and as well to all contributors. From CEOs to Board Chairs, from the Chairwoman of the Cercle Solvay to newly recruited faculty, and from students to researchers, the variety of arguments and perceptions shows that the debate is complex and far from being over. I hope that you will enjoy the readings, as I did.

**BRUNO VAN POTTELSBERGHE**, Dean of the Solvay Brussels School

<sup>1</sup> “It’s a Man’s Man’s World”, 1966, authored by Dils, singer: James Brown

<sup>2</sup> “Tech Tent: Sexism in Silicon Valley”, 7 July 2017, Rory Cellan-Jones, BBC News, see <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-40535712>

<sup>3</sup> “I wonder why I don’t have the same freedom as a male”: Teen posts account, 17 August 2017, Divya Kishore, International Business Times, see [http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/i-wonder-](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/i-wonder-why-i-dont-have-the-same-freedom-as-a-male-teen-posts-account-being-sexually-harassed-1635355)

[why-i-dont-have-same-freedom-as-a-male-teen-posts-account-being-sexually-harassed-1635355](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/i-wonder-why-i-dont-have-the-same-freedom-as-a-male-teen-posts-account-being-sexually-harassed-1635355).

<sup>4</sup> “Economics has a problem with women”, Diane Coyle, Financial Times, August 28, 2017. See <https://www.ft.com/content/6b3cc8be-881e-11e7-afd2-74b8ecd34d3b>

<sup>5</sup> Klasen, S. (1999). Does Gender Inequality Reduce Growth and Development? Evidence from Cross-Country Regressions. World.

## Testimonials

### DOMINIQUE LEROY

"We still hear that women are blocked from getting to the top - the so called 'glass ceiling'. Personally, I believe one of the barriers to women progressing on the executive route are themselves. I know it's not a popular view but women tend to put up barriers about what they think they can achieve, and how they can combine work and a family. They need to delegate more and trust in their capabilities.

It often comes down to the role that society believes they should play. I tell the women who work for us that this is a huge waste of talent.

At Proximus, we actively promote women internally. We have short- and medium-term succession plans in place across the business for both men and women to ensure we always have women who are capable of filling a vacancy when one arises. Women may feel less confident than men about being promoted to more senior roles but that changes when they know they are on a succession plan.

At the International Advisory Board of the Solvay Business School, I'm happy to have an almost equal male/female representation around the table. Besides skills and experience, this often brings different perspectives to the discussions."



*CEO Proximus  
Chairwoman of the International Advisory Board of Solvay  
Brussels School.*



*President of the Board of Hôpital Erasme, Vice-President of the Board of  
Orange Belgium, member of the Board of Atenor Group and member of  
the International Advisory Board of Solvay Brussels School.*

### NADINE LEMAITRE

"Over the course of my career, the position of women in the professional world has incredibly progressed. I was part of the pioneers, and most often the only woman in a team of men. Happily, this is no longer true. Sometimes, women are even the majority. So, I can tell the difference: the diverse points of view women bring in the discussions and decision making processes clearly enrich the outcome. They tend to have a wider experience of life (as mothers, spouses, professionals...).

So, they bring openness and a variety of opinions which deepens the debate. I would also say that they are more daring than men, because the road to their position may not have been easy, and they had to take personal risks to get there. Finally, I think they know better than most men that the devil may be in the details, which in some businesses like services, is really critical to success."

## JUDITH BEHRENS

"I am looking forward to becoming a faculty member in Brussels, and working with students interested in entrepreneurship. Working with young talents on entrepreneurial business ideas is always inspiring. However, when establishing and running a business, women still face more difficulties than men, mainly in access to venture capital, training, and networking. Also defying social expectations while managing a business as well as the fear of failure still diminishes new business creation. Therefore, to guide and mentor young students and researchers to develop an entrepreneurial mindset, to think outside the box, to be creative and innovative and to lose the fear of failure is a key element in my work."



*Judith will start as a Professor at Solvay Brussels School in autumn 2017. She holds a Professorship in Strategy and Entrepreneurship. She has teaching experience at the undergraduate, graduate, Ph.-D. and executive levels. Her teaching covers lectures and seminars in the area of entrepreneurship, technology- and innovation management, as well as methods.*



*Paula is an economist now finishing her postdoc as an FNRS at the Université Catholique de Louvain, and will be joining the Solvay Brussels School in September.*

## PAULA EUGENIA GOBBI

"Although the ratio women to men is low in economics, I never thought that being a woman was any different from being a man in academia, until I had a daughter. This was nine months ago. In Belgium, maternity leave is particularly short, and in academia, it is impossible to think of a complete shutdown from research. There are deadlines that one wants to respect and, in co-authorship, relations one wants to be as active and responsive as possible. Last week, while I was pondering this column for the newsletter, I went to see an exposition of the painter Paula Rego and I read something that probably summarizes what many women who love their work feel: "It was brush or baby that has always been the case. Doing pictures has nothing to do with having children. You do the pictures, you have the children, it's not part of the same life. Painting pictures is like being a man really, [...]" (in Paula Rego: Secrets & Stories, film directed by Nick Willing, 2017)."

## SANDRA ROTHENBERGER

*Men are Professors, Women are Teachers – food for thought on life as a female professor*

"As the debate around female representation in academia continues I recall some revealing moments and encounters from my own career trajectory. Picture your favorite university professor and here are some adjectives that might come to mind: Wise. Funny. Caring. Prompt. Passionate. Organized. Tough but fair. Brilliant, Geniuses. Now, are you thinking of a man or a woman?"

In a recent Franco-American student evaluation survey (Boring, Ottoboni and Stark, 2016<sup>6</sup>), men are categorized as professors and women as teachers. Men are more likely to be described as a star, knowledgeable, awesome or the best professor. Women in contrast more likely to be described as bossy, disorganized, helpful, annoying or as playing favorites. Nice or rude are also more often used to describe women than men. Female professors who demand excellence are thought of as "unfair," whereas male professors are thought to be "tough but fair." Let's break it down – students still tend to be systematically biased against women — so much so, in fact, that they're better mirrors of gender bias than of what they are supposed to be measuring: objective teaching quality. Student evaluations of teaching (mostly) do not measure teaching effectiveness. - Just food for thought!"



*Sandra is currently chairing the research unit of Strategy, Governance, Marketing and Innovation at the Solvay Brussels School of Economics & Management. Her business and industry experience includes consultancy of small and medium sized companies as well as supervisory board activities in European multinational corporations. Sandra also teach in the Solvay Executive MBA.*



**Bachelor in Economics**

*Vice President of Academics Affairs of Solvay Student Office.*

## VICTORIA DUBOIS

"Even though the board of directors has become totally accessible for women, some inequalities can still be felt. Sexist jokes are not uncommon around the campus, and overall, women's opinions seem to be doubted more often than men's.

I think another real issue is what is called "mansplaining". It consists of a man interrupting a woman and explaining to her why she is wrong to think what she thinks or say what she says, often in a condescending fashion. Sadly, it sometimes discourages some women from taking part in debates, be it during meetings or other events. This is one of the main reasons why I strongly believe in female solidarity.

Our association is good training for what we will face in the labor market, particularly given that phenomena such as the "glass ceiling" are still a reality.

I hope that my new position as Academic Vice President will encourage other women to get involved and stand up for their beliefs. Mentalities have definitely evolved but we still have a long way to go!"

<sup>6</sup> Boring et al., 2016, Gender Biases in Student Evaluations of Teaching, *Journal of Public Economics* 145 (2017): 27-41. See <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047272716301591>

## SANDRINE DAUD

“‘Solvay is a men’s faculty’, is what I had been hearing for months after I started to raise awareness about my choice of entering the SBS-EM. It was not that people did not support my choice, but they were warning me about the difficulties I would soon face because of my gender. Nevertheless, I was ready for it.

When I arrived at the SBS-EM, I immediately felt I was at the right place and started to understand that the gender inequality stereotypes were all coming from the outside. Evolving here has been wonderful, and has led me to great opportunities. People are open-minded, and only very few times have my capabilities been contested while I was aiming for the top. Today I am entering my last year in this beautiful faculty that made me who I am and taught me to dare and dream, and I could not be more proud to call myself a Solvay student.”



*Master in Business Engineering*

*President of the Cercle Solvay*



*Bachelor in Economics*

*Vice President at Solvay Business Game*

## SARA FARIAS DE CARVALHO MARTINS

“Historically, women have consistently been considered less worthy than men in every domain of modern society. For many years, our rights have been neglected: the right to work, to vote, to pursue a professional career, and be intellectual entities.

Even though huge steps forward have been made towards gender equality, the objective is still far from being achieved. Nowadays, top executive job functions are still held by men and salary differences between two candidates with equal qualifications but different genders remain large and unexplained.

As a female student in a business environment often known as “man’s world”, I have sometimes felt I was being considered differently in relation to certain fields. The SBS-EM offers the opportunity for female students to express themselves freely and intellectually, giving them the chance to become tomorrow’s future leaders and business women. Today, I feel that women can also be entrepreneurs, pursue an interesting professional career and find a good balance between their professional and personal life.

All things considered, as women we must continue, more than ever to fight for our rights and our image - starting here at our university. Being enrolled in different student associations has given me the strength and confidence to go forward and be proud to be a woman. Because there is no reason why gender should influence one’s individual potential.”

## ESTELLE VLASSELAER

"Nowadays, we see more and more young women succeeding in their studies, thinking about their career and dedicating themselves to improving students' opportunities via several associations. For our generation that seems normal.

As a student representative, I see at a faculty level that more and more women contribute greatly to the development of the school, even though they are still a minority at the university.

Those are great improvements but we should not forget that this must be the beginning and not the finish line."



*Master in Business Engineering*



*Bachelor in Human and Social Science*

*Head at Solvay Summer School*

## LILIA AMICO

"As women increasingly take up positions of responsibility, they can still find it difficult to blend into the entrepreneurial and business.

Since September I have led the organization of the Solvay Summer School, a one-week summer school for quality students from all over the world. We distinguish ourselves from other summer schools by the fact that the students organize the full week from A to Z.

When I was elected, it was with some concern that I began. I knew what was expected of me and had to prove myself and motivate a team that would only see the results of their work in August.

I think that mentalities about gender have changed, are changing and will change again. It is a long process that demands reflection. I am very positive about the future of women's leadership in various organizations as well as the wealth of social and cultural diversity."

## AFRAE HASSOUNI

"The place of women at Solvay and in the society in general is important to me. I have a keen interest in the studies that are conducted on female representation in the corporate world. I also read a lot about the stories of women who have managed to accomplish successful careers.

I will rather refer to the scientific researches that have been conducted on women's advancement in general and in academia more specifically. Indeed, in the last few decades the world has witnessed a rising of public interest for gender equality. And thanks to this movement, the belief that women are unfit for top positions has changed and is still changing throughout the world. We see that more and more women have managed to get into traditionally male-dominated areas and the number of women in the C-suite positions has slightly increased.

In academia, the evolution is similar. The number of women in top academic positions has increased in the last decades. For instance, in the past two years approximately 40 percent of new dean appointments in higher education across the U.S. have been assigned to women.

However, despite this advancement females are still underrepresented in leading positions in academia and in other sectors as well. Rice (2012) shows that only 12% of women in Ph.D. programs want a career within academia and that women lose interest in staying in academia the further they advance in their career.

The concept of glass ceiling refers to the invisible barrier that keeps women and minority groups from advancing beyond a certain level in the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications and achievements.

Several factors may help female Ph.D. candidates to climb the academic ladder:

**Passion:** they should have a passion around academia and a desire to serve the academic world. Top academic positions are time consuming and stressful, hence the persons running these positions need to be passionate about their work in order to succeed.

**Overcoming their fears:** fear is at the root of most of the barriers that women face. Fear of not making the right choice. Fear of doing things badly. Fear of being judged. Fear of not being a good partner/wife/mother. Once a woman overcomes these fears, she will be able to combine professional success with personal achievements.

**Network:** they need to build a strong network. Research has shown that women are more likely to advance in academia if they have built relationships through networking and mentoring. Therefore, I encourage women to peer with other women so that they are more empowered. Indeed, research has shown that we are more confident and able to learn more in small groups.

**Seeking out opportunities:** women need to seek out opportunities if they want to advance in their career. Each time a woman is placed on a project, she should make a name of herself by making outstanding contributions.

**Learning:** learning should be a continuous process during which women should strive to acquire new skills that can help them to advance in their career.

I think that the situation of women at Solvay makes no exception. The number of women in all levels of the hierarchy has increased compared to few years ago. A noticeable number of women sit in committees that take important decisions for the school or run decisive projects for the school. However, despite this rising involvement, women are still underrepresented in the top positions of the school and more efforts should be made to help women advance in their career at Solvay."



*PhD Candidate in Finance*

*Teaching Assistant Solvay Brussels School – CEB*

*Supporting the Solvay Finance Society*

## LAURIANE DEWULF

"As a Belgian woman, I feel very grateful to live in a country in which basic women rights are not a problem, although I think there is still room for improvements, notably with respect to salaries and presence of women in companies' Boards. During my doctoral program, I never really felt disadvantaged as a woman. Yet, I have the impression that academia is still more dominated by men - who outnumber women by far - and I do not see Solvay as an outlier.

The global academic system explains, in my opinion, part of this issue. Precisely, I have given up (at least temporarily) on pursuing an academic career because such a path presents the toughest hurdles at a time which I might want to build a family. I do not feel like entering the competition for grants/funding at this time of my life – especially with men who would not have to face maternal duties. I also do not want to face, at this same time, several expatriations according to the availability of funding sources, with all concessions it implies for couples and families. I consider these hurdles a strong "glass ceiling" but not as a problem for my fulfillment. I am indeed also glad to pursue a carrier elsewhere. Nevertheless, this fact makes me sad since many very talented women might have given up on academia for the same reason. No one knows what they would have invented or found...

I also believe there still exists preconceived ideas blocking women from pursuing an academic career. I feel concerned when I observe an important share of the rare senior women "survivors" who look like they had to bury their soft side to look tougher than the men around them. Earning peers' recognition should not be about seeming tough or strong. I am sure true self-confidence could also meet this goal once preconceived ideas on women in academia are set aside. And this can be only done first by women who, I am sure, will be followed by men."



*PhD in Economics at the Solvay Brussels School*