

Thank you for your attention.

To conclude this talk, I need to break the protocol.

Usually, I'm very happy to hear your comments and answer your questions, but today I'd like to reverse the custom – and instead, ask you a few questions.

At the very beginning of my career,
I experienced a crash:
sexual violence in the workplace.

I was so ashamed,
I couldn't speak about it and so find support
– not even with my closest friends.

I had a dream:
to become a researcher
and run freely in the field,
play with data,
invert models,
and engage in bright, energising scientific discussions.

So I stayed silent. I knew too well that a single phone call from the man who harmed me could destroy that dream. As you can see, I did fulfil that dream. But in the process, I've been overtaken by the crash nightmare.

Five years ago, I filed a formal complaint waking up the anger that had slept inside me for so long. And because I was determined enough to push the concerned institution to position, the abuser was finally sanctioned.

The process drained all my energy so few weeks after knowing the decision, I collapsed. I have been on sick leave since the beginning of July and only returned to work yesterday and I still have to work at part-time for medical reasons.

So today, it is impossible for me to carry on as if nothing has happened – especially when even small comments can reawaken my anger by reminding me that I don't belong to the "stronger sex". And yet, I am acutely aware of my privilege. The violence I suffered was acknowledged. I was always believed and listened to. My choices were respected by those around me, who supported me regardless of my decisions.

Today, in Europe, 50% of women in science experience sexual harassment at work. That's half of us. So all of us surely know colleagues who are currently going through difficult times at work.

My questions are simple, but they concern us all:

1. How can we support colleagues who are being held back in their careers simply because they are women?
2. What should we do when we directly witness sexist discriminations?
3. How should we engage with close colleagues who took part in sexist violence?

4. And finally – what can we do today, knowing that we ourselves may have committed sexist, racist, homophobic, or other kinds of discriminations in a more or less distant past?

Before we end, I ask you to please applaud our colleagues – whether or not they followed the unfair protocols of reporting, whether or not they shared their struggles. Let's remember: their choices do not reflect a lack of courage or understanding of their own situation – it is exactly the opposite.

Because all we want is to make our track whatever our gender in a world still shaped by masculine domination, while we only dream to run freely in the field, play with data, invert models, and engage in bright, energising scientific discussions.

And from here on, please feel free to break protocols ;)

Nolwenn Lesparre, Paris, October 2025