Barriers, Routes, Choices, e-Motions: the Gender Digital Divide from Social Psychology

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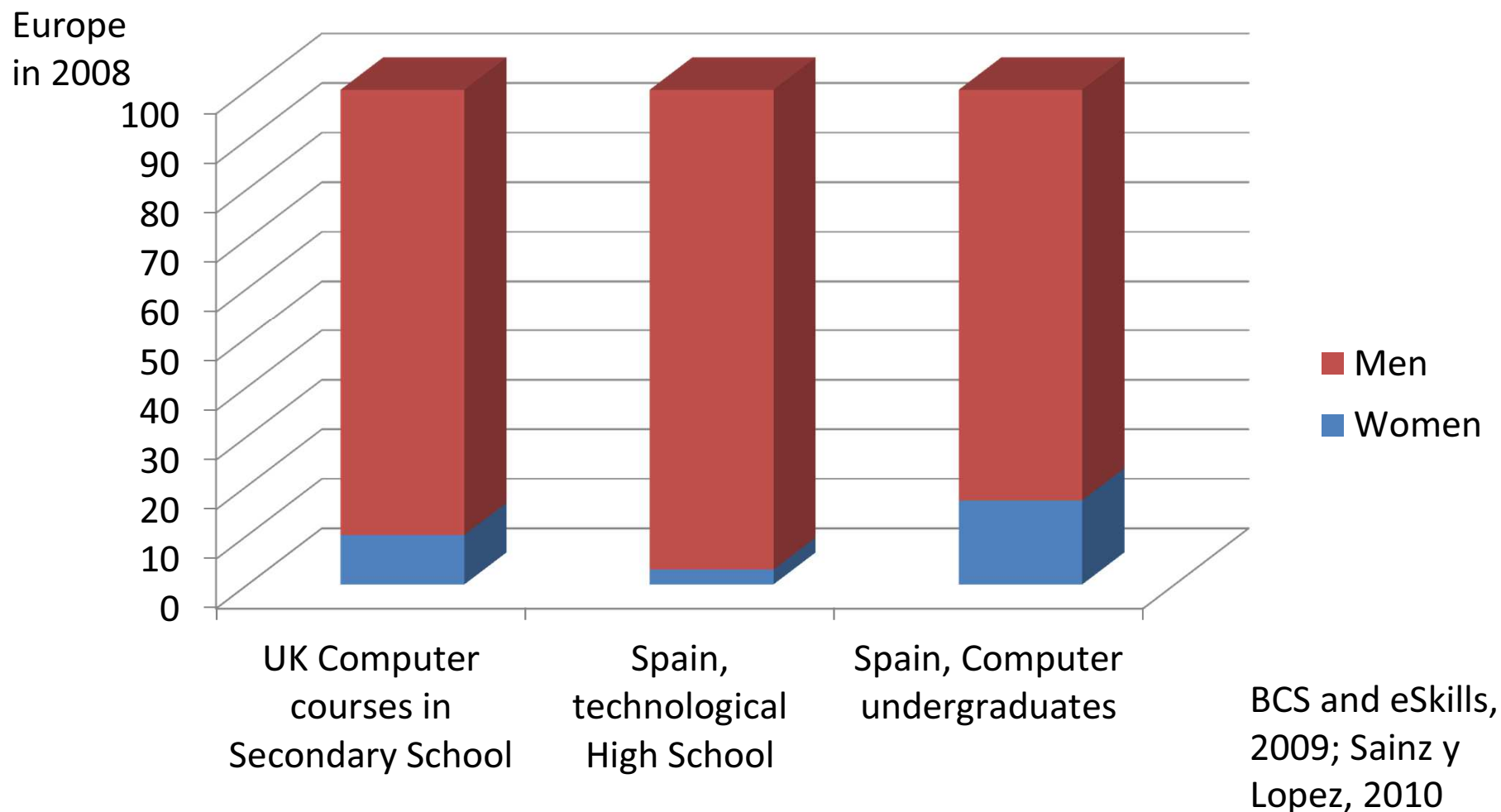joel.feliu@uab.cat

**Telecentre Europe Annual Conference
eSkills for the 21st century**

Working group: Gender equality

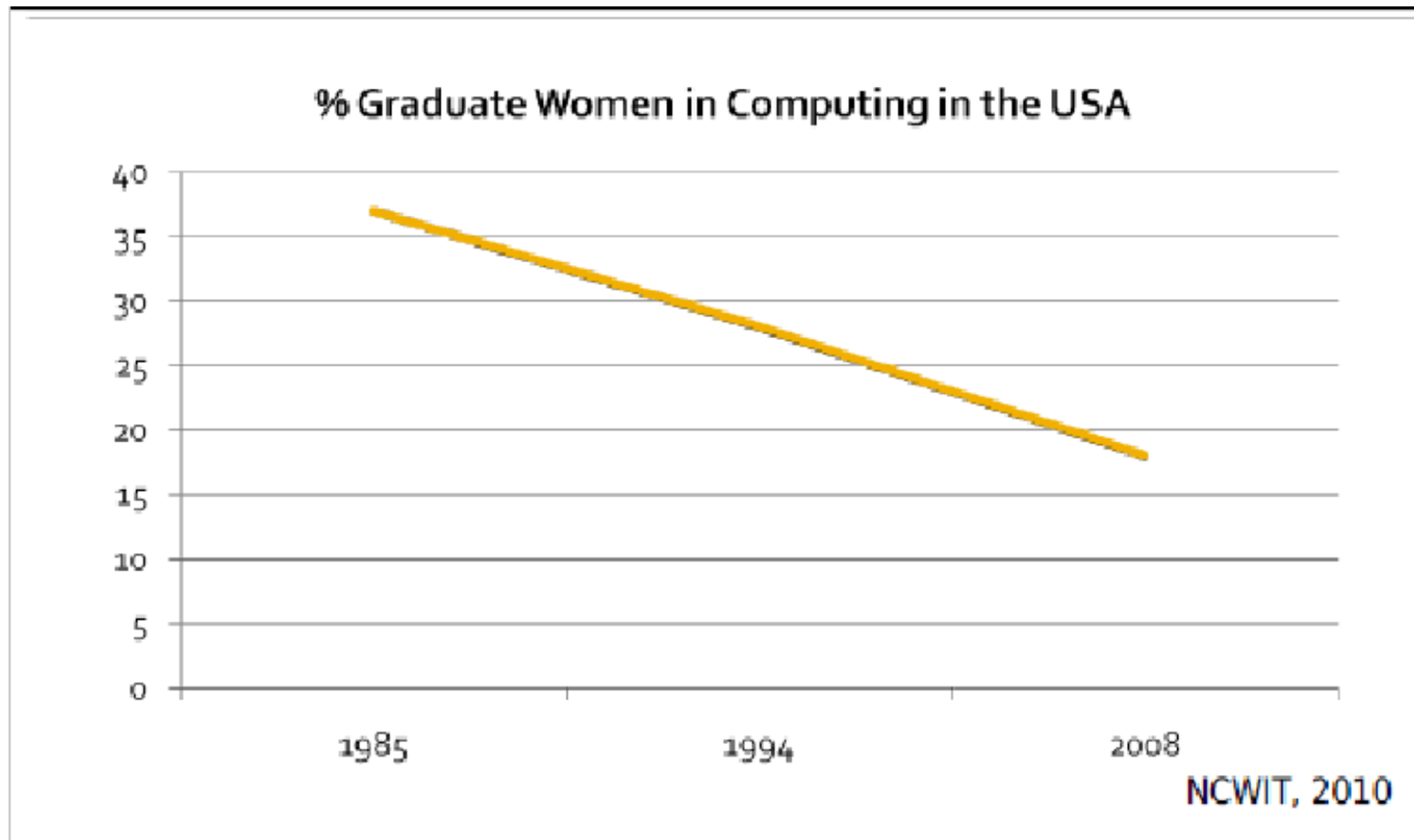JoventIC 01010101

Underrepresentation of women in technological studies

Europe in 2008

Men

Women

UK Computer courses in Secondary School

Spain, technological High School

Spain, Computer undergraduates

BCS and eSkills, 2009; Sainz y Lopez, 2010

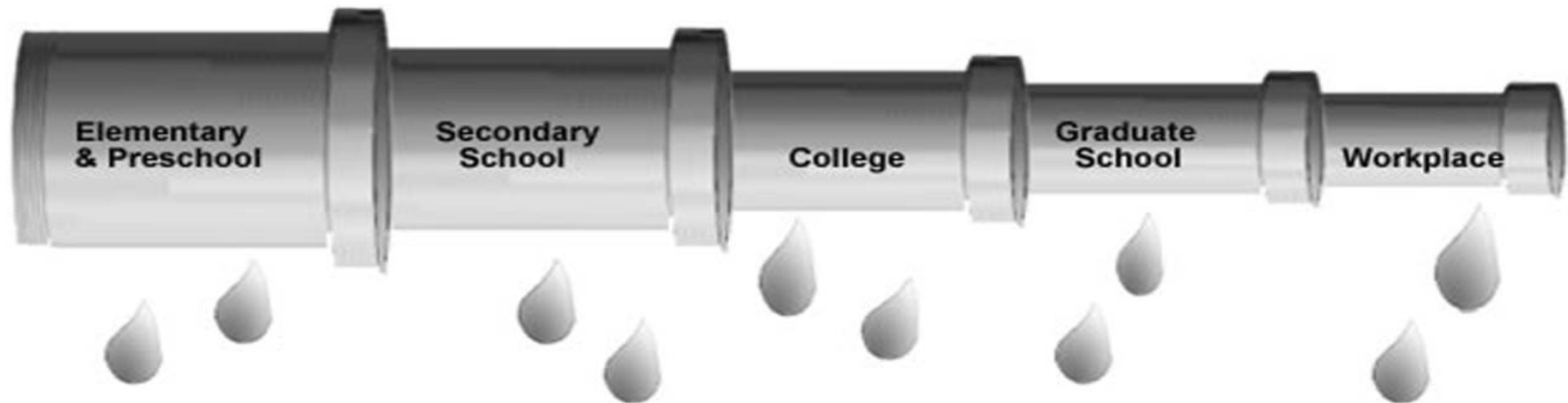# Increasing inequality

% Graduate Women in Computing in the USA

NCWIT, 2010

The leaky pipeline

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The problem of women not using computer technology to create/code or make objects, apps, software or design systems...

...is not only a problem for companies who lack of engineers to hire but a social problem which has repercussions in the lives of women

Why is this a Social Problem?

- Technological dependence
- Heightened vulnerability
- Invisibility on the Internet
- Exclusion from innovation and technological creation
- Exclusion from the future

This is not a universal problem

Seeking out new worlds and new civilizations:

- The cases of:
  - India
  - Malaysia
  - Former Eastern Europe
  - Western world in the recent past
    - Women as historical protagonists

Contemporary western world:

- Gender-essentialist ideology
- Self-expressive value systems
- Highly diversified curricula and job market

A Matter of Choice (…really??)

- "What to do when they are not really interested, it's their choice!"

- "it is a matter of personal choice (of tastes), if they are not interested they have the right, no one can force them, so we must do nothing."

This is how "choice" looks like:

- Video 1: Els meus amics a favor o en contra 1:37

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9QXzOKZYkQ

Road barriers / Invisible routes

- When a girl gets there, due to multiple 'accidents', it is automatically invisible: her story does not correspond to the dominant narrative, it is quickly forgotten or actually declared an exception. The routes that these women take are full of obstacles and/or invisible

Barriers

- Low levels of self-confidence in developing technological skills:
  - Lack of previous activities related to IT
  - Neuro-sexist discourse
  - Stigma is in the eye of the beholder
- Unappealing job market

Gendered barriers

- Fitting computer activities in one's own gender:
  - "I hate wasting time. -I'm not a gamer." "we are grown-ups we don't lose time playing"; "videogames are for children"; "boys are obsessed by videogames"…

e-Motional Barriers

- Emotion about technology can be thought as a signal to our gendered subjectivity.
- But it is mediated by one's expectations regarding:
  - our gendered identity,
  - definition of technology as a masculine site and
  - the definition of technology as playful (thus childish).
- Discursive context:
  - Gender binary is "natural" / Emotions are "natural" / What I feel is "natural"

Invisible Routes

- Main invisible routes:
  - Making something useful, applied: caring
  - Will to understand how things work, curiosity
  - Politics (Hacking, Community groups)
  - Diversion routes: through medicine, arts, film animation, chemistry, biology, math…
- Unusual routes ("masculine like") exist:
  - passion, falling in love with the machine, hardcore videogaming, code for the sake of coding…
  - But cannot be taken as "The Route": they are not.

To pipeline? Or not to pipeline?
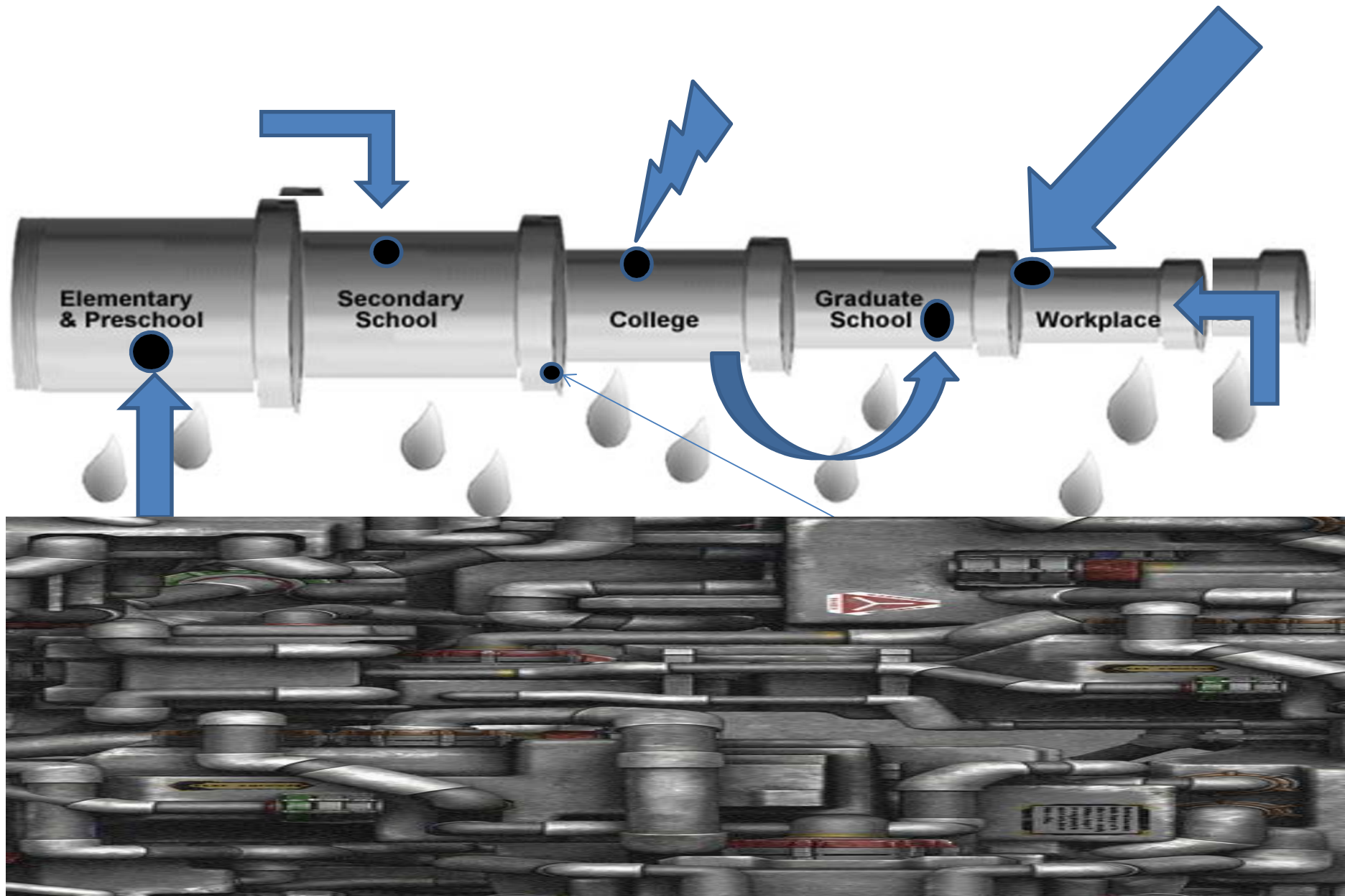
Things that can be done

- Making visible the invisible routes to provide young girls with feminine career models

- Rehearsing/testing new emotional responses to social and personal situations involving technology

Video 1.1: Tiu, què et costa explicar-m'ho 3:23

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUfQDOdnGjk

Our contribution

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