Cinderella or Cyberella: Empowering Women in the Knowledge Society

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Cinderella

♦ Works in the basement of the knowledge society (if she works in it at all)

    ♦ little opportunity to reap its benefits.

    ♦ waits for "her prince" to decide the benefits she will receive.

CYBERELLA

♦Fluent in the uses of technology

♦Comfortable using and designing computer, technology and communication equipment, software, and in working in virtual spaces

♦Devises innovative uses for technologies across problems and subjects

♦Finds information and knowledge to improve her life and expand choices

♦Active knowledge creator and disseminator

♦More than a user, designs information and knowledge systems to improve all aspects of her life.

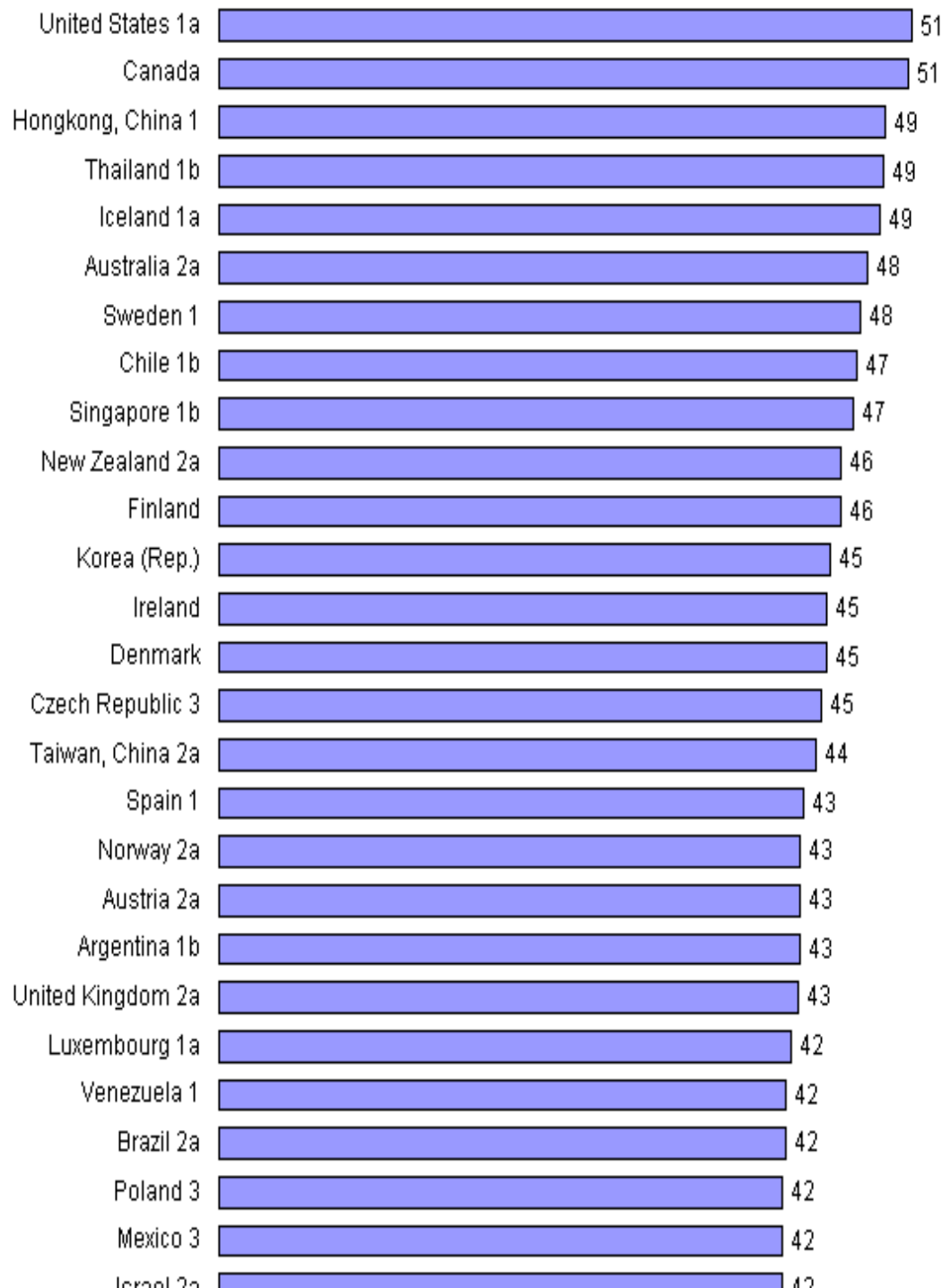# Phases of gender and ICT inclusion (Sue Rosser)

- First stage: absence of women's concerns and presence from the IT sector not noted
- Second stage: women's issues and concerns "added on" to existing structures and designs, but seen as problems, anomalies and deviance from ICT norms
- Third stage: Women seen as workers, users and designers of ICTs
- Final stage: full inclusion of women in all these aspects

What do we know about women and information technology worldwide?

♦ Few statistics available globally to cover the situation of women and information technology

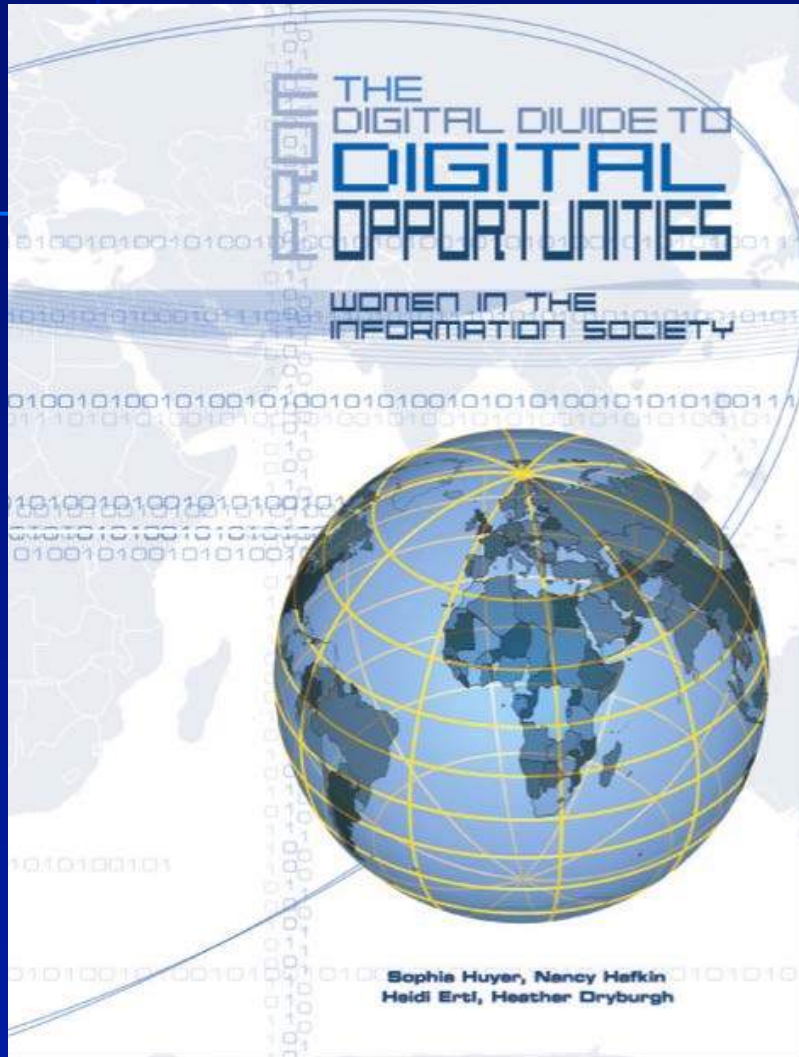## Female Internet users as % of total Internet users, 2002

Country	%
United States 1a	51
Canada	51
Hongkong, China 1	49
Thailand 1b	49
Iceland 1a	49
Australia 2a	48
Sweden 1	48
Chile 1b	47
Singapore 1b	47
New Zealand 2a	46
Finland	46
Korea (Rep.)	45
Ireland	45
Denmark	45
Czech Republic 3	45
Taiwan, China 2a	44
Spain 1	43
Norway 2a	43
Austria 2a	43
Argentina 1b	43
United Kingdom 2a	43
Luxembourg 1a	42
Venezuela 1	42
Brazil 2a	42
Poland 3	42
Mexico 3	42
Israel 2a	42

Female Internet users: what's missing?

Little data on female Internet use in developing countries

♦ Data available on only one African country – South Africa

♦ Only five Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela)

♦ No Middle East countries, except Israel

♦ Many Asian countries, but weighted towards wealthy countries, no India

♦ Available data reflects the global digital divide.

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Relationship between Internet penetration and proportion female Internet users
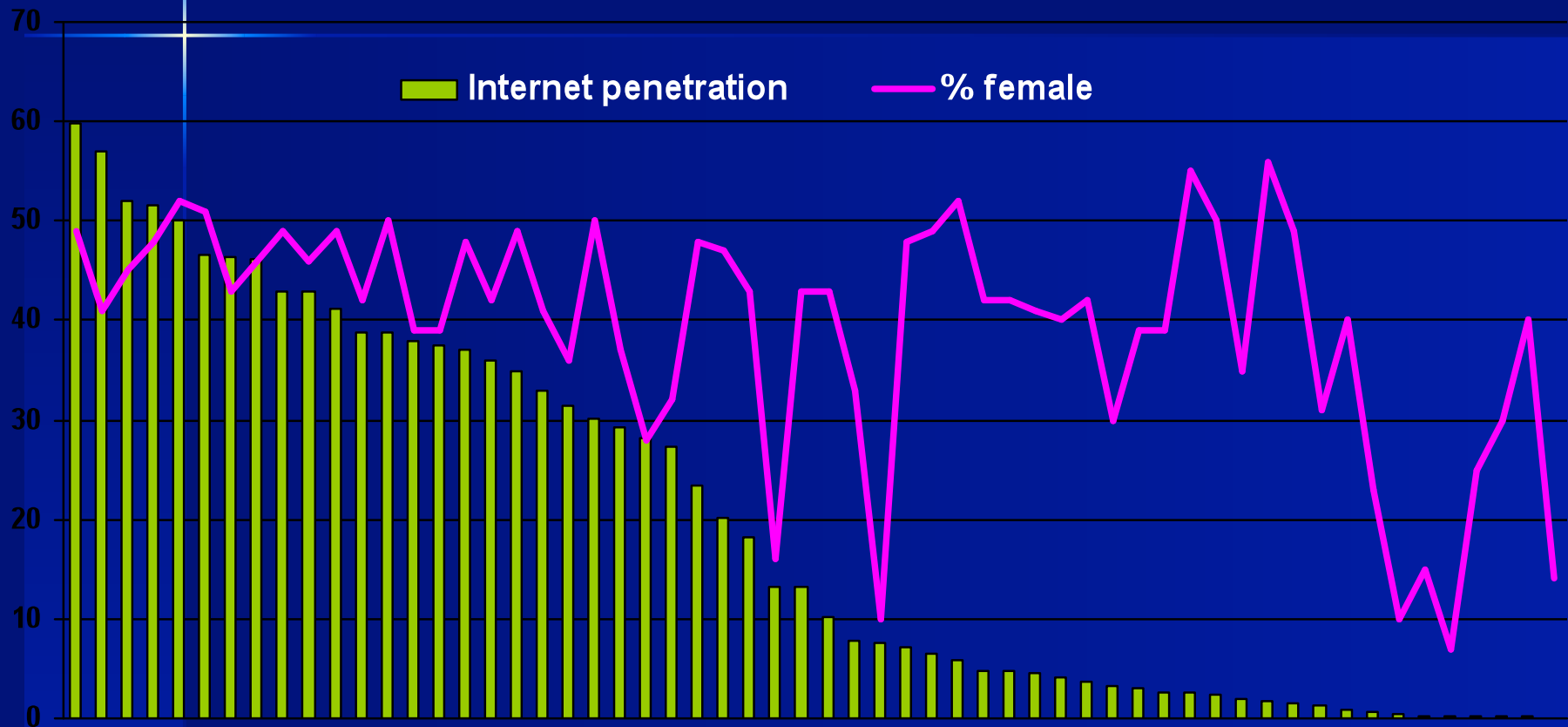
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Women in the Information Society

♦ Gender divide more pronounced in developing countries

♦ Even countries with high infostates have gender inequalities in use

♦ The gender divide and the overall digital divide do NOT move in tandem.

♦ Disputes argument that you don't have to take care of gender; it will take care of itself.

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Where is most attention going?

♦ Women in the IT industry and ICT-enabled businesses

♦ Women in science and technology education

♦ Comparative access of men/women to Internet

♦ Women using ICTs for advocacy, political empowerment

Intersections with globalization

- ICT-enabled remote service jobs: CBSS, BPO, ITES, outsourcing
- Issues in women and call centre employment
- Global spread of remote service jobs

Where are the challenges?

♦ Women and ICT4D

♦ ICTs for poverty reduction for poor women in the informal sector in developing countries

♦ ICTs for women's improved health, well being, income

♦ ICTs applied to existing businesses and enterprises (vs ICT-enabled businesses)

ICT4D-Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 2006

♦ Grameen VillagePhone brings focus on poor rural women gaining empowerment through ICTs as small-scale entrepreneurs

Why single out women?

♦ Myth of gender neutral technology-built it and everyone will benefit!

♦ Evidence that gender blind does not produce gender neutrality

♦ Growing attention to gender/women and development, but . . .

♦ Lack of awareness of women's/gender issues in ICT

Constraints to girls and women access, use of IT

♦ Little access at home- high costs, gendered access

♦ Public access the normal mode- gendered cultural, time and cost barriers

♦ Education

♦ Language

♦ Geographical location

♦ Disposable time

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More constraints . . .

♦ Limited mobility

♦ Lack of appropriate content

♦ Technophobia

♦ Gender socialization about technology

♦ Losing out, even in classrooms

Policy-level constraints

- ◆ Absence of women from IT policy
- ◆ Belief that IT (and all technology) is gender neutral
- ◆ Policy makers lack of knowledge of gender aspects of technical issues
- ◆ Gender advocates' unawareness of IT issues

Gender issues in technical IT policy

- ♦ Network modernization
- ♦ Network architecture
- ♦ Network deployment
- ♦ Infrastructure
- ♦ Technology choice
- ♦ Sector liberalization
- ♦ Tariff policy
- ♦ R&D, innovation
- ♦ Learning and training systems
- ♦ Building technological capacity

Silver bullet or latest problem for women?

♦ Increase in accessibility and quantity of pornography

♦ Tool to facilitate trafficking

♦ Associated with increased domestic violence and assertions of patriarchy

♦ But ICTs can contribute much to the process of realizing human capabilities, potential, freedom, as basic components of development (Amartya Sen).

Thank you

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