

In J. R. Walker and R. V. Bellamy, Jr., eds., The Remote Control in the New Age of Television (pp. 169-186). Westport, CT: Praeger (1993).

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Gender Differences in Remote Control Use

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The popular media (e.g., cartoons, greeting cards, television shows) have satirized gender differences in RCD behavior by portraying men as channel hoppers (The battle 1991; Kissinger 1991). The image of the man in the recliner with a beer in one hand and the remote in the other has become a cultural icon. The popular media image is that men control the television set and dominate use of the remote control device. On May 30, 1991, the ABC program "Primetime Live" speculated on why men are channel hoppers with the remote. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld offered his explanation: "Men hunt and women nest. And that's why we watch TV differently. Because we're still hunting. Men are still hunting. But there's nothing to kill anymore. This [the RCD] is the only weapon left that men have, on a nightly basis, with which they can still hunt" (Sawyer 1991).

Can something with so much face validity be wrong? This chapter focuses on gender differences in the use of remote control devices. We undertook this study to identify which attitudes and behaviors showed significant gender differences and what motivations were behind the differences. Taking into consideration different approaches to explaining gender differences, we anticipated that differences in socialization would minimize some differences in remote control use for younger adults. But we expected that inherent male-female differences in information processing would be revealed in differences in the reasons for changing channels.

RESEARCH ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN RCD USE

Men and women approach and use the remote control device differently. Several studies have noted gender differences in perceptions of RCDs, frequency of use, and motivations for changing channels.

Perceptions of RCDs

The view of the remote control device (RCD) as a part of the male domain has been reinforced by research. Gray, for example, asked women to describe household technology as either pink (feminine) or blue (masculine). This strategy "produces almost uniformly pink irons and blue electric drills" (1987, 42). Video technology is usually described in mixed colors: VCR "record" buttons are usually lilac but the timers are usually blue. However, "the blueness of the timer is exceeded only by the deep indigo of the remote control" because it is almost always controlled by men.

Males view the remote control device as a source of power. In a series of focus groups, Ferguson observed that several male participants admitted to fighting over the remote control: "My roommates and I fight over the remote. When we leave the room we hand it off to another guy to make sure someone else doesn't get it. Sometimes we'll hide it. Reminds me of people who call the remote God [because it] controlled their life" (1990a, 2). Ferguson and Perse (1991) also found that men are more likely than women to feel powerful when they are in control of the RCD. Walker and Bellamy (1991a) noted that males were also more likely to use the RCD to annoy others.

Women, on the other hand, view the remote control as a source of frustration. One of the six themes to emerge from focus group research (Ferguson 1990a) was frustration over control as a part of RCD use. Females reported a sense of frustration directed at the person (always male, in this sample of women and men) who controlled the remote control:

My dad is a cruiser. He'll flip it back and forth and it gets real irritating. My dad does that, just something fierce. It makes me so mad. 'Cause I'll sit down and he'll be watching something and I'll watch it and just at the point—I don't know how he does this—just at the point when I'm getting in to it, he'll flick it to something else. Then I'll watch that, and I'll just be getting into it, and he'll flick to something else. Everyone gives him a hard time, but he thinks they're kidding him. (Ferguson 1990a, 2)

The frustration that women feel because of a loss of control over their television viewing may lead women to have more negative feelings about the remote control device. Ainslie observed that "more than half of women viewers (who are often forced to graze by their spouses or children) . . . say they enjoy TV less while grazing" (1988, 57).

Frequency of Use

Some limited research suggests that males use RCDs more than women. Heeter (1985), for example, reported that adult males change channels more

and engage in several other behaviors that reflect higher levels of channel changing. Males use viewing guides less, watch more different channels, engage in less concentrated channel use, and are more familiar with different channels.

Heeter (1988b) also noted that males are more likely to change channels before settling on a program to watch, during commercials, and in the middle of programs. Moreover, Heeter found other gender differences that may be due to greater use of remote control devices. Men exhibit less television viewing loyalty. Ten separate studies using a variety of methods revealed that females are more likely to watch the same daily and weekly programs and that men are less likely to plan their viewing before turning on the television set.

Ferguson and Perse (1991) observed several gender differences in remote control use. Men changed channels more. Women, on the other hand, were less likely to graze (flip channels) during their favorite programs. Ainslie summarized that "men graze more than women and enjoy it significantly more" (1988, 54–55).

Motivations for Changing Channels

Several studies have also identified gender differences in the reasons for changing channels. Consistent with the findings that males change channels more, males are more likely to endorse reasons for changing channels.

In general, men are more likely to change channels to avoid commercials (Ainslie 1988; Ferguson and Perse 1991), to watch two or more shows at the same time (Ainslie 1988; Ferguson and Perse 1991; Wenner and Dennehy 1990), and to check what is airing on other channels (Ainslie 1988; Ferguson and Perse 1991). Walker and Bellamy (1991a) found that college men were more likely to change channels to avoid certain types of content, especially political ads, and to watch news or weather.

Summary

Heeter (1988b) noted that men seem to prefer greater variety, rather than familiarity, in television viewing. And remote control devices make it easier for men to achieve that variety. Thus, studies reveal that males have more positive perceptions of remote control devices, use them more, and are more likely to endorse reasons for changing channels that focus on power or variety seeking. However, few scholars have speculated about the underlying causes of these gender differences.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER DIFFERENCES

Feminist writers have identified three perspectives on gender differences: liberal, radical, and socialist (Steeves 1987; van Zoonen 1991). In general,

different explanations are based on the socialization of children, biological and psychological characteristics, and social and economic power. Each perspective has implications for RCD use.

The liberal perspective holds that there is no inherent biological or psychological basis for most gender differences. The strongest factor in creating differences between males and females is socialization. Stereotypical roles are pervasive in society; children learn these roles from parents, schools, peers, and the media. An important implication of liberal perspectives is that gender differences can be eliminated through social learning. Societies can eliminate gender-based stereotyping through education and social action.

Conversely, the radical perspective holds that there are profound biological and psychological differences between men and women. Men and women differ greatly in physiology, and some scholars argue that there are physiologically based gender differences in information processing (Meyers-Levy 1989) and ethical reasoning (Gilligan 1982). This perspective is considered "radical" because its proponents believe the following: Because female characteristics are belittled in patriarchal societies, women can realize their goals only when they separate from men.

The socialist perspective posits that women's social roles promote gender differences. The patriarchy creates and maintains these roles to maintain economic and political power. The domestic roles occupied by women, focusing on nurturing and concerns for family, are accorded less societal power. According to this view, gender differences are socially based and can be eliminated only by societal upheaval. Like the liberal perspective, the socialist perspective is concerned with gender differences leading to gender inequality. The two perspectives differ, though, in level of concern and assumptions about society.

The liberal perspective focuses on reducing gender differences through changes at the individual level—equal socialization of children and elimination of gender stereotypes. The liberal perspective is rooted in social tradition and affirms the value of existing societal structures. The socialist perspective, on the other hand, holds that individual change can occur only through changes at the societal level. Gender differences are based in social, economic, and class divisions reflected in family and work structure. Thus, the socialist perspective argues for change in the existing social structures.

Explaining Gender Differences in RCD Use

Liberal Explanations. The evidence suggests that differences between men and women's use of remote control devices reflect differences in socialization. In recent studies, adult respondents, socialized in an earlier era of strong gender differentiation, exhibited clearer differences in RCD use than

younger respondents. Heeter (1988b) found many gender differences in adult samples across ten separate studies, but only few differences in three samples of fifth and tenth graders. Ferguson and Perse (1991) noted several gender differences in RCD behaviors and attitudes in men and women, but these differences were not apparent in young women and young men (Ferguson 1992a; Walker and Bellamy 1991a; Wenner and Dennehy 1990). This reduction in gender differences found in samples of younger viewers is consistent with findings associated with mental abilities (e.g., verbal, spatial, and mathematical) and social behaviors (e.g., influenceability, helping, aggression). Hyde, for example, found that research on social behaviors over the past fifteen to twenty years has shown "a decline in the magnitude of gender differences" (1990, 72). She used d scores, where $d = M_m - M_f / s$, yielding an effect size (positive when male greater, negative when female greater). Between 1966 and 1973 her meta-analysis showed gender difference effect sizes $d = .53$, but only $d = .41$ between 1978 and 1981. Female advantage in verbal ability among pre-1973 studies was $d = -.23$ but only $d = -.10$ after 1973.

The liberal view suggests that older adults acquired their media use attitudes and learned television behaviors when U.S. society was more sex-delineated. Thus, females in general would be expected to use the RCD less. But the behavior of younger women raised in more feminist times should reflect fewer gender differences.

Radical Explanations. Another possible explanation for RCD-related gender differences highlights differences between males and females in attentional styles, information processing, and judgment. The superior verbal development of females, which is exhibited at an early age, allows them to listen to television without looking more often than boys do. However, males have superior visual skills. Alvarez, Huston, Wright, and Kerkman (1988) reported several experiments and secondary analyses that demonstrated consistent differences between boys and girls in visual attention. They concluded that boys focus more on the visual content of television and girls focus more on the verbal auditory content.

Other researchers have studied gender differences in attention and recall. Anderson, Lorch, Field, Collins, and Nathan (1986) reported that men looked at the television set more than women. Although Stauffer, Frost, and Rybolt (1983) found no gender differences in the recall of network television news programs, Gould (1987) noted that younger females recalled more television commercials than other male and female groups. Gould attributed such findings to greater self-consciousness about inner thoughts and feelings and greater social anxiety in the presence of others among younger females.

Meyers-Levy (1989) presented an extensive review of the literature on information processing. Meyers-Levy was able to reconcile sometimes contradictory findings by postulating a selectivity hypothesis: Males do not

comprehensively process all valuable information, relying instead on highly available and salient heuristic cues, while "females generally attempt to engage in a rather effortful, comprehensive, piecemeal analysis of all available information" (1989, 221). Although neither of the two is a superior information-processing strategy, Meyers-Levy found support in the research literature for gender differences on several levels of information processing: interpretation, play behavior, other-directed interactions, spatial versus linguistic skills, and influenceability. In general, women are distracted more by irrelevant details and competing information (Halley 1975). Men, on the other hand, are better able to ignore information that does not help them meet their goals.

Meyers-Levy's argument assumes that there are inherent psychological gender differences. It suggests that men use the remote control more often because of their more rapid (though not necessarily better) decision making and ability to discard irrelevant information. Women, on the other hand, should find the frequent content shifts because of changing channels annoying and distracting, unless they are changing channels to seek or avoid specific content.

Socialist Explanations. There are several explanations for gender differences in RCD behavior that are grounded in disparities in social power and social roles. First, because males control the production of media content, most television characters are male (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, and Roberts 1978; Greenberg, Simmons, Hogan and Atkin 1980), creating a male bias that extends to masculine sex-types content and masculine connotations. Because of this overriding male bias, male viewers may be interested in a wider variety of television content and actively seek additional stimuli via the remote control device.

Second, the home is the location of domestic work for women and the site of relaxation for men. Cleaning, cooking, and child care are often part of the rhythm of women's television viewing (Modleski 1983). Gender differences in channel changing might be explained by women's greater distraction by household concerns while viewing.

Third, men traditionally wield greater power in the family. Men generally control media use (Morley 1986). Males have greater say in both program selection (Lull 1982) and technology purchase (Harvey and Rothe 1986). Presumably, males' superior understanding of technology leads them to control these devices, including VCRs (Cohen and Cohen 1989) and remote control devices.

Research Expectations

This study focused on gender differences in channel changing and tested explanations drawn from three different perspectives. First, a liberal perspective suggests that gender differences are based on sexist socialization.

Because research notes that more equal socialization of men and boys is leading to fewer sex differences (Hyde 1990), we expected that gender differences in RCD behaviors would be present only for older viewers.

Hypothesis 1: Older males will change channels more than older females. Younger females will change channels as much as younger males.

Second, the radical perspective on gender differences holds that there are intrinsic biological and psychological differences between men and women. Because Meyers-Levy's (1989) research suggests that males may make channel selection decisions more quickly because they rely on highly salient visual cues, we might expect more rapid and, thus, more channel changing in males. But differences in channel-changing behaviors may be more evident in the reasons for changing channels. Men, who attend more to visual information and can process information more quickly, are more likely to change channels to increase visual stimulation and variety and avoid boredom. Thus, males should be more likely to change channels for stimulation-related reasons such as the following: to follow more than one program at a time, to see if something better is on, and to avoid boring programs and commercials. There should be fewer differences in changing channels to seek (or avoid) specific sorts of television content, such as news, music videos, and other specific programs.

Hypothesis 2: Men will change channels more for stimulation-related reasons.

Third, a socialist perspective on gender differences suggests that gender differences arise from societal roles. Because women are more likely to watch television while being involved with competing household chores, we expect that channel changing will be lower for women who are engaged in distracting activities while watching television.

Hypothesis 3a: Engaging in greater levels of distracting activities while watching television will be associated with lower levels of channel changing.

Gender differences also arise from different social power, according to a socialist perspective. Men more often control media selection and use. Thus, we expected that gender differences in RCD use would be greater in women who are viewing with others and do not control the remote control device.

Hypothesis 3b: Gender differences in channel changing will be greater in viewers who are watching with others.

Hypothesis 3c: Gender differences in channel changing will be greater in viewers who do not usually control the remote control device.

These hypotheses were tested with data collected in two studies: a quota sample from the East Coast and a random-digit telephone survey from a town in the Midwest (Ferguson and Perse 1993; Perse 1990). The use of two samples and two methods of data collection might strengthen the generalizability of our findings.

METHOD

Study 1: East Coast

Procedure and Sample. In Spring 1988, research assistants enrolled in a research methods course at the University of Delaware were given course credit for collecting the data for this study. The 180 assistants, trained in questionnaire administration and ethics, were instructed to recruit adults in six age and gender quotas (male and female, by ages 18–34, 35–49, and 50 and above) to complete questionnaires. Within a two-week period, 566 self-administered questionnaires were completed.

The sample was 50.6% male (coded 1) and represented ages 18 to 85 ($M = 40.44$, $SD = 15.07$). Respondents were drawn from a wide geographic area; 158 different zip codes were represented. The sample membership was somewhat well educated. Overall, 20.8 percent were high school graduates, 32.8 percent had attended college, 27.7 percent were college graduates, and 14.2 percent had attended graduate school. Respondents' occupations were coded into seven categories: 1 = professional, 7 = unskilled labor (Warner, Meeker, and Eells 1949). An independent coder recoded 10.0 percent of the occupational responses. Intercoder reliability was 89.5 percent. Average occupational level was 3.03 ($SD = 1.48$). Respondents watched an average of 2.89 hours of television a day ($SD = 1.72$).

Because this study considered gender differences in channel-changing behaviors, only respondents who owned a remote control device were included in the sample. Of the sample 75.4 percent ($n = 427$) owned a remote control device. The sample differed only slightly from those surveyed but not included in the analyses. Those with remote controls had higher-status occupations ($M = 3.04$) than those without ($M = 3.48$, $t(532) = 2.87$, $p < .01$). Remote control owners were also more likely to subscribe to cable than nonowners.

Channel Changing. Channel-changing frequency was not measured directly in this study. Instead, we assessed likelihood of changing channels by asking respondents to indicate whether or not they changed television channels while they watched: "between television programs"; "when commercials come on"; and "in the middle of shows—even when commercials aren't on." Because these items reflect types and locations of channel changing, the responses were treated as Guttman scalograms. Of the total sample, 1.8

percent never changed channels (coded = 0), 23.5 percent changed between programs (1), 44.3 percent changed when commercials came on (2), 30.4 percent changed in the middle of shows (3).

Changing Motivations. Respondents indicated how closely thirteen reasons for changing channels drawn from previous research (Ainslie 1988; Heeter and Greenberg 1985b) matched their own reasons for changing channels (5 = exactly, 1 = not at all). Nine reasons focused on changing channels to seek stimulation and avoid boredom: to avoid commercials ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.17$); to watch more than one show at a time ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.06$); to check what else is on ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.02$); because of boredom from watching the same program ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.04$); to see if something better is on ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.08$); to see something different ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.98$); to seek variety ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.05$); to see what's on the other channels ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.08$); and to see what they're missing on the other channels ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.14$).

Four of the changing motivations concerned channel changing for content-related reasons: because they don't like what they're watching ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.03$); to watch a particular program ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.08$); because someone else asks them to change the channel ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.04$); and because they don't like the program they're watching ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.10$).

Distractions. To assess distractions while viewing, respondents indicated how often (5 = very often, 1 = never) they engaged in seven distracting activities: reading a book, newspaper, or magazine ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.13$); preparing food ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.21$); eating ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.00$); doing housework or chores ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.17$); doing needlework or hobbies ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.25$); taking care of children ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.14$); and doing homework or paperwork ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.23$). Distractions ranged from 1.00 to 5.00 ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.70$, median = 2.71, Cronbach alpha = .71). The scores were split into two groups around the median.

Study 2: Midwest

Procedure and Sample. A random-digit-dialing telephone survey was conducted in Spring 1991 among adults living off campus in Bowling Green, Ohio. Out of 813 valid attempts (excluding business numbers, no answers, and ineligible persons), there were 615 completions and 198 refusals, giving a 75.6 percent completion rate. The sample was 45.1 percent male and ranged in age from 17 to 93 ($M = 36.27$, $SD = 17.01$). The average respondent had completed 14.45 years of education (ranging from 8 to 20 years, $SD = 2.45$). Hollingshead's two-factor social position index measured occupational level (Miller 1983) and ranged from 11 to 73 ($M =$

46.50, $SD = 18.52$), with lower scores representing higher status. The typical respondent watched 2.98 hours of television a day ($SD = 2.24$).

Once again, because the study focused on gender differences in channel-changing behaviors, all analyses included only those respondents who owned remote control devices (73.5%, $n = 452$). The RCD-owner subsample was not substantially different from nonowners, but owners ($M = 45.80$) had higher occupational status than nonowners ($M = 49.59$) and were more likely to subscribe to cable TV (76.5%) and own VCRs (82.4%) than nonowners (45.0% and 54.5%, respectively).

Channel Changing. Ferguson (1992b) reported on the unreliability of asking respondents to indicate how many times per hour they change channels. For example, people are more likely to remember "how often" they glanced at their wristwatch yesterday than "how many times" they performed such a mundane behavior. Because of the difficulty in precisely recalling a similarly mundane behavior, respondents with RCDs described their frequency (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = often, 4 = very often) to the question, "How often do you flip channels?" The mean score was 2.37 ($SD = 0.81$).

Channel-Changing Motivations. Respondents indicated how often they changed channels (4 = very often, 1 = never) for nine reasons adapted from RCD motivations identified by Ainslie (1988) and Walker and Bellamy (1991a). Five motivations focused on stimulation-boredom reasons: to watch two or more channels at the same time ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.93$); to avoid commercials ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.09$); out of boredom ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.85$); to annoy others ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 0.72$); and to peek at other programs out of curiosity ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.82$). Four motivations focused on seeking specific content: to watch music videos ($M = 1.75$; $SD = 0.92$); to watch news ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.87$); to avoid seeing certain persons on television ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.90$); and as a substitute for printed TV listings ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 0.99$).

Viewing Content. Respondents indicated how often (4 = very often, 3 = often, 2 = seldom, 1 = never) they watch television alone. Most (30.2%) respondents seldom watched television alone. The mean score was 2.73 ($SD = 0.81$), reflecting that most respondents were sometimes alone. The four response categories were collapsed into a "seldom" group (44.1%) that included "never" and "seldom" and an "often" group (55.9%) that included "often" and "very often."

Respondents also indicated the person in their household who most often operated the remote control device. Most respondents (50.9%) reported that they operated the RCD most often, followed by respondent's husband or other male (23.5%), wife or other female (9.0%), decision by consensus (6.9%), two or more children (2.4%), or nobody in particular (2.2%). The remaining respondents (5.1%) did not know or would not answer. This

item was recoded to reflect self-controlled RCD (50.9%) or other-controlled (49.1%).

Statistical Analysis

Following scale construction, there were several stages to analysis. We tested the hypothesized interaction between sex and age on channel-changing levels with a 2 (sex) by 2 (age) analysis of covariance using educational level and occupational status as covariates. Because of our concern with socialization differences between younger and older respondents, age was dichotomized into two groups, those age 29 and younger and those age 30 and older.¹ A 2 (sex) by 2 (age) analysis of covariance using educational level and occupational status was also used to explore gender differences in reasons for changing channels.

There were several steps to testing the third set of hypotheses. First, a *t*-test was used to examine male-female differences in engaging in distracting activities during television viewing. Second, a 2 (sex) by 2 (distraction) analysis of covariance (once again using education and occupation as covariates) explored the influence of distraction on channel changing. Third, a 2 (sex) by 2 (viewing context) analysis of covariance tested the impact of group viewing on channel changing. Last, a 2 (sex) by 2 (device control) analysis of covariance examined the impact of device dominance on channel changing.

RESULTS

Study 1: East Coast

Testing the Liberal Perspective. The first hypothesis predicted that gender differences in channel-changing behaviors would be found only in older viewers. The cell means for Study 1 are summarized in Table 12.1.

Analysis of covariance supported the hypothesis. Sex had a significant effect on channel-changing location and type: $F(1, 385) = 11.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Males changed channels more than females. Age also had a significant effect: $F(1, 385) = 11.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$. Younger respondents changed channels more.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, however, there was a significant interaction between age and sex in the East Coast study: $F(1, 385) = 6.71$, $p < .01$. As expected, gender differences were reduced for younger respondents.

Testing the Radical Perspective. A radical perspective to gender differences is based on inherent differences between men and women. We expected

Table 12.1
East Coast, Analysis of Covariance: Channel-Changing Motivations as a Function of Sex and Age

	Males		Females		F Sex	F Age	F Inter- action
	<30	30+	<30	30+			
Channel Changing	2.22	2.12	2.27	1.74	11.71***	11.86***	6.71**
<u>Stimulation</u>							
Avoid commercials	3.64	3.26	3.68	2.84	8.43**	23.59***	6.05*
To watch more than one show at a time	2.60	2.56	2.53	1.75	36.32***	11.94***	12.12***
Check what else is on	3.85	3.42	3.83	3.15	5.27*	23.10***	1.30
Bored watching the same program	2.96	2.56	2.67	2.50	3.18	3.70	1.41
To see if something better is on	3.83	3.51	3.72	3.28	4.89*	8.50**	0.24
I want to see something different	3.30	3.10	3.16	3.11	0.55	0.64	0.43
I like variety	3.22	2.89	2.91	2.69	6.80**	4.01*	0.31
To see what's on other channels	3.63	3.25	3.51	2.96	6.61*	14.13***	0.64
To see what I'm missing	3.22	2.88	3.12	2.46	11.16***	13.36***	1.66
<u>Content</u>							
I don't like what I'm watching	3.33	3.24	3.39	3.46	1.61	0.01	0.33
To watch a particular program	3.46	3.55	3.55	3.87	5.15*	2.53	0.92
Because I don't like the program I'm watching	3.35	3.29	3.49	3.50	2.64	0.02	0.09
Someone asks me to	2.89	2.78	3.09	2.91	1.65	1.52	0.17

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

those differences to be reflected in the reasons that people changed channels. We hypothesized that men would change channels more for stimulation-related reasons. There was partial support for the second hypothesis. The cell means are reported in Table 12.1.

Men in the East Coast study were significantly more likely to report changing channels to avoid commercials, to watch more than one show at a time, to check what else is on, to see if something better is on, because they like variety, to see what's on other channels, and to see what they're missing.² Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no difference between males and females in reporting changing channels out of boredom or to see something different.

There were few gender differences in content-oriented changing motivations. Women were significantly more likely to report changing channels to watch a specific program. Several non-hypothesized relationships emerged between age and changing motivations. Younger respondents were more likely to change channels to avoid commercials, to watch more than one show at a time, to check what else is on, to see if something better is on, to seek variety, and to see what's on other channels. In two cases, there were significant interactions between age and sex. Gender differences were apparent only in older respondents in changing channels to avoid commercials and to watch more than one channel at a time.

Testing the Socialist Perspective. The third set of hypotheses concerned the influence of social roles on channel changing. Hypothesis 3a was tested in Study 1. Hypothesis 3a predicted that women's typical responsibilities in the home would lead them to engage in more distracting activities than men while watching television. This expectation was supported in the East Coast study by t-test. Women ($M = 2.97$) reported more distracting activities than men ($M = 2.62$); $t(418) = 6.93, p < .001$.

Our next expectation was that distracting activities would be associated with lower levels of channel changing. Because the East Coast study did not directly assess channel-changing frequency, we tested whether distracting activities would affect the location and type of channel changing. This hypothesis was not supported. Although sex was a significant influence on location and type of channel changing ($F(1, 369) = 12.62, p < .001$, eta squared = .16), distractions were not a significant factor ($F(1, 369) = 1.60, p = .21$).

Study 2: Midwest Study

Testing the Liberal Perspective. The liberal perspective was tested in Hypothesis 1, which predicted that gender differences in channel-changing behaviors would be found only in older viewers. The cell means for the Midwest study are summarized in Table 12.2.

Analysis of covariance supported the hypothesis.³ Sex had a significant

Table 12.2
Midwest, Analysis of Covariance: Channel-Changing Motivations as a Function of Sex and Age

	Males		Females		F Sex	F Age	F Interaction
	<30	30+	<30	30+			
Channel Changing	2.75	2.36	2.64	1.99	14.83***	33.00***	4.38*
<u>Stimulation</u>							
Watch two or more channels	2.47	2.12	2.22	1.81	11.18***	12.32***	0.19
Avoid commercials	3.14	2.45	2.89	2.28	5.49*	26.68***	0.05
Boredom	2.92	2.82	2.39	2.31	1.19	33.45***	0.02
Annoy others	1.80	1.60	1.39	1.24	10.38***	19.89***	0.07
Peek at other programs out of curiosity	2.98	2.53	2.76	2.32	9.07**	23.77***	0.03
<u>Content</u>							
Music videos	2.15	1.49	2.20	1.43	0.87	43.40***	1.48
News	2.64	2.37	2.11	2.26	10.69***	0.53	6.94**
Avoid certain persons	2.70	2.69	2.44	2.47	0.07	3.41	0.02
Substitute for listings	2.64	2.64	2.56	2.07	6.16*	13.29***	5.72*

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

effect on channel changing in the Midwest study ($F(1, 423) = (14.83, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19)$). Once again, males changed channels more than females. Age also had a significant effect: ($F(1, 423) = 33.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$). Younger respondents changed channels more.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, there was a significant interaction between age and sex: ($F(1, 423) = 4.38, p < .05$). As expected, gender differences were reduced for younger respondents.

Testing the Radical Perspective. In terms of the influence of inherent differences between men and women on channel changing, the second hypothesis predicted that men would change channels more for stimulation-related reasons. The cell means are reported in Table 12.2.

Once again, there was partial support for the second hypothesis. Men in the Midwest study were significantly more likely to report changing channels to avoid commercials, to watch two or more channels at a time, to annoy

others, and to peek at other programs out of curiosity. There was no gender difference in changing channels out of boredom. There were some gender differences in content-oriented changing motivations. Men were more likely to change channels to watch news reports and as a substitute for printed listings.

As before, several non-hypothesized relationships between age and changing motivations were uncovered. Younger respondents were more likely to change channels to watch two or more channels, to avoid commercials, out of boredom, to annoy others, out of curiosity, and to watch music videos. There were two significant interactions between sex and age. Gender differences in changing channels to watch news were shown only in younger respondents (younger men were more likely than younger women to change to see the news). Older females were least likely to substitute channel changing for printed TV listings.

Testing the Socialist Perspective. Hypothesis 3b expressed our expectation that women would change channels less because they watch television with others who tend to control the set. We predicted that gender differences would be greater in viewers who typically watch with others. The hypothesis was not supported. Once again, sex was a significant factor ($F(1, 422) = 23.03, p < .001$). Males ($M = 2.55$) changed channels more than females ($M = 2.25$). Watching television alone or with others was a near-significant factor in channel changing ($F(1, 422) = 3.47, p = .06$). Those who watched alone changed channels less ($M = 2.30$) than those who watched with others ($M = 2.45$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no significant interaction between sex and viewing context: $F(1, 422) = 0.36, p = .55$.

Hypothesis 3c predicted that gender differences in channel changing would reflect male domination of the use of the remote control device. Thus, we expected that gender differences would be greater in viewers who do not usually control the remote control device. This hypothesis also was not supported. Differences in channel changing were not a function of control of the remote by the respondent ($M = 2.47$) or another ($M = 2.30$): $F(1, 423) = 1.28, p = .26$. Also, there was no significant interaction between sex and control: $F(1, 423) = 0.50, p = .48$.

DISCUSSION

Part of the promise of the new media environment is that unbounded choice replaces the homogeneity of the "old media" (Webster 1986). In addition to cable television and the videocassette recorder, the remote control device (RCD) is a choice-facilitating element in the new media environment. This study examined RCD use as a function of gender differences.

Overall, the results of our study are consistent with previous research that identified gender differences in channel-changing frequency and mo-

tivation (Ferguson and Perse 1991; Heeter 1988b; Walker and Bellamy 1991a). Men changed channels more readily and more frequently than women. Men were also more likely to endorse more reasons for changing channels than women. Similar to earlier findings, men were more motivated to change channels to seek variety and stimulation and to avoid annoying or boring content.

Our study considered three explanations for gender differences arising from liberal, radical, and socialist frameworks. We found a good deal of consistency across our two studies in our findings in changing levels and motivations. In general, we found support for liberal and radical perspectives.

The liberal perspective argues that there are no inherent differences between men and women. Differences that have been identified are due to the stereotypes that exist in and are reinforced by society. As these stereotypes are reduced, children will be socialized more similarly and gender differences will disappear. Our study found that differences in channel-changing frequency appear to be decreasing for younger viewers. Although older men change channels more than older women, younger males and females did not differ significantly in how often they changed channels. Moreover, younger respondents from the East Coast did not differ in their desires to change channels to avoid commercials and to watch more than one show at a time.

But the results of our study also offer support for a more radical view of gender differences. This perspective argues for inherent biological and psychological differences between men and women. We expected these differences to be reflected in motivation to change channels. Consistent with our hypothesis that men would change channels to increase stimulation, we found that men were more likely to change channels to avoid commercials, to watch more than one channel at a time, and, in general, to seek variety in their television viewing. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to change channels only to watch a particular program.

These findings differ somewhat from prior research. Ferguson and Perse (1991) found that males were more likely to avoid commercials, but Walker and Bellamy (1991a) found that sex was not related to that motive for changing channels. Both Ainslie (1988) and Ferguson and Perse (1991) noted that women were more likely to change channels to peek at other programs, for curiosity. In our studies, that motivation was more strongly endorsed by males. Clearly, research should continue to explore the nature of gender differences in reasons for changing channels.

According to the radical feminist perspective, the real differences between men and women make it impossible for women to achieve self-actualization in a gender-mixed society. Gender differences in television program preferences and attitudes about and use of various television technologies appear to be real. Future research should explore the impact of mixed-gender tele-

vision viewing on satisfaction with television. Just as romance novel readers enjoy private time reading (Radway 1984), female television viewers may find more satisfaction with television when they can choose programs and change channels themselves (see also Gantz 1985).

We found little support for a socialist perspective to explain gender differences. This view holds that differences between men and women arise from roles created by societal structure. Although women engaged in more distractions while watching television, distractions had little impact on type or location of channel changing. Sex did not interact with viewing context to influence channel changing. There are two possible explanations for these null findings. First, our methods might not have been sensitive enough to locate the subtle influence of societal power. Most research based on the socialist perspective has used in-depth interviews and observations (Gray 1987; Morley 1986). Second, the social roles created for women may be so powerful that they may continue to influence their viewing across a variety of viewing contexts.

The results of our study support the views of writers who have conceptualized the remote control device as both a tool and a toy (Bellamy and Walker 1990b; Wenner and Dennehy 1990). For the men in our samples, the RCD appears to be a tool that eases location of stimulating television content. But because men use concrete props to facilitate play (Meyers-Levy 1989), the RCD may also be a toy. Future research should explore the content and process gratifications of remote control use (Cutler and Danowski 1980).

These studies' results point out that the concept of stimulation may be useful to future media research (Christ 1985). Males seem to use the RCD to seek variety and stimulation and to avoid unpleasant content. Research has observed that sensation seeking, a personality trait that leads people to seek risks and excitement (Zuckerman 1979), is linked to watching horror movies (Edwards 1991) and some reasons for watching television (Conway and Rubin 1991). Research should explore the influence of sensation seeking on reasons for changing channels (see Wenner and Dennehy, Chapter 9 of this volume).

The implications of how men and women use RCDs differently to view television have practical impact on television programmers and theoretical importance for television choice models (Heeter 1985; Webster and Lichty 1991). Research might explore gender differences in attention levels during commercials. Older women might be more attentive, because they are less likely to change channels to avoid commercials. On the other hand, distracting activities may detract from awareness of commercials (Perse 1990). Printed and on-air promotions should be aimed at women, because they are more likely to seek specific programs when changing channels. Finally, advertisers who want to attract male attention should increase the stimulation appeal of their commercials.

NOTES

We'd like to thank Charles Pavitt for arranging data collection.

1. The median age was 36 in both studies. Age 30 was chosen to mark the split between the two groups because it traditionally marks the end of adult youth. Also, persons in their thirties in 1988 and 1991 were socialized before the rise of feminism in the 1970s. Thus, they reflect a theoretically significant young-old split, rather than just a chronological one.

2. The subtleties in wording are worth noting. The phrase "what else is on" suggests mild dissatisfaction; "see if something better is on" implies stronger dissatisfaction. The phrase "see what's on other channels" may only denote curiosity.

3. Occupational status was a significant covariate in only the Midwest study. Educational level was not significantly related to channel changing.

Part V**The Impact of Remote Control
Devices on Media Industries**