

Women who control too much:

One of the common difficulties that men have with women relates to women's need to be in control of family life. It is and has always been difficult for men to voice this dissatisfaction because a lot of the time they do not feel entitled to even say this. They don't feel entitled to it because the women they want to complain about are so competent and effective. They do control their husbands and families but they do it so well that the men can feel churlish and irrelevant in their objections because when they look in the mirror they see someone who is so less effective than she is. In some families fathers are set up to be good role models for their son's. In other families, unfortunately, father is set up as the bad example. "Whatever you do, don't end up like your father!" is not an uncommon declaration.

Men often lose their voice in family life – they lose a sense of being able to contribute meaningfully and relevantly. This results in their gradual withdrawal and underachievement; or else in their aggressive displays of power to compensate for their felt emotional irrelevance and lack of control.

The need for control is the most common complaints that partners have about each other. What is relationship control? We are all familiar with direct efforts at control such as intimidation, coercion, bullying, criticism, etc. However, there is another less visible form of relationship control that often goes undetected. This can be applied by men and women but let me examine how women control relationships today:

Control tends to be achieved by the person that decides the roles and responsibilities of each partner in the relationship. In this way, the controlling person does not directly control the other person, but rather controls the rules that govern the relationship itself. When someone controls the relationship rules they take a position of declaring each person's roles, responsibilities, obligations, and moral requirements. This is a very clever form of control because the controlling person is not necessarily abusing the other person, or bossing them around. He or she is, rather, stating they way the relationship is supposed to be and exerts direct and indirect pressure on the other person to conform to those expectations. If you control the rules and roles within the relationship you then find it easy to control the person. Once this pattern has been laid down it is very difficult to correct it. In fact, one of the disturbing ways that you gain control over someone is by getting them to comply with trivial, rather than important demands. A man will control a woman therefore by getting her to wear what he wants, by getting her to shop in a specific place, or by criticising her trivial errors and omissions. When someone controls the small things the bigger things are easy to colonise. A woman's version of the same thing might be the way she gets him to do trivial things for her in the company of others, getting him to do a household chore again because he did it poorly the first time, or directing his every move as he drives.

Women gain control of relationships by deciding, for example, what their husband's role is and by exerting pressure on him to comply with those expectations. She may assign him the role of bread-winner and assume the role of home-maker for herself. She may then, by virtue of his broad compliance, assume the responsibility and authority for herself on what happens in the home, with the children, and with extended family. He may find himself not being able to have an opinion about family life and when he does his opinion may be categorised as largely irrelevant. This is because he has accepted her authority as the person who decides on roles and therefore he accepts his role of not having responsibility or authority at home.

A woman can gain control of a relationship by deciding what kind of communication should occur in the relationship. For example, very quickly in a relationship a pattern can be set up that assumes that she has the right to complain and criticise him about his performance at home. She sets it up in such a way that it is her duty to do so. To be critical of him is her assuming her responsibility. Because she has designated herself as the Skipper of the Family Boat, she then assumes the right to raise issues and complaints. Once this pattern has been repeated for some time the husband finds himself in a subordinate role. He can become sheepish and avoidant. He can begin to lose his voice and fade into the background of family life. He might even think that his subordinate role is best, he will find himself saying things like "she is a great organiser" and so much better than he is.

A woman can also gain control of a marriage or relationship by just taking charge of responsibilities – of who is responsible for what. In assuming this role she indirectly gets control of the relationship and therefore of him. For example, if he is happy to let her tell him what his responsibilities are and if she is happy to assume the role of being his mother, then control is assumed. This control can appear invisible but he finds himself later in life being scolded for not doing things properly, being issued with instructions like he is another kid in the house, and being lectured like he is an incompetent.

What I am emphasising here is that the person who controls the ground rules for the relationship as a whole is the person who is in control. She does not have to be abusive, or bullying, or bossy for this to happen. All he knows is that, after some time, he has lost his voice. He feels less and less entitled to express his point of view and he fades into the background. When he does assert himself he may find that it results in a big fight. This is so because when he tries to assert himself he is trying to change the rules of the relationship and this, as I have illustrated, has been her job. The person who controls the relationship rules controls the relationship. The person who controls the relationship controls the other person. Control can therefore often masquerade as competence. Her apparent efficiency can be her way of controlling the relationship. And him. The Simpsons is funny to a lot of men for the simple reason that the father is portrayed as the family idiot. Many men secretly identify with him for this reason.