

What men complain about:

In marriage and intimate relationships men and women tend to have different complaints about each other. These complaints refer to their partner's attitude, behaviour, and mood. The stereotypical complaints that men make about their wives or partners tend to be that:

1. Her expectations and demands are excessive.
2. Her reactions are disproportionate.
3. Her behaviour around the house is too controlling or bossy.
4. Her emotions and moods are difficult.

I will describe each of these in more detail: With regard to his partner's demands or expectations being excessive the kinds of things he will complain about include:

- Her wanting him to do too much around the house.
- Her wanting more time with him than she gets.
- Her wanting him to assume more responsibility for things.
- Her needing more communication and participation from him.
- Her expecting him to be more available emotionally.

With regard to these kinds of expectations, the man will feel that they are too much and will often defend against them. However, she will typically be left feeling frustrated with his failure to live up to the mark. She will then feel let-down, angry, irritable, disappointed, stressed, or depressed. He, on the other hand will feel 'put-upon' and feel that nothing he ever does is good enough. This will trigger feelings of failure and guilt that create a chronic fear about what he is going to face when he gets home. Alternatively, he may become angry and defensive as he resists and seeks to defy her demands.

The second things that men tend to complain about are her emotional reactions. It is not unusual to find men saying that their wives *overreact* to situations and events. Men will complain that though they understand her frustration with certain things, they find it hard to cope with the intensity of her reactions using phrases such as 'over-the-top', 'losing the plot', 'stressed out', or 'being hysterical'. He will want her to 'calm down' or to 'pull herself together'. These reactions, of course, act as fuel to the fire of her distress as he appears to 'miss the point entirely'. These kinds of arguments and spats are very common in relationships as she feels that his dismissive and diminishing reaction to her are condescending and trivialising.

The third area of complaint for men tend to be related to her being excessively controlling or bossy when it comes to family life. His general complaint is that whatever he does is not enough or else inadequate and that she spends a lot of time and energy telling him what to do. He might complain that he 'does not get a look in' when it comes to how things are done. He might complain that she acts like his mother while she might complain that he acts like a child. At his worst he will complain that she has become domineering and controlling and that his role is to comply and to try and keep her happy.

The fourth area of complaint by men relates to their partners emotions and moods. As with the previous categories, the complaint tends to be related to intensity and excessiveness. In other words, that she gets *too* upset, *too* needy, *too* angry, or *too* moody. The man will often complain that though he may have done something wrong or bad that she lets things get to her too much. This applies to his extreme behaviour as much as his everyday behaviour. For example, it is not unusual to find men complaining that their partner's reactions to their drinking, affairs, abuse, neglect, and even violence as being excessive. It is as if men have a streak in them that makes them want to be 'left alone' when it comes to their bad behaviour. But men will also complain about their partners everyday emotions as being excessive – be they her tears at how he has hurt her, her anger at his failure to keep promises, her anxiety about his unreliability, etc.

You will notice, then, in all of these general complaints the general pattern is that a lot of men complain about the excessiveness of their partners behaviours. It is as if men tend to think that their partners expect and need too much from them. Men tend to then feel either inadequate or defiant. In other words, he will try to measure up to her expectations or else defy and try to resist them. The first man ends up feeling inadequate and guilty, the second man feels angry and resistant.

These portrayals of male complaints are stereotypical in many ways and seem to categorise men and women into typical roles. Of course, in many relationships the complaints are quite the opposite. However, it is interesting to consider how these struggles with over and under responsibility appear so frequently in relationships. The complaints described here are all related to issues of responsibility fitting in with the stereotype that, when it comes to the business of intimacy and family life, men tend to err on the side of under-responsibility while women tend to err on the side of over-responsibility thus drawing a battle-line across which each of them attack and defend.