

# What You Perceive As Control In Your Spouse May Not Be What It Seems

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by Brad Miller

Most of the husbands I have met will talk at some point about how their wives are controlling in ways such as the wife needs to be informed about everything, have a say in everything, and often will want to tell a husband how to do things. Or, at least, that's how they see it.

“What we often perceive as control in a spouse is actually much less about control than we think.”

This is less about “control” and more about the differences between men’s and women’s brains. If you can take just 5 minutes to understand what is actually going on in these situations, I am convinced that it could completely change how husbands and wives relate with each other as well as how often you each bump heads with the other.

Tami and I have been thinking quite a bit lately about this common theme where one spouse, usually but not always the husband, claims that the other spouse, usually but not always the wife, is too controlling and needs to loosen up. She needs to stop making such a big deal of everything that’s not a big deal. Right?! ([More on big deal vs. little deal here.](#)) We wish it were as simple as this, but it’s far more complex. Let’s dive in.

## OUR BRAINS ARE DIFFERENT!

Men’s and women’s brains are wired in different ways. It is easiest to generalize here and say that most men are single-task-focused, and most women are multitask-focused. Talk to a group of ten guys, and at least nine of them will admit that it’s difficult to truly multitask – to do more than one thing at a time and do it well and with full attention. Yes, men can play the air guitar while mowing the lawn, but that does not require their full attention. Ask most men to pick up some butter from the store while they are on the phone with someone, and you will see precisely what I mean.

On the other hand, generally speaking, women are much better multitaskers than men. The evidence of this can even be seen in MRIs that show more neural connections between the left and right sides of women’s brains. Ask a woman to pick up some butter while she is on the phone with a friend, while juggling a baby in one arm and a loaf of bread in the other arm, and she may pause her phone conversation long enough to ask you,

“Salted butter or unsalted?” This is not a stretch.

In practice, when a man walks through a room to get to the garage for a screwdriver, he never sees the sock on the floor or many other things in his path because he is focused on just one thing. The woman, on the other hand, cannot NOT see the things on the floor and more – all of them. In fact, the woman wishes that she could turn off this part of her brain or at least turn down the volume, but she cannot. This is how her brain is wired. To be fair, a man will do that one thing, his single task, well and with pride. Good job men!

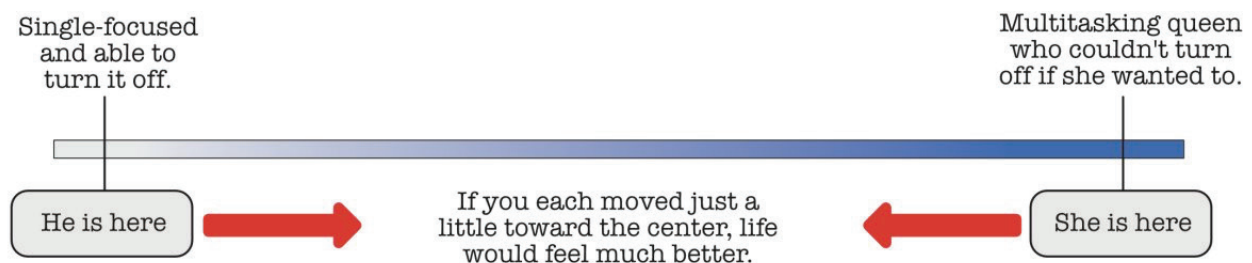
Furthermore, most wives at one time or another have asked their husbands, “What are you thinking about?” Only to be in disbelief when her husband answers, “Nothing.” “Nothing, really?” she says, because “nothing” is difficult for her to imagine. Most women would give their life savings to have a man’s “nothing box” for a day, but that will never happen. For women, the minute they are able to quiet just one of twenty or more messages in their heads, a new message or thought pops into its place – as if to make certain that a woman can never understand the concept of a nothing box in a man’s brain.

And this, dear friends, is why women can seem controlling at times—because she cannot just turn off her brain the way that a man can. So, long after most men have comfortably checked out of engaging with people or things and checked into their brain’s nothing box, their wife is still trying to close enough open-ended thoughts in her head that she can dream about a moment of mental and emotional rest. But for her, it will likely never happen.

In summary, men get to turn their brains off from time to time or focus on one thing to think about at the moment. This is a luxury that most women will never understand — she can’t *not* see the sock and if she tries to simply ignore it, she can’t do that either. All of this is to explain why you and your spouse are each on opposite ends of this spectrum. You already know how uncomfortable it can be for you to be on opposite ends of any spectrum, so we would suggest that you each try to make a small but meaningful shift toward the center of the spectrum, as illustrated below. Don’t worry about moving TO the center, just TOWARDS the center.

This “moving towards the middle” can be accomplished by a man who decides to believe what is actually true – that his wife cannot easily quiet her brain. And also by a wife who realizes that her husband is wired differently than she is. This way, instead of getting angry at him for not seeing the sock, it might even become comical!

P.S. You cannot wait for the other to make the first move.



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