

7. Submissive Words: How Submission Sounds

<https://youtu.be/PV8z4qoMBmY>

Note: I removed the dropbox and the voice exercises are now in the next lesson.

#1. Defensiveness

Defensiveness is a recurring pattern of submissive people.

Remember in the lesson of verbal expressions of power, where the most powerful person takes the judge role, does the questions, leads and, potentially, attacks?

Well, the submissive individual does the opposite.
He answers, justifies and defends.

Submissive people fall into this trap because they feel that their destiny is in the dominant men's hands, and they need to win their approval (selling themselves and qualifying) and/or their forgiveness (defending and justifying).

1.1. Justifying

Imagine this dialogue:

Authority: You knew it was forbidden didn't you

Person: (long face, low gaze) I'm sorry

Authority: Then why did you do it

Person: Well, I was thinking that it was OK after all because in this case there was an exception, because basically what happened is that...

"Person" in the above dialogue is defending and justifying himself.

He looks submissive to the authority.

Notice that “person” might be guilty.

Or he might not.

But simply by retreating, defending and justifying, he is behaving like he has committed a moral infraction and everyone around will think of him as morally guilty.

Also notice the abundance of words in the example.

Lots of words and convoluted stories are also a sign of justification and they communicate insecurity.

It's like saying “*here are all my excuses, and I need to make lots of them because I feel inferior to you all and I care so much about what you all think*”.

A more dominant way of handling that conversation would be this:

Authority: *You knew it was forbidden didn't you*

Person: *Yes I knew it*

Authority: *Then why did you do it*

Person: *I'm not sure why. I just did it and it was a mistake (I apologize to everyone involved)*

Or to deliver a barb to your inquisitor you could say:

Person: *“I'm not sure why the “why” matters or how it's going to help. I've done it, it's in the past, and now I know it was a mistake. I apologize to everyone involved and it won't happen again. This is what I will do to make up for it.. “*

Much more powerful.

Even with the apology, it's much more powerful. You own it without defending yourself.

Notice that “apologizing to everyone involved” is a social finessing power move.

Instead of apologizing to the person who is cornering you, which will give him a lot of power and authority over you, you are instead apologizing “to everyone involved”, thus not deferring to him.

1.2. “Just” (“I just meant.. “, “I just wanted to say.. “)

“I didn’t mean to offend you, I just wanted to fix a mistake”.

Just is the keyword of the defensiveness and it’s akin to asking for forgiveness.

1.3. “Because... ” (I tried to do this and...)

When you begin with “because” it often means that someone is in the position to field the questions, while you are in the position of having to answer them.

It’s not the biggest indicator of submissiveness, but if you find yourself always beginning your answers with “because” you should ask yourself why is that.

1.4. (long nonverbal pause) “What”

Do you remember that dominant individuals withstand social pressure and create tension?

Well, **the submissive party tries to *release* that social tension.**

Especially when the most dominant party seems angry or judgmental, the more submissive party will defend himself by re-engaging verbally. “what” in this case it’s as if to say “what have I done wrong now”.

Here is an example from the movie Beautiful Girls:

<https://youtu.be/gu6PAedRgkM>

“What” here it’s as if he was saying “what have I done wrong”, and that gives his group of friends power over him (the power of judging his actions).

A more assertive and socially powerful individual would have flipped the scripts instead and imposed his frame, which might have been something like “what the hell is wrong with *you* guys”.

#2. Insecurity

Read this section attentively.

These issue plague the majority of people and removing them will skyrocket your social power.

2.1. Filler words

Filler words are expressions such as “ehm”, “uhmm”, “well...”.

Filler words come naturally to most of us.

But “natural” doesn’t mean “good”, and we should all get rid of them.

Watch this [judge Judy video](#) several times until you also start hating filler words. Or join a Toastmasters where they use a clacker to highlight filler words.

Here as an example from Margin Call:

<https://youtu.be/Hhy7JUinlu0>

Also notice his intonation going up at the end of the sentence.

This an issue that plagues many people who *could* otherwise be confident and powerful. But you can’t look confident and powerful until

you get rid of your filler words.

Make filler words a priority (tips and advice on how to do it are later in this same module).

Here is an example of a public speech without filler words where most people, including me in the past, would have used filler words. After I trained myself to remove them, I come across far more influential and compelling.

2.2. Tail filler words

Same as above, but adding filler words *at the end* of a sentence.

They are utterances such as “ah”, “ok” or, as they do in Germany “ja”. It sounds terrible and like you don’t believe in what you’re saying.

<https://youtu.be/uenMdHLWsBI>

He looks solid overall but he loses points right off the bat because his sentence didn’t need any “OK” (first few seconds).

An example of tail filler words is also ending sentences with “or... “.

<https://youtu.be/9IEHO9Zft4>

At minute 3:32 there is a slightly different kind of tail filler word:

<https://youtu.be/Y-cUxJ1o2D8>

That tail filler word was out of pressure to fill the silence.

There was a good laugh on the first joke but not so much on the second one. That silence was getting heavy and “alright” was an effort to relieve the pressure.

Avoid it.

Notice the difference between “alright” after you have given a command or explained a procedure. In that case, it’s dominant

because it's asking to asking "did you get it?".
Much different here where it serves as a pressure-reliever.

2.3. Repeating oneself

People don't pay much attention to submissive individuals, which forces them to repeat.

Most importantly though, submissive people don't even *believe* that people listen to them, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Notice that we also saw repetition in the lesson on how powerful people behave, but they come from a totally different place. Socially powerful individuals repeat as if to say "*didn't you hear me, I gave you a question* (and I'm expecting a reply)". Submissive people repeat with a tonality and facial expression which says "*would you please listen to me*".

2.4. "Maybe this is silly, but..."

Submissive individuals fear social judgment and fear looking bad.

Thus, they preface their ideas and opinions with words that predict failure, so that if they *do* say something stupid, they at least soften the blow (or so they think).

Similar submissive expressions which signal insecurity are:

Insecure Person: I'm not an expert, but... "

Insecure Person: I hope this is not completely stupid...

PRO Tip: Don't do it, especially not before meeting someone
Sometimes you can see this behavior in women right before a date from online dating apps and platforms.

They try to manage down expectations by telling they don't look good, they're fat or that they dressed poorly for the day.

But this behavior only makes them come across as insecure. "Managing expectations down" can work, but it must be done more subtly and in person.



P.S.: and notice

me putting her at ease

Exception

Advanced communicators can use similar expressions to draw attention to what they are about to say.

So if you have a good reputation, authority and social status in a group, you can use it strategically.

2.5. Over-reactions (getting angry, raising one's voice, etc)

Overreacting shows signs of nervousness, unease, and over-dependence on the more dominant individual.

Furthermore, people who overreact show they don't have control over their own mind. Powerful individuals instead take care of dominating their own mind first and foremost.

Here's an example from the Godfather:

https://youtu.be/0_IsXQRM6uk

Raising her voice is a sign that she is not *fully* submissive and she is trying to reject his brother's authority.

But getting so worked up also shows her weakness: she needs to aggress to defend herself, which tells us that his brother is getting to her.

And when someone can easily get to you, it means that they are very important to you (likely, they have judging power over you and you need their approval).

Another example of an overreaction is when a submissive individual is being scolded, maybe unfairly, by someone they respect a lot and they just can't wait to jump in to defend themselves (ie.: "can't wait to defend myself to win your approval").

Relationships:

You will see the "can't wait to defend myself to win your approval" if you're a man in a relationship with a woman where you're the obvious leader.

When you are unhappy or explaining to her why you're disappointed she will jump in to justify herself before you can even finish your sentences.

2.6. Over-reactions 2 (jumps in, breaking mood etc.)

Look at this scene for twenty seconds, and ask yourself: who is the least socially powerful in the group?

<https://youtu.be/bWduxRfYeuA>

It's the lieutenant who says "Jesus".

He is the only one who overreacts to the bad news, coming across as the most fearful. Then he darts his eyes around looking for other people's reactions.

2.7. Verbal U-turning

When the dominant leader says something opposing what the submissive party has just said, you will often see the submissive party U-turning and/or flip-flopping.

U-turns can be full, 360 degrees changes or partial ones.

Partial ones would be something like "yeah, I didn't really mean..." or "well, I exaggerated a bit there, but...".

Seduction Note:

It's a very good sign in seduction when a woman U-turns to a man.

People who have become very socially skilled will sometimes contradict a woman on purpose to check her reaction.

And when they will notice verbal U-turning from her they will know they are holding sway. But since they don't want to dominate and destroy her, they will then build her back to make sure she doesn't feel humiliated (for example, giving her credit for what she just added or saying that her previous position also had some value).

2.8. Beating around the bush

Not cutting to the chase shows fear of telling things as they are.

We are afraid of how people might react so we pussyfoot around to test the water.

Here is an example from Zuckerberg's congress testimonial:

<https://youtu.be/eSWGXYr7YtQ>

In this case, beating around the bush was not just submissiveness, but also fear of saying anything compromising. This is one of those exceptions when behaving submissively is not only OK, but the best way to go

2.9. Upward Inflection

An upward inflection, or “going up at the end of the sentences” is very feminine, but not necessarily in a positive way.

If you're a woman you can keep it a little as it's attractive to some men. But scrap it completely at work and whenever you need authority and credibility.

Here is a good example of upward inflection from the movie Bridesmaids.

The very first moment, when she introduces her friend she goes up with the words “Danny” and “Becca”

<https://youtu.be/7kihC0VFaqE>

2.10. Trailing Off

This one says that you don't really believe in yourself and you're afraid that people might disagree with what you're just about to say (ie.: fear of judgment).

You will see a lot when an insecure individual starts to say something, then notices that people aren't really listening and instead of increasing his intensity to get their attention, he gives up and trails off.

Here is an example from The Wolf of Wall Street, the Swiss banker scene:

<https://youtu.be/ndTbiDQjbiE>

Notice how he also ends with a slight smile -friendly submissive signal- and a nod.

As if to say "OK I'm done, you leaders can take over now".

2.11. Passive-aggressive attacks

"Passive-aggressive attack" might sound like an oxymoron.

But this is a pattern I have noticed and that I have not read anywhere else so, same as "tail filler words", it doesn't have a standardized name.

So here it is just for you, an exclusive from The Power Move :).

Submissive people are afraid of cornering others, even when they are right.

So they use utterances such as "come on" and an abundance of filler words to "keep the pressure on" as they go on their passive-aggressive attacks.

I could not find any good video for this, but it's important because I have seen it from many different people and it's difficult to explain with just words.

So here's me doing an interpretation of a passive aggressive attack:

<https://youtu.be/1VSh9g6fyXU>

What's the powerful alternative?

The alternative is to state your point resolutely and assertively, just once. No "come on", no upward inflection and no filler words.

#3. Lack of Leadership & Direction

Submissive people look insecure because, often, they themselves don't know what they want.

And when they know it, they *still* submit their will to that of the leader or to that of the group, so they end up looking like they don't know what they want.

3.1. Verbal flip flop

Verbal flip flop means going from yes to no and spending a lot of time "uhm-ming" in the middle without taking a final decision.

Why do submissive individuals engage in verbal flip-flopping?

Because they don't answer based on reality or based on what they believe in, but based on what the group accepts and what the dominant figure wants to hear.

Hence, especially in tense exchanges, they try to guess what they *should* answer and switch back and forth waiting for feedback from the environment.

Look at this example from Reality Bites:

<https://youtu.be/YVOKgKYJB2E>

Ben Stiller shows all his insecurity by flip-flopping on such a simple decision as whether or not the waitress can take his dish.

PRO Tip: Pause, then decide. Or ask for an opinion, then decide
Sometimes it's not that we are being submissive, but that we aren't even sure ourselves.

What you can do then is to **pause to think for a second about what you want, then make your final decision.**

In the above example, you would tell the waitress: "one moment" and take two seconds to think.

If you're still not sure, keep the status quo to give you even more time to think about it and tell her "thank you, I'm not done yet".

If you're with someone, you can ask them first to take their opinion into account (caring leadership).

3.2. "Yeah, yeah..." (just confirms what the other says)

Not interjecting with one's ideas and opinions can be an indicator of submissiveness.

PRO Tip: Say you should be more informed

Sometimes you really have nothing to add but you still get asked an opinion. If you want to avoid to even risk looking like a follower, do the following: pause one second as if you were mulling it over, which makes you look intelligent and judge-like.

Then say "I think I can agree with what John said". Or, if you want to be more honest, which is always best, just say "I don't have an opinion

on that". If you're afraid of looking superficial because it's an important topic, say that "you should have more information" before committing to an opinion, which always sounds smart and wise -and it often *is* wise-.

3.3. "They said..."

Say the following sentences aloud:

"*they* said I could it"
"*they* allowed me",
"*they* told me".

How do they all sound to you?

All these words broadcast to the world that you don't have any power yourself.

Notice Trump using first "we" and then "they".

Notice how different it feels when he moves from "we" to "they".

<https://youtu.be/iTJIJxBTJV4>

He doesn't sound too presidential using "they", does he?

Probably Trump is trying to detach himself from the problem and doesn't want to make big statements about what he fears he cannot accomplish.

But don't fall for that: leaders must take the responsibility upon themselves.

The passive form makes it only worse, such as:

I was told

I have been instructed

I have been tasked with..

PRO Tip: Take ownership of tasks, even when you are told what to do

There will be plenty of situations in life where you are indeed instructed or told what to do.

And that's fine.

But if you keep behaving like you have no agency whatsoever in life, you will keep having no agency.

Even if you were told, instructed or tasked, take ownership of those tasks. Nobody put a gun to your head, so you also elected that those tasks are fair and moral enough for you to execute them.

So now they are *your* tasks.

You are doing, *you* need others to, *you* want to.

#4. Fear of Punishment

Submissive individuals are afraid of punishment from the most dominant individuals.

The following showcase a fear of punishment:

4.1. “Come on...”

Come on is the verbal equivalent of sticking your hand out to beg.

When people have no power to enforce resolutions and no courage to mount a serious challenge they resort to “come on-ing”.

Look at this Scarface example, with Frank betraying with his voice his total lack of leverage, power, and social confidence:

<https://youtu.be/PD9GJYT9Vw8>

“come on you listen to me *ah*”.

That “ah” is a tail filler word. It serves no purpose if not to prop up his own sagging courage.

4.2. Passive-aggressive attack, then 90° turn

Much of passive aggressive behavior stems out of fear of confrontation, fear of engaging, fear of ruining the relationship and, of course, fear of the dominant and assertive individual.

When submissive people get annoyed by more dominant individuals they might push back at first.

But then they get scared they pushed too much.

And to soften the blow they will add more (unneeded) words and filler words to fill the uncomfortable silences.

And it will be all the more obvious if the more dominant individual puts his foot down.

Here is a great example from the movie Fargo:

<https://youtu.be/Kt-US8ljtYw>

He first explodes -at least for his standards- and then spends the rest of the interaction trying to defend his own behavior with a slew of passive aggression.

4.3. ... “No I’m joking”

Please please never ever again do this.

A friend of mine, who could otherwise be a rather cool cat, never fails to come across instead as a fearful, powerless individual.

You will hear the “no I’m joking” right after someone makes a joke or a tease.

But the submissive individual is afraid the joke might be “too much” or the tease might not be well received.

So he immediately takes it back and invalidates with the “no I’m joking”.

***Person:** Of course you deleted the picture, you didn’t like your shirt had visible creases. No I’m joking.*

It makes you come across like a little mischief firestarter who likes to provoke people but who doesn’t have the balls to back it up.

Basically: the worst of both worlds. An asshole in intent, with the fear of a too nice guy.

#5. Child-Like Behavior

Same as we’ve seen in the previous lesson, child-like behavior also applies to verbal communication.

Childlike behavior includes the following:

- Temper tantrums
- High-pitched voice
- Whining
- Baby talk
- Many more words than necessary
- Giggling
- Squirming

Seduction exception:

Regression games to childhood are not necessarily signs of submission during seduction.

Voice Exercises

Hi guys,

In order to keep everything simpler for you and within the course you can now find the voice exercises in the next lesson called “practical steps to increase your confidence and social power”.