

2. Submission – Assertion – Aggression Continuum: You Need Them All

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR3F9CIJVwY>

Most social skills and communication resources present assertion as the sweet spot between submission and aggression.

And they are right... *As a rule of thumb.*

But if you want to maximize your potential, then you need to move beyond the rules of thumb and mastering the exceptions as well.

In social skills that means **you need to learn the whole spectrum** from submission to assertion to aggression.

Using Submission For Social Power

At first blush, there might seem to be no upside to submission.

But that's wrong.

Dating and relationships are one typical example where female submission can get men chasing and investing.

This is an exaggerated example of course, but the “damsel in distress” is extremely effective:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqrKjIUl-Yc>

And there are plenty more uses for submission.
For example:

– Put Women At Ease On First Approach

To keep within the male/female interaction, a man should not approach a woman too directly and confidently in situations where she could perceive it as dangerous -ie. at night when she's alone-.

In those situations, he might be better off going indirect, pretend he's lost, send "friendly" and submissive signals... And then *later*, once she knows it's all good, he can switch gears.

– Rebalance Relationships After You've Done Something Wrong

Submission helps to re-balance relationships when you have hurt someone or when you have abused your power.

[David J. Lieberman](#) correctly points out that if you hurt someone a "sorry" might not be enough.

The quickest -and the deepest- way to mend the relationship instead is to give them the power to punish you -which, if you do it well, will not lead to any punishment but to a better relationship-.

– Avoid Punishment

A third example is to avoiding punishment by strategically playing the submissive idiot.

This is especially useful when you have no leverage whatsoever. When you're out of leverage, appealing for mercy can work.

Example:

A friend of mine had been called by the finance office for tax return misrepresentation, a potential criminal offense if prosecuted. My friend had (stupidly) "tried his hand" and he knew he was guilty.

While some advised him to contact a lawyer, my friend showed in the office with broken local language, saying it was the first time he tried to file his own tax returns, which was true, and playing the “sorry I messed this up” role.

He then asked, “OK, what should I do now”.

Asking “what should I do now” relinquishes power on his future behavior and asks the officer to *direct* his behavior -a sign of submissiveness-.

The tax officer admonished him to be careful because that mistake *could* be a criminal offense.

My friend acted with restrained shock and muttered it was probably the last time he would file his own tax returns.

Then they fixed the mistake together, the tax officer explaining in the teacher role and my friend playing the ignorant student (the subservient position).

Result: he got away scot-free.

Now I don’t necessarily recommend you try to use submissive behavior to break the law or to avoid punishment, but this is an example in which submission trumped both aggression and assertion in getting what you want.

If my friend had shown up with an attitude (or with a lawyer), chances are that the situation would have escalated.

Using Aggression For Social Power

And there are plenty of times when aggression is the best course of action.

A good example is answering to aggression with aggression. Simple assertiveness against aggression, at times, might make you look weak.

Imagine your girlfriend slaps you in public and you “assertively” tell her she crossed your boundaries and you do not accept that. Well... That would work if she said something mean, but it might be too little for a public slap.

The 2017 presidential debates present many examples in which Hillary should have been more aggressive in dealing with Trump:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVNw1stHT7M>

Trump’s aggression allowed him to curtail Hillary’s speaking time. She didn’t even have enough air time to make her points. And from a political point of view, it looked like Trump was the embodiment of the angry citizen grilling an ineffective, crooked politician. Hillary’s justification confirmed that impression.

Another example where it’s best to meet aggression with aggression is during some types of relationship arguments. While many relationship guides and gurus recommend people not to respond to aggression, that can be counter-productive when it makes you look like a submissive punching bag (especially bad for men).

Example:

The only moment when Robin Williams seems to have a shred of dignity in the Mrs. Doubtfire divorce scene is when he raises his level of aggression to match hers:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKiAJWc2ouU>

Notice that it's not about showing aggression *per se*. It's that by matching your attacker's level of aggression, you communicate that you are not a submissive punching bag who's incapable of defending and drawing boundaries.

During this course, we will see plenty more examples and you will understand when it's best to use submission, assertion or aggression.

Gender Differences

In general, men are given more leeway to be aggressive. And men also lose more social points if their default state is too far into the submissive end of the spectrum.

For women, it's the opposite. Women are considered higher quality and are more sought after when they can get what they want using *less* aggression and assertion (we will have one lesson focused on female leadership).

This is not to say, of course, that women should *never* be aggressive and that men should *never* be submissive. What we said stands: there is a time and place for (almost) anything.

But, on average, women lose social capital when they overdo assertion and aggression. And men lose respect when they overdo submission.

That means that, on average, **women are better off positioning themselves slightly lower on the assertion continuum compared to men; and men are better off positioning further up as compared to women.**

The biggest loss for both genders when they miss-position themselves in the assertion continuum is in dating and relationships. Submissive men are very unattractive and aggressive women are rather unattractive.

The smallest loss for more aggressive women instead happens in the workplace.

Why?

Because the workplace ideal is a neutral structure where people are ranked on skills and results only. Of course, as we will see later that ideal “workplace meritocracy” doesn’t exist.

Pay Lip Service To Opposing The Double Standard

The fact that women and men are judged differently is an example of the so-called “double standard”.

Double standard often refers to gender, but it can be applied to races, skin colors, socio-economic background, etc.

Today it’s popular, especially among liberals, to oppose anything that even remotely reeks of “double standard”.

From a purely Machiavellian perspective the best approach to the double standard is this:

- 1. Accept the double standard as true and act accordingly to it**
- 2. Avoid taking up arms for either side**
- 3. If someone asks you about it, provide bland support to the complainers with something like “that’s a good point”, “yeah, unluckily”**

This is the rationale behind them:

1. Accept the double standard as true and act accordingly to it

You need to respect double standards because most of them stem from human nature.

Even if we don’t like it, they are still real. People *do* hold different groups of people to different standards, no matter what they say.

Still, don’t say that the double standard is here to stay.
And never look like you agree to it. So never say that a woman is unattractive for being “unfeminine” and never, ever say that submissive men are “pussies”.
But keep acting as if everyone thinks that way.
Because they do.

2. Avoid taking up arms for either side

You make a few friends being an extremist, that’s true.
But you alienate the majority because the majority doesn’t really like extremists.
Let others make enemies, you be a social chameleon.

3. If they ask something, provide bland support

Opposing the double standard is considered “progressive” and liberal. People tend to associate pro-social attitudes with progressive ideals

and a more “dog eat dog” attitude to more conservative and reactionary values and ideals.

So you're better off looking like you're leaning slightly more towards more liberal ideas because people will trust you more.

And yes, it doesn't matter who's right here, this is only about virtue signaling.

Finally, if you are in more extremists groups, bland support usually gives you a free pass and nobody will pick on you.

People look for extremists to create ingroup/outgroup dynamics, and if you seem open to any idea you will never provide them with an easy target.