

ST-C Module 8: Empowerment imagery exercise (by Eckhard Roediger)

If the client has difficulties to get in touch with his or her assertive side you can offer the following imagery exercise. Be aware that social role models require a different procedure for male and female avoiders. For male avoiders the goal is to strengthen their touch side because we expect that a virile man is basically attractive for a dominant woman because deep in her heart she hopes for a strong and reliable partner she can (at least sometimes) lean on. For males dominant women might appear threatening and not sexually attractive. Thus, we have to take different roads.

Version to strengthen a **male avoider** ("brave knight" exercise):

Therapist (talking to the *man* sitting on the assertiveness chair): *"If you guys are ok with it, I would like you to please close your eyes now. Tom... picture yourself now being 10 feet tall and full of muscles. Like a brave knight in a fairy tale or a warrior in a science fiction movie... Can you feel that strength running through your body?... It's in your chest, your shoulders, your back, your arms, your leg... If you like you can adjust your posture a bit... Ok. Feeling this power, what would you like to Betty? Or do with her?"*

If it makes sense to you, ask the male client to stand up and take a powerful body posture (power posing), while the woman remains seated below. This is one of the rare occasions where the two partners find themselves on different levels. *"How does it make you feel standing this way looking down on little Betty down there?"* To be clear: BOTH clients keep their eyes closed. Ask the client to express his ideas to you first. Then ask them to address themselves to Betty directly. *"How does it feel talking to Betty this way?..... How does that resonate in your body?.....Ok, please hold on to these feelings for a moment".* And don't forget to ask Tom what he offers to Betty in return once they got empowered!

Now you have two options:

Either continue checking back with Betty as described in Module 7. Once she shows a basically positive reaction you go back to Tom, who is still standing with eyes closed. *"Ok, back to real life, Tom. Could you please open your eyes and say to Betty again what you need from her?.....Does this still feel ok?.....Well, so please sit down now (while you sit beside Tom) and say it again.....Is this still working? Can you keep the powerful feeling in your body?"* Then check back moving to Betty's side. Finally move to the neutral position and end the session. The last part follows the steps of module 10 (training the healthy adult mode).

If Betty feels attracted by the new strength of Tom you can leave Tom in the standing position, have a seat beside Betty (who has her eyes closed for the whole exercise). *"Betty, how do you like this side of Tom showing up now?....What impulse do you feel inside?.....Can you imagine getting closer to him?.....Ok, so please stand up too!"* Take Betty by the hand and guide her towards Tom with eyes closed. Take Tom's hand and connect it with hers: *"Ok, what do you want to do now?....You are a couple.....I will keep my eyes closed for some minutes."* After a few minutes you can ask them to slowly open their eyes. This could be the

end of the session. If this works, this gives the sense of emotional connection a strong boost and opens the couple up for module 9 (emotional reconnection by conjoint imagery).

Version to strengthen a **female avoider** ("Jean d'Arc" exercise; we call the avoider "Mary" and her dominant partner "Ron"):

Therapist (talking to the woman sitting on the assertiveness chair): *"If you guys are ok with it, I would like you to please close your eyes now. Mary... picture yourself now being very upright and full of strength. Like Jean d'Arc or a strong woman in a science fiction movie... Can you feel that mental and physical strength in your mind and your body?If you like you can adjust your posture a bit... Ok. Feeling this power, what would you like to say or do to Ron?"* And don't forget to ask for Mary's contribution for the relationship she is willing to give to Ron.

If it makes sense to you, ask the female client to stand up and take a powerful body posture (power posing), while the man remains seated below. *"How does it make you feel standing this way looking down on Ron down there?"* Ask the client to express his ideas to you first. Then ask them to address themselves to Ron directly. *"How does it feel talking to Ron this way?..... How does that resonate in your body?.....Ok, please hold on to these feelings for a moment".*

Unlike to the male version, hugging as outcome is not very likely. Usually the short-term goal for a woman in this situation is getting more accepted and some space for her own instead of getting into physical contact. This is close to the first outcome version described above. Thus a realistic end of the session could go like this: Therapist: *"Ok, maybe this was the first time you expressed your needs this way and I am happy that it feels kind of good, even still a bit strange to you. Could you please try to keep this feeling alive while you sit down on your assertiveness chair again. Now both of you please open your eyes. Try to tell your wishes to the face of Ron now.....Ok, how does that make you feel?"* Then take your seat behind Ron's chair asking: *"Ron, how does it resonate it you? Could you imagine accepting Mary this way?"* If yes, make an agreement what to work on in detail until the next session.