



## How perceived power influences the consequences of dominance expressions in negotiations<sup>☆</sup>

Scott S. Wiltermuth<sup>a,\*</sup>, Medha Raj<sup>a</sup>, Adam Wood<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Southern California, United States

<sup>b</sup> Woodbury University, United States



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### ABSTRACT

Recent research (Wiltermuth, Tiedens, & Neale, 2015) has indicated that negotiators may use expressions of dominance and submissiveness to discover mutually-beneficial solutions and thereby create more joint value. We examined how the perceived relative power of negotiators who express dominance influences value claiming and value creation in negotiations. Negotiators with relatively little power benefitted by expressing dominance, as expressing dominance increased relatively low-power negotiators' abilities to claim value. In contrast, relatively powerful negotiators' expressions of dominance fueled value creation.

Dyads in which only the relatively powerful negotiator expressed dominance created more value than did dyads in which neither, both, or only the relatively powerless negotiator expressed dominance. The coordination benefits attributable to dominance complementarity were therefore best achieved when there was congruence between a negotiator's perceived power and the power/status cues the negotiator sent through expressions of dominance.

### 1. How power influences the consequences of dominance expressions in negotiations

People have long employed the expansive body postures, gestures, and verbal approaches associated with dominance to improve their own outcomes in social interactions (e.g., Berger, 1994). Although these dominance expressions do not appear to have robust embodied effects on the people expressing the dominance (e.g., Ranehill et al., 2015), they are functional in interpersonal contexts in which dominance can serve as a social signal. In line with conflict-based accounts of hierarchy differentiation (e.g., Buss & Duntley, 2006; Mazur, 1973), numerous studies have demonstrated that dominance behaviors can enable people to: become more socially attractive (Vacharkulksemsuk et al., 2016), attain power and establish status (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Jolly, 1972), and procure concessions in negotiations (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Camras, 1984; Komorita & Brenner, 1968; Pruitt, 1981; Rosa & Mazur, 1979; Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006). Moreover, recent studies have shown that people who express relatively non-antagonistic forms of dominance in negotiations facilitate the process of discovering mutually-beneficial solutions when their dominance elicits submissiveness from their counterparts (Wiltermuth, Tiedens, & Neale, 2015).

Expressing dominance, however, may not yield the same benefits for people who lack power as it does for people who possess power. To date, little work has examined this issue as researchers have largely examined the effects of dominance in contexts in which there are no competing cues about people's power (e.g., Wiltermuth et al., 2015). The one set of studies that has examined how powerful postures interact with role-based power to influence behavior indicates that enacting powerful postures generates outcomes associated with having power, regardless of whether the person enacting the powerful posture occupies a low-power or high-power role (Huang, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Guillory, 2010). Yet, there are multiple reasons to expect that dominance from powerholders would create different consequences than would dominance from relatively powerless people. For example, high-power negotiators' expressions of dominance are legitimated by the existing social hierarchy (Burke, 1967, 1971; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986; Van Kleef & Côté, 2007; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & De Cremer, 2007), are more commonplace within organizations (e.g., Brass & Burkhardt, 1993; Kipnis & Schmidt, 1988), and are backed by more credible threats of impasse (Polzer, Mannix, & Neale, 1998; Wang, Zhang, & Han, 2008).

We investigate here how displays of dominance interact with other cues about power to predict outcomes in contexts in which both parties

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [wiltermu@usc.edu](mailto:wiltermu@usc.edu) (S.S. Wiltermuth).

perceive a power imbalance. Specifically, we examine how the perceived relative power of the negotiator expressing dominance behaviors, such as adopting an expansive body posture and speaking in a loud voice (see Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005, for a review of dominance behaviors), affects negotiators' abilities to claim value and find mutually-beneficial agreements. We posit that expressions of dominance from negotiators who are perceived to be relatively powerful are likely to be more effective than such expressions from relatively low-power negotiators in enabling the negotiating dyad to discover mutually-beneficial solutions. Furthermore, we speculate that relatively powerless negotiators will be able to use dominance expressions to claim a greater share of the value available in the negotiation. While we recognize that balance of power is not clear in many negotiations, we focus our analyses on the effects of dominance in contexts in which both sides perceive a power imbalance.

The notion that the perception of a negotiator's relative power affects the consequences of dominance expressions presents a novel insight for those interested in the links between power, interpersonal dynamics, and social decision-making. To our knowledge, no research has examined how acting dominantly affects social decision-making when explicit differences in perceived power exist between people. By examining this issue, we aim to make several contributions to theory. Chiefly, we integrate theories of power in negotiation (e.g., Kim, Pinkley, & Fragale, 2005) with Interpersonal Theory (e.g., Wiggins, 1979) to examine whether dominance expressions and role-based power have independent or interdependent effects on the outcomes of social interactions. We also investigate the possibility that dominance need not be backed by other forms of power to give negotiators an advantage on some metrics of negotiation success (i.e., value claiming). Given the importance of negotiation as a coordination mechanism for work processes, conflict resolution, and career advancement (Barley, 1991; Bowles & Flynn, 2010; Mannix, 1993; Pfeffer, 1981), and the difficulty that power imbalances can create in reaching negotiated agreements (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005), we believe it is critical that managers understand how perceptions of relative power affect the utility of dominance expressions within negotiations.

## 2. Power and dominance in negotiations

Many people associate dominance behavior with power (Carney, Hall, & LeBeau, 2005), which is defined as the ability to control resources and administer rewards and punishments (French & Raven, 1959; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Indeed, many of the power tactics that negotiators employ to maintain or change the power relationship within the dyad are dominance behaviors (Kim et al., 2005; Schmid Mast & Hall, 2003). Supporting this view, negotiators who act dominantly are generally viewed as more powerful (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006; Dunbar, 2004; Pruitt, 1981), and consequently, claim a larger share of the value available in a negotiation than do their counterparts (Camras, 1984; Pruitt, 1981; Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; Sinaceur, Van Kleef, Neale, Adam, & Haag, 2011). Moreover, those who possess power often display dominance to dissuade others from challenging their power or status (Darwin, 1872/2009; de Waal, 1982/1998; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1975). Thus, behaving dominantly can increase how powerful negotiators are perceived to be.

Although negotiators who possess power are more likely to display dominance than are negotiators who lack power (Dunbar & Burgoon, 2005), both relatively powerless and relatively powerful negotiators may exhibit behavioral dominance cues (Burgoon, Johnson, & Koch, 1998). Similarly, negotiators in equal-power dyads may express dominance if doing so allows them to accumulate power, progress the conversation, or create a more comfortable dynamic within the interaction.

Researchers' operationalizations of dominance expressions have varied. However, these operationalizations have generally followed the

biological conception of dominance expressions as postures and behaviors typically associated with fighting and the threat of force (Chapais, 1991; Packer & Pusey, 1985; Vervaecke, de Vries, & van Elsacker, 1999). For example, staring (Lewis & Fry, 1977), being verbally aggressive (Komorita & Brenner, 1968), and expressing anger (Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006) have all been shown to allow negotiators to claim a greater share of the attainable value.

Although dominance expressions are sometimes portrayed as combative value-claiming techniques that are best used in competitive negotiations between strangers (Neale & Bazerman, 1991), dominance may also be communicated in more subtle ways. In short, expressing *dominance* need not equate to being *domineering*, which is defined as making "excessive attempts to control the behavior of others" and being "overbearing, oppressive, bossy, dictatorial, arrogant, and high-handed" (Sadalla, Kendrick, & Vershure, 1987, pp. 735-736). Instead, dominance behaviors, as defined by Interpersonal Theorists, can be much more subtle, and much less antagonistic.<sup>1</sup> For instance, when people expand their posture and take up more space, they are perceived to be more dominant (Argyle, 1988; Aries, Gold, & Weigel, 1983; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1975; Gifford, 1991; Mehrabian, 1972; Spiegel & Machotka, 1974; Tiedens & Fragale, 2003; Weisfeld & Beresford, 1982). Similarly, when people raise their voices, interrupt their counterparts, or simply move themselves closer to their interaction partners, they are also perceived to be more dominant (Hall et al., 2005). People who exhibit dominance tend to express their preferences more often and more clearly, are more assertive in trying to influence their interaction partners, and are also more likely to take the lead in conversations (Burgoon et al., 1998). Additionally, they are less likely to use subjunctive language and are more self-confident and certain in the language that they use (Weisfeld & Linkey, 1985; Zhou, Burgoon, Zhang, & Nunamaker, 2004). They also speak more than do other people (Schmid Mast, 2002).

When people exhibit dominance by expressing their preferences clearly, removing subjunctive language, and expanding their posture in the absence of other salient forms of social hierarchy, dominance behavior becomes more likely to elicit submissiveness than dominance. By creating this dynamic of dominance complementarity, which exists when people contrast each other's behavior along the control dimension of interpersonal behavior (Bales, 1950; de Waal, 1982/1998; Dryer & Horowitz, 1997; Goodall, 1986; Lonner, 1980; Michels, 1915; Murdock, 1945), negotiators may change their negotiation outcomes. As Interpersonal Theorists have repeatedly shown, people generally contrast with others on the control dimension by behaving dominantly toward others who behave submissively and behaving submissively toward others who behave dominantly (Horowitz et al., 2006; Kiesler, 1983; Tiedens & Jimenez, 2003; but also see Strong et al., 1988, for counter examples). The reasons for this complementarity are at least twofold. First, the dynamic of dominance complementarity leads to elevated levels of rapport between interaction partners (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997; Horowitz et al., 1991; Sadler & Woody, 2003; Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). Second, and importantly for negotiators, dominance complementarity can lead to improved social coordination (Estroff & Nowicki, 1992).

In fact, dominance complementarity has been shown to help negotiators coordinate the exchange of information when there are no other salient cues about negotiator power. Wiltermuth et al. (2015) found that negotiating dyads created more joint value when one negotiator in

<sup>1</sup> Some sociologists (e.g., Berger, Webster, Ridgeway, and Rosenholtz (1986) and Ridgeway (1984, 1987)) have subdivided the behaviors associated with the control dimension of behavior into two categories: dominance cues and task cues. Dominance cues are classified as those that attempt to control through threat, while task cues "make claims or permit inference about how well the actor will do or is doing at the task" (Ridgeway, 1987). We have opted to stay true to conception of dominance held by Interpersonal Theorists (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2006; Tiedens, Unzueta, & Young, 2007), and therefore, do not make this distinction in our work.

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