

# The Effect of Content and Demeanor on Reactions to Dominance Behavior

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Dominance behavior, the attempt to direct or control others through threat, has been shown to be a generally ineffective influence tactic and results in negative affective reactions and evaluations from others. However, the nonverbal *expression* of dominance can be distinguished from dominant message *content*, and the authors propose that the nonverbal component of dominance (demeanor) may more readily convey feelings of threat and result in stronger negative reactions than the verbal component (content). Participants rated statements that varied in terms of neutral or dominant content and whether they were presented with neutral or dominant demeanor. The results indicated that both dominant content and dominant demeanor resulted in negative affective reactions and lower evaluations of competence and leadership. Results further indicated that dominant expressive behavior contributed more to the observer's negative reactions than did dominant content.

Research suggests that dominance behavior is a generally ineffective influence tactic in groups and leads to negative evaluations from others of incompetence, resentment, and dislike (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995; Driskell, Olmstead, & Salas, 1993; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). These results led Driskell et al. (1993) to conclude that dominance behavior violates a general norm of appropriate behavior in task groups. That is, most task groups hold norms of conduct, including norms that group members should not threaten others. To the extent that dominance behavior is deemed to be a violation of these general task norms, this violation will result in negative reactions of dislike or disapproval toward the norm violator. However, little research has examined why this is the case. A dominant message ("Do this now or else!") includes both a verbal and nonverbal component. The verbal component conveys the content of the message. The nonverbal component conveys expressive cues such as a lowered brow or loud

voice. It is likely that the more emotion-laden expressive component of dominance may constitute a stronger expression of threat relative to the content of the message, and it may be the dominant demeanor that leads to strong negative reactions from others. In this study, we draw a distinction between dominant content and dominant demeanor, and we examine the extent to which negative reactions to dominance-influence attempts are determined by these separate components.

## Reactions to Dominant Behavior

Yukl and colleagues (see Yukl, Kim, & Chavez, 1999; Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996; Yukl & Tracey, 1992) have examined the consequences of different types of managerial influence tactics. They found that tactics involving rational persuasion (using logical arguments and factual information to substantiate a request) were generally effective, whereas the use of pressure tactics (using demands or threats) was found to be one of the least effective influence techniques. Moreover, Yukl and Tracey (1992) proposed that pressure tactics were likely to be viewed as socially unacceptable and to result in resentment toward the user.

Driskell et al. (1993) identified two styles of influence behavior that persons may enact

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in task groups that parallel the distinction between rational persuasion and pressure tactics. *Task cues* are behaviors that imply competence. These include a well-moderated voice tone, rapid speech, few verbal disfluencies, a steady gaze, and fluid gestures. In general, research indicates that individuals who speak rapidly, with few verbal disfluencies or hesitations, who speak more often, and who maintain eye contact especially while speaking are perceived as more competent and occupy a higher position in the group status hierarchy (see Berger, Webster, Ridgeway, & Rosenholtz, 1986; Erickson, Lind, Johnson, & O'Barr, 1978; Mullen, Salas, & Driskell, 1989; Ridgeway, 1987). Thus, Driskell et al. (1993) argued that task cues serve as markers of competence or ability and form one primary basis for the allocation of influence in groups. *Dominance cues* are behaviors that attempt to influence or control another through threat. Dominance cues include a loud voice with angry tone, lowering the eyebrows while staring, a posture stiff with muscle tension, and pointing one's finger or making other intrusive or forceful gestures. Dominance theorists (e.g., Mazur, 1985) argue that the competitive struggle for behavioral dominance is a primary basis of influence in groups. In an empirical test of these competing perspectives, Driskell et al. found that speakers who exhibited a high level of task cues were more influential, seen as more competent, and seen as more pleasant and likable. On the other hand, speakers exhibiting dominance behaviors—glaring, pointing, and speaking loudly—were less influential, seen as less competent, and disliked. Similar results were found by Copeland, Driskell, and Salas (1995) and Carli et al. (1995). In general, research indicates that dominance is an ineffective form of influence behavior (Driskell et al., 1993; Ridgeway, 1987; Yukl & Tracey, 1992) and that dominance behavior results in negative affective reactions toward the user (Copeland et al., 1995; Driskell et al., 1993; Ridgeway, 1987).

Nevertheless, research shows that dominance or pressure tactics are in fact used with some degree of frequency in group settings (Yukl & Falbe, 1990). Thus, the question arises regarding the conditions under which dominance tactics may evoke less negative

reaction. In other words, are there conditions under which such tactics arouse less antagonism? Berger et al. (1986) have provided a distinction between *indicative* and *expressive* behaviors. Indicative cues establish a claim and are under volitional control (e.g., "I would like to have that report"), whereas expressive cues are "given off" during interaction and are assumed to be under less control of the individual (e.g., facial expressions, speech rate, or intonation). This distinction parallels that between verbal (content) and nonverbal (expressive) communication (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; DePaulo, Rosenthal, Eisenstat, Rogers, & Finkelstein, 1976).

This distinction is useful for our purposes for two reasons. First, dominance behaviors contain both a verbal component (the *content*, which is a message attempting to direct or control another, generally through implied threat) and a nonverbal component (the *demeanor*, or expressive cues such as a loud voice, knitted brows, and a glaring stare). In real-world settings, we may readily conceive of dominance being expressed either in a primarily expressive manner (the lowered brow, pointing and staring) or in a primarily verbal manner ("You must do this now, or there will be repercussions"). Thus, we can view content and demeanor as two separate manifestations of dominance behavior that are at least to some extent capable of being expressed independently.

Second, dominant message content and dominant demeanor may have differential effects. Research has suggested the primacy of nonverbal cues versus verbal cues (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Mehrabian, 1981). For example, when expressive and verbal cues are discrepant—when a person glares but claims to be happy—we generally attribute more credibility to the expressive behavior (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967). Anecdotally, we often note that "it is not *what* they said but the *way* they said it." One reason that we view expressive cues as more revealing is that we tend to perceive expressive cues as under less direct control of the individual and thus as less available for direct manipulation by the individual (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992).

The general implication that we draw from the above is that expressive cues may constitute a stronger expression of dominance, stronger in

the sense of being more revealing of the threat underlying dominance attempts. Thus, to the extent that threatening behavior is viewed as a violation of task group norms, dominant demeanor may more readily convey threat and result in stronger negative reaction. On the other hand, dominant message content (“Do this now or else!”) that is devoid of strong emotional expressivity may be less aversive to the recipient than dominant-content/dominant-demeanor messages.

### Hypotheses

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that speakers who display dominant behavior are generally seen as threatening, they are perceived as less competent and persuasive, and they are perceived as less pleasant and likable than speakers who do not display dominant behavior (Carli et al., 1995; Copeland et al., 1995; Driskell et al., 1993; Yukl et al., 1996). Moreover, dominant behavior, which conveys threat but not competence, is likely to be viewed as an inappropriate leadership or management style.

Given that both dominant message content and dominant demeanor are expressions of dominance (i.e., they are both attempts to direct or control another through implied threat), we propose the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* Dominant message content will result in higher perceived threat, lower perceived competence, more negative affective reactions, and judgments of poorer management style than neutral message content.

*Hypothesis 2:* Dominant demeanor will result in higher perceived threat, lower perceived competence, more negative affective reactions, and judgments of poorer management style than neutral demeanor.

Mehrabian (1981) has argued that a person’s expressive behavior contributes more to an observer’s interpretation of feelings and attitudes than do words (although the relative importance of verbal and nonverbal channels has been shown to be dependent on a number of situational and contextual factors; see Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992). Others have noted that nonverbal behavior is less controllable

than verbal behavior, and feelings that “leak out” through these nonverbal channels are viewed as more accurate (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). Lieberman and Rosenthal (2001) conclude that people rely on nonverbal cues more than twice as much as verbal cues in forming judgments about a target. Thus, research suggests that there are at least some circumstances in which nonverbal cues have a stronger impact on viewer perceptions than verbal cues. As we noted previously, dominant behavior has been shown to lead to lower perceptions of speaker competence and strong feelings of dislike. We argue that nonverbal dominance cues (demeanor) may more readily convey feelings of threat and result in stronger negative reactions than verbal cues (content). Thus, we believe that the primary component of dominant behavior that elicits negative affective reaction is dominant demeanor as opposed to dominant message content.

Therefore, we expect that dominant demeanor will predominate content when both cues are present and that this will be manifest in two ways. First, we expect a Dominance  $\times$  Content interaction, such that high dominance masks the effect of content. That is, when demeanor is neutral, we expect negative reactions to be stronger to dominant content than to neutral content. However, when demeanor is dominant, we expect the effects of message content to be less pronounced. In other words, respondents may dislike dominant demeanor so much that differences in message content (i.e., whether the content is dominant or neutral) will have less impact. Second, we argue that dominant message content (“Do this now or else!”) that is devoid of strong emotional expressivity may be less aversive to the recipient than dominant-content/dominant-demeanor messages. Thus, we predict that affective reactions to the dominant-content/neutral-demeanor speaker will be less negative than to the dominant-content/dominant-demeanor speaker.

*Hypothesis 3:* Demeanor and content will interact, such that when dominant demeanor is displayed, reactions will be negative regardless of the effects of message content.

*Hypothesis 4:* The dominant-content/neutral-demeanor speaker will be disliked less than the dominant-content/dominant-demeanor speaker.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were 169 undergraduate students from a large southeastern university (109 women and 60 men). Participants were volunteers who agreed to take part in a study of communication in exchange for extra course credit.

### *Manipulations*

Following Carli et al. (1995), Driskell et al. (1993), and Yukl and Falbe (1990), we defined dominance as a behavior or request that attempts to influence through threat or intimidation. We defined neutral behavior as an attempt to influence in a factual, nonthreatening style, similar to Carli et al.'s notion of social behavior and Yukl and Falbe's rational persuasion. In the following, we distinguish between dominant and neutral message content and dominant and neutral demeanor.

*Message content.* To develop a pool of statements that were either content neutral or content dominant, we asked subject-matter experts (six industrial-organizational faculty and graduate students) to derive statements that represent common ways that managers may attempt to request information, assign tasks, request assistance, or request changes. Furthermore, they were asked to come up with pairs of statements: (a) one in which the manager uses demands, threats, or intimidation to get the other to comply and (b) one in which the manager uses nonthreatening attempts to get the other to comply without the use of demands or intimidation. From this pool, we chose four statements representing neutral content (e.g., "Please check these figures and submit any changes to me when you are done") and four statements representing dominant content (e.g., "You have to improve your work or there is not going to be a place for you in this organization").

*Demeanor.* Following Ridgeway (1987), dominance cues are those that attempt to influence through threat and have a tense, emotional quality. Dominant demeanor includes a loud, angry voice, knitted brows, a glaring stare, muscle tension, and intrusive, pointing gestures. Neutral demeanor includes a well-moderated voice tone, relaxed facial expressions, moderate eye contact, and normal upright posture. We trained a male and a female confederate to present each message exhibiting either dominant nonverbal cues or neutral nonverbal cues. For example, each confederate was trained to present a dominant message from a script including instructions for loud speech, glaring, finger pointing, and lowered eyebrows, similar to the procedure in Driskell et al. (1993) and Copeland et al. (1995).

Each of the eight content messages (four dominant content and four neutral content) was recorded on videotape in either a dominant demeanor or a neutral demeanor presentation.

### *Procedure*

Participants viewed a speaker presented on videotape. Participants were told that managers often differ in how they communicate. The participants' task was to imagine that the person on videotape was their manager or supervisor and to rate each statement or request made by the speaker. Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental conditions that varied according to whether the speaker was male or female, message content was neutral or dominant, and demeanor was neutral or dominant. Each participant viewed and rated four statements within a single condition.

### *Measures*

A series of items presented on a 7-point Likert-type scale in the postexperimental questionnaire were used to tap participants' perceptions of the speaker on four separate measures: affective reactions, perceived competence, managerial style, and perceived threat. To assess internal consistency of each scale, the Cronbach's alpha procedure was used (Cronbach, 1951).

*Affective reactions.* Affective reactions were assessed by three items asking whether the

speaker seemed pleasant versus unpleasant, likable versus unlikable, and positive versus negative. These items were combined into a composite measure of affective response (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ), with a high score indicating a positive affective response.

*Perceived competence.* Participants' perceptions of speaker competence were assessed by three items asking whether the speaker seemed persuasive versus unpersuasive, convincing or unconvincing, and competent versus incompetent. These items have been shown in previous research to provide a reliable measure of perceived competence (Driskell & Mullen, 1990; Driskell et al., 1993). These items were combined into a composite measure of perceived competence (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ), with a high score indicating that the speaker was perceived as competent.

*Managerial style.* We assessed whether the managerial style of the speaker was perceived as positive or negative. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the speaker's management style was seen as appropriate versus inappropriate and as acceptable versus unacceptable, whether the speaker exhibited high leadership qualities or low leadership qualities, and the extent to which they would be motivated to comply with the manager's directives. These items were combined into a composite measure of managerial style (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ), with a high score indicating that the speaker was seen as presenting a positive managerial style.

*Threat.* Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the speaker seemed threatening versus nonthreatening, aggressive versus passive, and dominant versus submissive. These items were combined into a composite measure of perceived threat (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ), with a high score indicating that the speaker was seen as threatening.

*Manipulation checks.* We adopted the following approach to test the effectiveness of the content and demeanor manipulations. To assess the effectiveness of the message content manipulation, four independent judges read the eight written statements (four neutral content and four dominant content) and rated the extent to which each statement seemed dominant or threatening on a 9-point scale. The mean interjudge correlation was .89, and

the corresponding Spearman–Brown effective reliability was .97. Because there was no theoretical interest in the four different neutral content statements and the four different dominant content statements (i.e., we made no predictions regarding the four exemplars of each statement type), judges' ratings were averaged across the four neutral content statements and the four dominant content statements. A one-way two-cell (dominance of content) analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures revealed a significant difference between the mean judged dominance for the neutral content statements ( $M = 3.00$ ) and the dominant content statements ( $M = 7.81$ ),  $F(1, 3) = 121.00$ ,  $p < .01$ .

To assess the effectiveness of the demeanor manipulation, four judges independently viewed all 32 video segments (the four neutral content statements delivered with neutral and dominant demeanor and the four dominant content statements delivered with neutral and dominant demeanor) with the sound turned off, so that the evaluations were not influenced by what the targets were saying. The judges rated the extent to which each presentation seemed dominant or threatening on a 9-point scale. The mean interjudge correlation was .84, and the corresponding Spearman–Brown effective reliability was .96. Because there was no theoretical interest in the four exemplars of each presentation type (i.e., Presentations 1, 9, 13, and 15 all represent a male speaker making a neutral content statement with neutral demeanor), judges' ratings were averaged across these presentations. A 2 (gender of speaker)  $\times$  2 (content)  $\times$  2 (demeanor) ANOVA with repeated measures indicated that the only significant main effect or interaction was the expected main effect for demeanor,  $F(1, 3) = 52.04$ ,  $p < .01$ . Thus, the mean judged dominance of the neutral demeanor presentations was lower ( $M = 3.44$ ) than the mean judged dominance of the dominant demeanor presentations ( $M = 7.48$ ).

## Results

Each participant rated four statements or trials. In preliminary analyses, there were no significant or meaningful main effects or interac-

Table 1  
*Means (and Standard Deviations) as a Function of Demeanor and Content*

Measure	Female speaker		Male speaker	
	Neutral demeanor	Dominant demeanor	Neutral demeanor	Dominant demeanor
Affective reactions				
Neutral content	5.30 (0.86)	2.31 (0.87)	5.35 (0.97)	2.34 (0.82)
Dominant content	3.28 (0.97)	1.70 (0.56)	2.41 (0.91)	1.41 (0.55)
Perceived competence				
Neutral content	4.93 (0.88)	4.46 (1.50)	5.11 (1.07)	3.21 (1.17)
Dominant content	4.09 (0.95)	3.49 (1.49)	4.49 (1.24)	4.26 (1.37)
Managerial style				
Neutral content	5.09 (0.92)	2.88 (1.34)	5.40 (1.14)	2.40 (1.08)
Dominant content	3.60 (1.18)	2.12 (1.18)	3.46 (1.35)	2.60 (1.11)
Threat				
Neutral content	3.66 (0.56)	6.36 (0.62)	3.15 (1.06)	5.31 (1.12)
Dominant content	4.89 (1.21)	6.58 (0.47)	5.02 (1.31)	6.32 (0.80)

tions for the trial term. To simplify the analysis of our composite measures, we conducted an item analysis on the responses for each of the four trials. The mean Cronbach's alphas for the items composing each scale across the four trials was .88 for affective reactions, .84 for perceived competence, .89 for managerial style, and .90 for threat. Thus, we collapsed across the trial factor in the subsequent analyses.<sup>1</sup>

### *Affective Reactions*

Means and standard deviations for each outcome measure are shown in Table 1. Data were analyzed in a 2 (gender of speaker)  $\times$  2 (content)  $\times$  2 (demeanor) ANOVA. This analysis resulted in a significant main effect of speaker gender,  $F(1, 160) = 4.15, p = .04$ . Participants tended to like the female speaker ( $M = 3.15, SD = 1.56$ ) somewhat more than the male speaker ( $M = 2.88, SD = 1.51$ ). However, this result was modified by a significant Speaker  $\times$  Content interaction effect,  $F(1, 160) = 5.58, p = .019$ . When message content was neutral, there was no significant difference between reactions to the female speaker ( $M = 3.80, SD = 1.71$ ) and the male speaker ( $M = 3.85, SD = 1.13$ ),  $F(1, 160) = .051, p > .10$ . However, when message content was dominant, participants rated the male speaker as significantly less likable ( $M = 1.91, SD = 0.89$ ) than the female speaker ( $M = 2.49, SD = 1.73$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 9.89, p < .01$ .

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of message content,  $F(1, 160) = 149.99,$

$p < .01$ . The speaker was liked less when message content was dominant ( $M = 2.20, SD = 1.04$ ) than when message content was neutral ( $M = 3.82, SD = 1.71$ ). Finally, there was a significant main effect of demeanor,  $F(1, 160) = 262.66, p < .01$ . The speaker was liked less when demeanor was dominant ( $M = 1.94, SD = 0.83$ ) than when demeanor was neutral ( $M = 4.09, SD = 1.59$ ). Thus, we find that dominant content and dominant demeanor result in negative affective reactions, consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicted, and the analysis revealed, a significant Content  $\times$  Demeanor interaction effect,  $F(1, 160) = 41.72, p < .01$ , as shown in Figure 1a. When demeanor was neu-

<sup>1</sup> The four composite scales (Affective Reactions, Perceived Competence, Managerial Style, and Perceived Threat) were composed primarily for theoretical reasons and had been used in prior research (see Copeland et al., 1995; Driskell et al., 1993). However, it is useful to note that whereas the 13 individual scale items tend to interrelate overall ( $r = .60$ ), the items that constitute each composite scale correlate much more strongly with the other items within that scale than they correlate with the items outside of that scale. For example, the average interitem correlation for the three items that compose the Affective Reactions scale is .85, whereas the average interitem correlation for these items and the items outside of that scale is .57. Similar patterns emerge for the other scales: For Perceived Competence, the average interitem correlation for within-scale items is .72 and for other-scale items is .35; for Managerial Style, the average interitem correlation for within-scale items is .80 and for other-scale items is .56; and for Perceived Threat, the average interitem correlation for within-scale items is .88 and for other-scale items is .44.

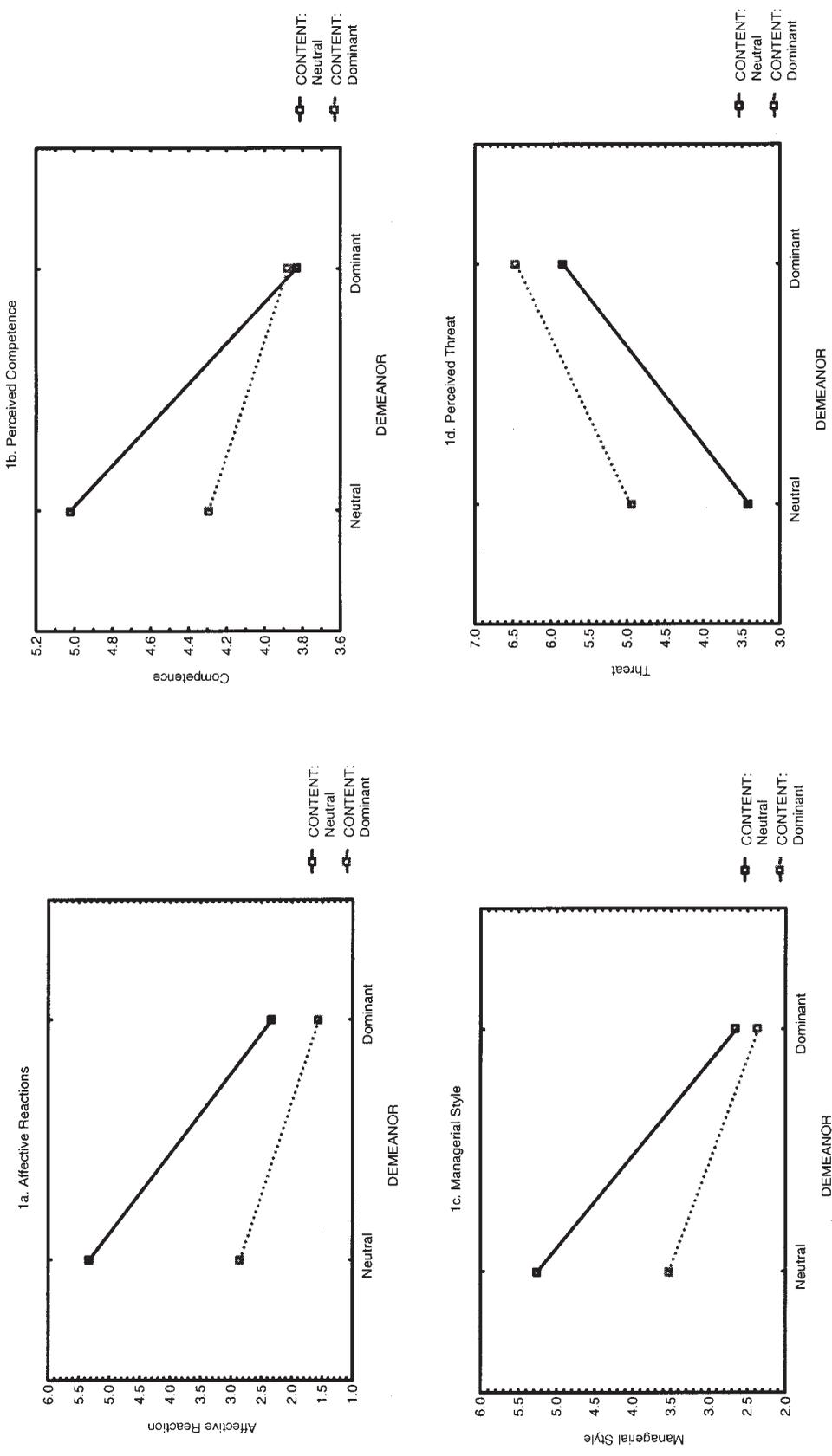


Figure 1. Content × Demeanor interactions.

tral, participants reacted much more negatively to dominant message content ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) than to neutral message content ( $M = 5.33$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 165.14$ ,  $p < .01$ . When demeanor was dominant, the difference between dominant message content ( $M = 1.56$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) and neutral message content ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) was less pronounced,  $F(1, 160) = 17.81$ ,  $p < .01$ . In other words, when the speaker displayed neutral demeanor, listeners responded more negatively when content was dominant than when content was neutral, but when the speaker displayed dominant demeanor, this effect was somewhat overshadowed by the fact that participants did not like dominant demeanor.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that affective reactions to the dominant-content/neutral-demeanor speaker would be less than to the dominant-content/dominant-demeanor speaker. An a priori test revealed that speakers delivering dominant message content were seen as less negative when demeanor was neutral ( $M = 2.85$ ) than when demeanor was dominant ( $M = 1.56$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 48.54$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### *Perceived Competence*

There was no significant main effect of speaker gender,  $F(1, 160) = 0.19$ ,  $p > .10$ , or content,  $F(1, 160) = 2.87$ ,  $p = .09$ , on perceived competence. However, there was a significant main effect of demeanor,  $F(1, 160) = 15.79$ ,  $p < .01$ . The speaker was seen as less competent when demeanor was dominant ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) than when demeanor was neutral ( $M = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ).

The analysis revealed a significant Speaker  $\times$  Content interaction effect,  $F(1, 160) = 7.73$ ,  $p = .01$ . Participants rated the female speaker as significantly less competent when message content was dominant ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) than when message content was neutral ( $M = 4.69$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 9.22$ ,  $p < .01$ . For the male speaker, there was no significant difference in perceived competence when message content was dominant ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) or when message content was neutral ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 0.64$ ,  $p > .10$ . Thus, we find partial support for Hypothesis 1: Dominant message content resulted in lower perceived competence for the female speaker but not the male speaker. Consistent

with Hypothesis 2, the results indicate that dominant demeanor results in lower perceived competence.

There was a marginally significant Content  $\times$  Demeanor interaction effect,  $F(1, 160) = 3.63$ ,  $p = .06$ , as shown in Figure 1b. When demeanor was neutral, participants perceived the speaker to be more competent when presenting neutral message content ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) than when presenting dominant message content ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 6.11$ ,  $p = .01$ . When demeanor was dominant, there was no significant difference between neutral message content ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) and dominant message content ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 0.02$ ,  $p > .10$ . Again, consistent with Hypothesis 3, this suggests that participants tend to respond to dominant demeanor so strongly that it masks the effects of type of content.

Finally, the analysis revealed a significant Speaker  $\times$  Content  $\times$  Demeanor interaction,  $F(1, 160) = 5.06$ ,  $p < .05$ . We conducted post hoc analyses of variance to examine speaker and message content effects within types of demeanor. When demeanor was neutral, there was a significant effect for message content,  $F(1, 73) = 8.36$ ,  $p < .01$ , and no effect for speaker nor a significant interaction ( $ps > .10$ ). Thus, when demeanor was neutral, the speaker was seen as more competent when message content was neutral ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) than when message content was dominant ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ). When demeanor was dominant, there was no significant effect for speaker,  $F(1, 87) = 0.60$ ,  $p > .10$ , or for message content,  $F(1, 97) = 0.02$ ,  $p > .10$ ; however, there was a significant Speaker  $\times$  Content interaction,  $F(1, 87) = 10.97$ ,  $p < .01$ . When demeanor was dominant, the female speaker was seen as more competent when delivering neutral message content ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ) than when delivering dominant message content ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ), whereas the male speaker was seen as more competent when delivering dominant message content ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) than when delivering neutral message content ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ).

### *Managerial Style*

There was no significant main effect of speaker gender on perceptions of managerial

style,  $F(1, 160) = 0.05, p > .10$ . There was a significant main effect of message content,  $F(1, 160) = 27.72, p < .01$ . The speaker's managerial style was seen as less appropriate when message content was dominant ( $M = 2.94, SD = 1.31$ ) than when message content was neutral ( $M = 3.94, SD = 1.71$ ). There was also a significant main effect of demeanor,  $F(1, 160) = 98.19, p < .01$ . The speaker's managerial style was seen as less appropriate when demeanor was dominant ( $M = 2.50, SD = 1.19$ ) than when demeanor was neutral ( $M = 4.39, SD = 1.44$ ). Thus, we find that dominant content and dominant demeanor result in negative perceptions of managerial style, consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2.

The analysis also reveals a significant Content  $\times$  Demeanor interaction effect,  $F(1, 160) = 14.15, p < .01$ , as shown in Figure 1c. When demeanor was neutral, participants rated the speaker's managerial style more negatively when message content was dominant ( $M = 3.53, SD = 1.27$ ) than when message content was neutral ( $M = 5.25, SD = 1.01$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 38.45, p < .01$ . When demeanor was dominant, there was no significant difference between dominant message content ( $M = 2.36, SD = 1.14$ ) and neutral message content ( $M = 2.64, SD = 1.24$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 1.20, p > .10$ . These results again support Hypothesis 3.

Consistent with Hypothesis 4, an a priori test revealed that speakers delivering dominant message content were perceived as possessing a more positive managerial style when demeanor was neutral ( $M = 3.53$ ) than when demeanor was dominant ( $M = 2.36$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 48.54, p < .01$ .

### Threat

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of speaker gender on perceived threat,  $F(1, 160) = 7.76, p < .05$ . Participants viewed the female speaker as somewhat more threatening ( $M = 5.38, SD = 1.39$ ) than the male speaker ( $M = 4.95, SD = 1.48$ ). However, this result was modified by a significant Speaker  $\times$  Content interaction effect,  $F(1, 160) = 5.35, p < .05$ . When message content was neutral, participants rated the female speaker as more threatening ( $M = 5.01, SD = 1.46$ ) than the male speaker ( $M = 4.23, SD = 1.52$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 12.73, p < .01$ . However, when message con-

tent was dominant, there was no significant difference between reactions to the female speaker ( $M = 5.74, SD = 1.28$ ) and the male speaker ( $M = 5.67, SD = 1.25$ ),  $F(1, 160) = .11, p > .10$ .

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of message content,  $F(1, 160) = 49.63, p < .01$ . The speaker was viewed as more threatening when message content was dominant ( $M = 5.70, SD = 1.25$ ) than when message content was neutral ( $M = 4.62, SD = 1.54$ ). Finally, there was a significant main effect of demeanor,  $F(1, 160) = 163.85, p < .01$ . The speaker was viewed as more threatening when demeanor was dominant ( $M = 6.15, SD = 0.92$ ) than when demeanor was neutral ( $M = 4.18, SD = 1.34$ ).

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, we observed a significant Content  $\times$  Demeanor interaction effect,  $F(1, 160) = 9.29, p < .01$ , as shown in Figure 1d. When demeanor was neutral, participants viewed the speaker as more threatening when delivering dominant message content ( $M = 4.96, SD = 1.26$ ) than when delivering neutral message content ( $M = 3.40, SD = 0.84$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 48.06, p < .01$ . When demeanor was dominant, the difference between dominant message content ( $M = 6.45, SD = 0.72$ ) and neutral message content ( $M = 5.84, SD = 1.01$ ) was less pronounced,  $F(1, 160) = 8.49, p < .01$ .

Finally, consistent with Hypothesis 4, we found that speakers delivering dominant content messages were seen as less threatening when demeanor was neutral ( $M = 4.96$ ) than when demeanor was dominant ( $M = 6.45$ ),  $F(1, 160) = 48.59, p < .01$ .

### Summary

The results of this study confirm an outcome that those who work with domineering bosses are no doubt aware: Those who use dominant behavior to direct others are disliked, viewed as less competent, seen as poor managers, and perceived as threatening and aggressive. These findings are consistent with a growing body of literature that has examined the role of task cues and dominance cues in small groups (Carli et al., 1995; Driskell et al., 1993; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) and that has examined the effects of rational persuasion and pressure tactics in management (Yukl et al., 1996, 1999;

Yukl & Tracey, 1992). The results of these studies are remarkably consistent: Dominance behavior is generally ineffective and results in negative reactions and evaluations from others.

However, the expression of dominance can be distinguished from the content of the message, and we have drawn on a long-standing tradition of research on verbal and nonverbal behavior to make a distinction between content and demeanor in dominance behavior. We found that both dominant message content and dominant demeanor result in unfavorable reactions from others. Moreover, we found that in virtually every instance, the dominant-content/dominant-demeanor speaker was least liked, received the least favorable evaluation, and was seen as least leaderlike. In almost every instance, the neutral-content/neutral-demeanor speaker was seen as most favorable.

Furthermore, we found clear evidence that dominant expressive behavior contributed more to the observer's negative evaluations than did dominant content. In general, when speakers displayed high dominant demeanor, they were disliked regardless of whether the message content was neutral or dominant. We further found that dominant message content that was devoid of strong emotional expressivity was less aversive than dominant-content/dominant-demeanor messages. This elaborates the group norm explanation of dominant behavior: Not only do we hold that dominant behavior violates norms of appropriate behavior in task groups, it also seems that dominant behavior that is a more visceral threat (i.e., dominant demeanor) is viewed as a greater violation than dominant message content.

We found no consistent differences in reactions to male and female dominance behavior. This is consistent with the results of Driskell et al. (1993) and Copeland et al. (1995) and confirms that dominant behavior is viewed as inappropriate for both men and women. Thus, both men and women evoke negative reactions to their dominant behavior. However, Carli (2001) has noted that in general, people allow men much greater behavioral latitude than they allow women, and when a woman violates behavioral expectations, she is placed under greater scrutiny than a man. In fact, Bolino and Turnley (2003) found that women who used dominance or intimidation tactics were evaluated more negatively than men who used the same tactics.

Therefore, although people tend to tolerate (or, more precisely, not tolerate) dominance behavior in a similar manner for men and women, the possibility exists that the consequences may be more severe for a woman.

In this study, we focused on differences in the content of a message and the way in which the message is expressed. However, there are factors other than message content and demeanor that determine reactions to influence attempts. Yukl et al. (1999) have examined the role of the perceived importance of a request and its feasibility in determining listener response. They found that under certain conditions, influence attempts that involved rational persuasion were more successful when the request was deemed to be both important and feasible. Whether perceptions of importance and feasibility would make a dominant influence attempt more acceptable is not known.

One further caveat is that dominance behavior may be used in ways other than as a means to influence others. As Yukl and Tracey (1992) noted, sometimes compliance is all that is needed to achieve a task objective. For example, perhaps a managerial attempt to influence or persuade another to carry out a task has failed, and the next logical strategy is simply to force compliance through threat. Or, it is possible that dominance may be viewed as more appropriate when used to control others who have violated group norms, as a means of social control. Therefore, we do not intend to imply that dominance behavior has no role whatsoever in a manager's or group leader's repertoire, just that it is an ineffective and costly strategy when used as a means to influence others.

Finally, the experimental laboratory allowed us to examine dominance, and the specific components that constitute dominance behavior, with a greater degree of precision than would otherwise be possible. Of course, there is a cost to this approach, in that we examine only a snapshot of behavior in a setting that is abstracted from the larger social context in which groups operate. It is therefore useful to speculate on the contextual factors that may impact dominance behavior. We briefly address three such factors: the temporal context, status effects, and external demands. First, real-world groups usually operate over time; that is, they are ongoing, with a past and a future (McGrath, 1997). Groups that have existed long enough to

establish a past history and a shared understanding may provide stronger support for an existing leader, even a domineering one. Second, leaders who have established status and legitimacy within the group may receive support from the group even when engaging in domineering behaviors (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). In a classic work, Hollander (1958) noted that high-status group members accumulate idiosyncrasy credits over time, which allows them greater leeway in exhibiting behavior that violates norms. Third, external demands on the group may impact influence behavior (Driskell & Salas, 1991). The tendency for groups to close ranks when confronted with an external threat may result in greater tolerance for dominance behavior. Anecdotaly, group members often state that a high-status member may be an arrogant tyrant but that he or she is *our* arrogant tyrant. Further research is needed to examine how the impact of dominance may vary in different social contexts.

What are the implications of this study for those who manage groups? Although a manager is obligated to carry out a range of organizational activities, there is considerable leeway in the manner in which these tasks are carried out. It is important to distinguish between directing others (the skillful use of rational persuasion seems to be an effective managerial tactic; see Yukl et al., 1999), threatening others (dominant influence attempts are generally ineffective and result in negative affective reactions; see Driskell et al., 1993), and expressing dominance both verbally and nonverbally (people tend to dislike dominance, but reactions are especially strong to the expression of dominant demeanor as opposed to dominant message content, as seen in this study). Even if the message conveys dominant intent, communication that is devoid of expressive dominant behavior is seen as less aversive.

Moreover, the domineering manager can receive training to enact the relaxed, forward posture, firm and well-modulated voice, confident gestures, calm expression, and moderate eye contact that are more likely to result in a positive response from others, rather than the intimidating, glaring, and intrusive behaviors that imply threat. The success with which well-developed training programs have improved social skills in applied settings (e.g., Smith-

Jentsch, Salas, & Brannick, 2001) suggests the value of this approach.

Berger et al. (1986) posed the question "When can one win through intimidation, and when do those tactics simply arouse antagonism?" (p. 16). We do not have a complete answer to this question. However, we do know that when dominance is used as a means to influence others, it is met with considerable resistance. Much of this negative reaction stems from the expressive component of dominant behavior. Although we may point and glare at another person with the intention of being influential, what it does is make others dislike us. A domineering leadership style should be used with extreme caution in a group setting.

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