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Men's Egoistic Dominant Acts

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Synonyms

[Male strategies](#); [Social hierarchy](#); [Social status](#)

Definition

Males display a sex-specific pattern of expressions of dominance, which is a universal feature of human psychology.

Introduction

Dominance is the use of aggression, threats, fear, and intimidation to maintain or achieve positions of social influence (Henrich and Gil-White 2001), and evidence suggests there are important sex differences in the expression of dominance (Buss 1981). Among social animals, dominance is a common mechanism by which multiple individuals produce a linear hierarchy of social rank. When dominance-based strategies are successful, stronger, larger individuals are more likely to attain a disproportionate level of power and influence within the social group (Lukaszewski et al.

2016). Among humans, cultural and ecological context plays an important role in the viability of dominance-based strategies, and among mobile egalitarian foragers, untethered subsistence coupled with an ethos of equality allows the group to effectively resist overly assertive dominant leaders (Boehm 1993). With increased sedentarization and monopolization of resources by kin groups, the importance of dominance in status striving increases (Kaplan et al. 2009). Nonetheless, dominance represents a distinct strategy for gaining social influence across a variety of social and cultural contexts (Chapais 2015; Cheng et al. 2013) and is likely a universal feature of human psychology. Yet sex-specific expressions of dominance reveal the impact of sexual selection on male and female leader-follower psychologies.

The Expression of Dominance Among Men

Among a sample of Western undergraduates, Buss (1981) demonstrated sex differences in dominance behaviors and evaluations of dominant acts. Males showed preference for self-enhancing and egoistic expressions of dominance and rated these behaviors more favorable; similarly, dominant males reported expressing dominance through both communal and egoistic acts, whereas dominant females tended to express dominance exclusively through communal,

prosocial behaviors. Both males and females may pursue dominance-based strategies for achieving positions of social influence, yet males are more likely to use dominance to achieve individual goals. For males, expressions of dominance can function to achieve both proximate goals promoting individual accomplishments, while simultaneously working to achieve ultimate reproductive goals and increased reproductive success.

Dominance and Reproductive Benefits

In addition to the physical underpinnings of social dominance, individuals who achieve and demonstrate competence in a variety of behaviors, including fighting ability, control of fear, the ability to produce coalitions, and the cognitive abilities associated with effective strategizing, are able to more effectively display and express dominance among the group leading to leadership positions and high social status (Chapais 2015). Across a wide variety of cultural contexts, high-status males have increased mating opportunities, have access to higher-quality mates, are more likely to marry polygynously, and ultimately have greater reproductive success (Hill 1984; Neel 1980). The emphasis on status striving and the associated reproductive rewards is a component of human social organization that has remained stable over biological and cultural evolution. In a meta-analysis of 33 nonindustrial societies, von Rueden and Jaeggi (2016) documented a consistent relationship between male social status and reproductive success, independent of domains of status competition and consistent across variation in social stratification. Dominance may be expressed in many forms, including aggressive and nonaggressive mechanisms. For males, dominance is a widespread route to increased social status and ultimately increased reproductive success.

Conclusion

Over the course of human evolution, there have been strong selection pressures shaping and

reinforcing status competition among males, building on the primate and mammalian systems of dominance hierarchies (Chapais 2015; Neel 1980; von Rueden and Jaeggi 2016). Males rely on physical markers to signal the propensity and potential for expressions of dominance to the group but can also use demonstrations of competence in a variety of domains to achieve positions of social influence which may or may not confer authority and coercive power over subordinates (Chapais 2015). At both the proximate and ultimate levels, expressions of dominance among males serve individualistic and egoistic aims, conferring social status and reproductive benefits. From this system, cooperative and prosocial behaviors may emerge as well. Human males have evolved to be status seekers, and the pursuit of dominance-based strategies for achieving positions of social influence remains a universal feature of male psychology employed by at least some males across a wide range of social and cultural settings.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Dominant Acts Expressed](#)
- ▶ [Women's Prosocial Dominant Acts](#)

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