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RESEARCH REPORT

The Competence Shield: Fostering Competence Perceptions Weakens the Dominance Penalty for Women in Leadership

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Although research has consistently found that women face social and economic penalties for displaying assertive, dominant agentic qualities often deemed necessary for leadership, limited work has examined how to mitigate the dominance penalty. Integrating the expectation states theory and multidimensional perspectives of agentic perceptions, we found that fostering perceived leader competence attenuated the dominance penalty. Across four studies, including two multiwave, multisource field studies (Studies 1 and 3), a critical incident experiment (Study 2a), and a vignette experiment (Study 2b), we observed the dominance penalty at lower but not higher levels of perceived leader competence. Perceived leader status mediated these effects so that higher (vs. lower) levels of perceived leader dominance led to less favorable leader status and effectiveness evaluations for women (but not for men) leaders, and these gender differences were eliminated at higher levels of perceived leader competence.

Keywords: gender, leadership, agency, dominance, competence

Extensive research has shown that women face social and economic penalties for displaying assertive, dominant agentic characteristics deemed necessary for leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). This phenomenon, known as the dominance penalty, is an important driver of women's underrepresentation in leadership roles (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). Past research has suggested that women bolster perceptions of their communality (e.g., warmth, friendliness, Heilman & Okimoto, 2007) to mitigate the dominance penalty. However, complementing dominance with communality can be practically difficult as these constructs entail conflictual characteristics (Zheng et al., 2018) and doing so may inadvertently reinforce communal stereotypes about women (Ridgeway, 2001).

Integrating multidimensional perspectives of agency—which find that agency perceptions contain distinct facets of competence and dominance (Ma et al., 2022; Rosette et al., 2016)—with expectation states theory[1] (Berger et al., 1972; Correll & Ridgeway, 2003), we theorize that fostering perceived competence will attenuate the dominance penalty. Expectation states theory theorizes that status perceptions are an important driver of the dominance penalty (Berger et al., 1972; Correll & Ridgeway, 2003). We propose that being perceived as competent reduces the extent to which women

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[1] Please see the additional online material for the discussion of the similarities and differences between expectation states theory and status incongruity hypothesis.

would experience the dominance penalty and that this would be mediated by perceived status. Specifically, we predict that at lower levels of perceived leader competence, perceived leader dominance would be more strongly associated with lower perceptions of leader status and leadership effectiveness for women (vs. men) leaders and that these gender differences will be eliminated at higher levels of perceived leader competence (Figure 1).

Our study contributes to gender and leadership research in several ways. First, by examining the interactive effects of agentic perceptions, our work further supports the distinctiveness of agency perceptions, contributing to multidimensional perspectives of agency (Ma et al., 2022). So far, multidimensional perspectives have studied the effects of distinct agentic perceptions in isolation without considering their interwoven effects. This is a critical oversight in the literature because multiple agentic perceptions tend to co-occur (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Moreover, competence has been considered by some scholars as a way of identifying the scope of agentic penalties. For example, Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Nauts (2012) found that agentic women (vs. men) were less likely to be promoted, which was driven by perceived dominance as opposed to competence. We show that perceived competence is not only distinct from perceived dominance but also reduces gendered penalties that result from perceived dominance for women. Finally, we contribute to managerial practice by identifying perceived competence as a buffer for the dominance penalty for women in leadership.

Theory and Hypothesis

Status Perspectives on the Dominance Penalty

Consistent with recent multidimensional perspectives of agency (Ma et al., 2022; Rosette et al., 2016), we define agentic dominance as the inclination "to influence other people's opinions and actions in an overbearing and prevailing manner" and agentic competence as "possessing the requisite ability and knowledge needed for a particular task or activity" (Ma et al., 2022, p. 2119). Penalties for dominant but not competent women have been consistently observed in the context of leadership effectiveness evaluations (Ma et al., 2022; Rosette et al., 2016; Rosette & Tost, 2010), defined here as "evaluators' satisfaction with the leader, desire to work with the leader, the extent to which the leader fit the image of what a leader should be, and observers' general perceptions that the leader is strong" (Rosette & Tost, 2010, p. 228). Specifically, research has found a consistent interaction between gender and dominance, so that the negative effects of dominance (vs. nondominance) on favorable leadership evaluations were stronger for women (vs. men; De Hoogh

et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2022; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). The tendency for women's (but not men's) attempts to assert authority to elicit resistance and unfavorable leader effectiveness evaluations is problematic because it shapes the perceived legitimacy of the barriers that limit women's access to leadership positions, impacting their representation in leadership roles over time (Eagly et al., 1995; Joshi & Knight, 2015).

Drawing on the expectation states theory, we propose a novel way of mitigating the dominance penalty experienced by women: fostering perceptions of women's competence and status. We define perceived status as perceptions of "respect, admiration, and voluntary deference" that an observer confers to a target based on their social instrumental value (Anderson et al., 2015, p. 574; Xu et al., 2024).[2] According to expectation states theory, targets are perceived as having higher status if they possess one or more status characteristics—which can include diffuse (e.g., demographic cues such as gender) and specific status characteristics (e.g., task-relevant expertise)—and/or are perceived as assertive, dominant in interpersonal interactions (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003; Fişek et al., 1991). This occurs because status characteristics and dominance perceptions carry societal expectations for superior performance (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003; Ridgeway, 2001). In other words, targets with diffuse (e.g., men) and specific status characteristics (e.g., accounting experts) are perceived as having higher status than low-status counterparts (e.g., women, accounting novices) because perceivers believe that they are more competent and will perform better in a variety of situations. Similarly, when targets are perceived to be assertive and dominant, observers are more likely to infer expertise and confer these targets with status (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Chen et al., 2014; Chou, 2018).

Importantly, dominance perceptions do not reliably connote status inferences; the degree to which assertive targets are conferred higher status is contingent on the target's diffuse status characteristics (e.g., gender, Ridgeway, 2001). All else equal, observers perceive dominance attempts enacted by men as more expected, legitimate, and deserving of compliance. This leads observers to confer dominant (vs. nondominant) men with greater status and more favorable performance evaluations (Ridgeway et al., 2009). In contrast, observers react negatively to targets who lack status characteristics (e.g., women) when they attempt to assert influence. These dominance attempts are viewed as unexpected, illegitimate, and undeserving of compliance (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, & Phelan, 2012), leading observers to confer dominant (vs. nondominant) women with lower status and unfavorable performance appraisals (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986).

The Buffering Role of Agentic Competence Perceptions

If diffuse status characteristics (e.g., gender) and dominance lead to greater status beliefs because they serve as diagnostic signals for a target's ability and expertise, then providing observers with direct information about the target's competence should attenuate the predictive impact of these diagnostic cues on status judgments. Supporting

Figure 1
Theoretical Model

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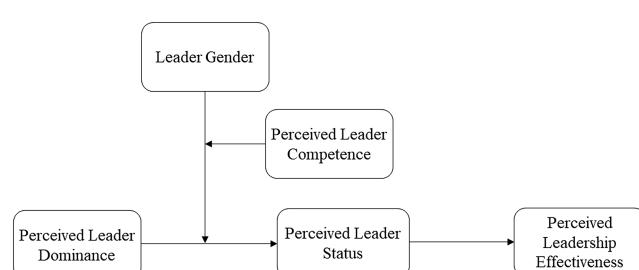
[2] When defined as such, perceived status is thus closely connected to perceived leader effectiveness (Ridgeway, 2001). Nonetheless, they are distinct concepts. For example, high-status leaders' desire for social approval can lead them to make suboptimal decisions (Case et al., 2018), contributing to unfavorable leadership evaluations.

this tenet of expectation states theory (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003), one study found that when the task was feminine (e.g., a sewing task), women behaved more assertively and were more voluble than men in group interactions, crucially because women were thought to possess greater expertise in the task (Dovidio et al., 1988). Nonetheless, this study examined the target's self-perceptions and own behaviors (as opposed to interpersonal evaluations of the targets).

Building on the idea that perceived competence (i.e., a specific status characteristic) predominates over diffuse (e.g., gender) and dominance characteristics in status judgments, we posit that directly fostering perceptions of the leader's competence will attenuate differences in how dominant men and women leaders are evaluated. We theorize that when observers perceive the target as competent, they are less likely to rely on other cues of expertise, such as gender and dominance, to make inferences about a leader's status and effectiveness. As such, we do not expect a dominance penalty when leaders are viewed as highly competent. In contrast, the dominance penalty should be exacerbated at low levels of perceived leader competence because observers may view dominance attempts by targets who lack status characteristics (e.g., women) as illegitimate and undeserving of compliance (Vial et al., 2016). For instance, research has found that nonprototypical leaders, such as women, were punished more for mistakes than prototypical leaders (i.e., men, Brescoll et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2016), suggesting that penalties for women (vs. men) may be more severe when perceivers believe that the leader lacks competence. In sum, we predict that at lower levels of leader competence, observers would confer dominant (vs. nondominant) women leaders with less favorable status and effectiveness evaluations, and this would not be the case for men. At higher levels of leader competence, however, we would not expect the adverse effect of dominance (relative to nondominance) to be stronger for women leaders than for men leaders. Put formally:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a three-way interaction of perceived leader dominance, leader gender, and perceived leader competence on perceived leadership effectiveness. Specifically, we predict a significant gender and dominance interaction at lower levels of perceived leader competence so that perceived leader dominance will be more negatively related to leadership effectiveness for women (vs. men) leaders, and these gender differences will be eliminated at higher levels of perceived leader competence.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a three-way interaction of perceived leader dominance, leader gender, and perceived leader competence on perceived leader status. Specifically, we predict a significant gender and dominance interaction at lower levels of perceived leader competence so that perceived leader dominance will be more negatively related to perceived leader status for women (vs. men) leaders, and these gender differences will be eliminated at higher levels of perceived leader competence.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived leader status mediates the interactive effect of perceived leader dominance, leader gender, and perceived leader competence on leadership effectiveness evaluations.

Overview of Studies

We tested our hypotheses across four studies, with Studies 1, 2a, and 2b testing Hypothesis 1 and Study 3 testing the full model. Study 1 collected two-wave, multisource data from sales teams in a Chinese real estate company to provide a correlational test of Hypothesis 1. Study 2a, a preregistered experiment conducted with an online sample of full-time U.S. employees, employed a critical incident study design to provide a causal test of Hypothesis 1. Providing another causal test of Hypothesis 1, Study 2b employed a vignette study design with an online sample of full-time U.S. employees. Study 3 sought to test our full model with two-wave, multisource data from a Chinese manufacturing company. We obtained approval from the Renmin Business School Institutional Review Board (Title: "Gender and Leadership").

We adhered to the *Journal of Applied Psychology* methodological checklist and described our sampling plan, data exclusions, manipulations, and measures for all studies below. The data for all studies and the additional online material are available at https://osf .io/xh4fm/?view_only=e5f63756eb094733a8583084ba8dfda9. The data were analyzed using SPSS Version 23, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), and Mplus 8. We preregistered Study 2a (https:// osf.io/kdmpr/?view_only=07caee158f704c91aa318a9274731c8d).

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

We measured perceived leader competence and leader dominance from 345 subordinates and demographic information from leaders across 51 sales teams working in a Chinese real estate company at Time 1. A month later (Time 2), subordinates were asked to evaluate their leaders' effectiveness. In total, we obtained matched data from 251 subordinates (51% men, $M_{age} = 27.06$ years, $SD_{age} = 3.90$) and 47 leaders (53.2% men, $M_{age} = 31.83$ years, $SD_{age} = 3.64$). This is the first use of this data from a larger data collection effort.

Measures

Following Brislin's (1986) back-translation procedure, we translated survey items from English into Chinese. Unless otherwise noted, all items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). At Time 1, subordinates were asked to rate their perceptions of their leaders' dominance using a five-item scale (e.g., Dominant: Exerting authority over others, $\alpha = .93$, Ma et al., 2022) and competence using a five-item scale (e.g., Competent: Sufficiently qualified, $\alpha = .96$, Ma et al., 2022).[3] Leaders self-reported their gender at Time 1. At Time 2, subordinates rated their leaders' effectiveness (e.g., My leader is the right person for the job, $\alpha = .94$, Rosette & Tost, 2010). As covariates, we included subordinate gender and the percentage of women workers in the team, measured at Time 1 (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations of variables. Multilevel confirmatory factor analyses indicate that the hypothesized three-factor model displayed an acceptable fit to the data (Table 2). A null model for leadership effectiveness indicated

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[3] In Studies 1 and 3, we measured perceived ambitious agency, diligent agency, independent agency, and self-assured agency (Ma et al., 2022). However, none of these agency factors moderated the Perceived Dominance × Leader Gender on leadership effectiveness (see the additional online material).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations Among Variables (Study 1)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Individual level								
1. Subordinate gender	0.51	0.50	—					
2. Team gender composition[a]	0.49	0.23	−.46***	—				
3. Leader gender[a]	0.56	0.50	−.13*	.28***	—			
4. Perceived leader dominance	4.22	1.39	−.04	.01	.12†	(.93)		
5. Perceived leader competence	5.11	1.14	−.04	.08	−.14*	.05	(.96)	
6. Leadership effectiveness	5.34	1.32	.04	.06	−.08	−.06	.53***	(.94)
Team level								
1. Subordinate gender[b]	0.53	0.25	—					
2. Team gender composition	0.47	0.25	−1.00***	—				
3. Leader gender	0.53	0.50	−.24	.24	—			
4. Perceived leader dominance[b]	4.19	1.02	.04	−.04	.30*	—		
5. Perceived leader competence[b]	5.15	0.88	−.06	.06	−.14	−.01	—	
6. Leadership effectiveness[b]	5.44	0.81	−.15	.15	−.19	−.15	.61***	—

Note. N (individual level) = 251. N (team level) = 47. Subordinate/leader gender: 0 = women, 1 = men. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's α coefficients) are presented along the diagonal in parentheses.
[a] Team gender composition and leader gender were assigned down to the individual level. [b] Subordinate gender, perceived leader dominance, perceived leader competence, and leadership effectiveness were aggregated to the team level.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

substantial between-team variance for leadership effectiveness, $\chi^2(46) = 73.83$, $p = .006$; intraclass correlation coefficient (1) = .09, indicating that HLM is appropriate for testing our hypotheses. To address the nonindependence of subordinate responses, which were nested within teams, we used the two-level HLM analytic method. We centered variables on their grand (vs. group) mean because we were interested in predicted effects across the entire sample instead of predicted effects within groups (Aguinis et al., 2013; Rennesund & Saksvik, 2010).[4,5]

The three-way Leader Dominance × Leader Gender × Leader Competence interaction predicting leadership effectiveness was significant ($\gamma = -.14$, $p = .045$, Model 2, Table 3, Figure 2). At lower levels of leader competence (1 SD below the mean), leader dominance was negatively associated with leadership effectiveness for women leaders ($\gamma = -.21$, $p = .006$) but not for men ($\gamma = .04$, $p = .762$). At higher levels of leader competence (1 SD above the mean), gender did not significantly moderate the relationship between leader dominance and leadership effectiveness ($\gamma = .05$, $p = .710$); both women ($\gamma = -.06$, $p = .409$) and men ($\gamma = -.13$, $p = .227$) were not viewed as less effective when seen as more dominant, supporting Hypothesis 1.[6]

Study 1 found evidence of a dominance penalty for women leaders at lower, but not higher, levels of perceived competence. Study 2 sought to provide a causal test of Hypothesis 1 using a critical incident experiment (Study 2a) and a vignette experiment (Study 2b).

Study 2a

Method

Participants and Procedure

A power analysis with an effect size of $\eta^2 = .01$ (based on Study 1), $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed), and power = 80% indicated that we need to recruit 779 participants. Rounding up, we recruited 800 U.S.-based, fully employed participants who had a direct supervisor from Prolific Academic. We excluded 35 participants who did not complete the manipulation as instructed, 46 who recalled events that were unrelated to the manipulation, and 15 straight-lined responses.

The final sample comprised 704 participants ($M_{age} = 38.66$ years, $SD_{age} = 11.25$, 50.3% men, 76.3% White; $M_{work\ experience} = 17.22$ years, $SD_{work\ experience} = 10.93$; $M_{work\ time\ with\ leader} = 4.40$ years, $SD_{work\ time\ with\ leader} = 4.43$). They held jobs in various industries (e.g., construction).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions in a 2 (low vs. high perceived leader dominance) × 2 (low vs. high perceived leader competence) between-subjects design. We adopted the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) and asked participants to write about a time when their leader acted in a way that was either low or high in dominance or competence (see additional online material). Thereafter, all participants were asked to complete the same three-item leadership effectiveness measure used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .96$). Participants were asked to complete measures of perceived leader dominance ($\alpha = .95$) and perceived leader competence ($\alpha = .97$) used in Study 1 as manipulation checks. Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic information about their leader and themselves.

Results and Discussion

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics and correlations of the study variables. Our experimental manipulations were successful.[7] Participants in the high dominance condition perceived their leader as

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[4] We also tested our hypotheses using the group-mean centering method in Study 1 and Study 3, and our results were robust with this centering method (see the additional online material).

[5] To facilitate comprehension of results across studies, we will refer to perceived leader competence, perceived leader dominance, and perceived leadership effectiveness as leader competence, leader dominance, and leadership effectiveness, respectively.

[6] Gender stereotype content varies across cultures (Cuddy et al., 2015). A validation study found that dominance was also more strongly proscribed for women and men in China (see the additional online material), indicating that China is a suitable context for examining the dominance penalty.

[7] We asked two raters to code the recalled events on dominance and competence as an additional manipulation check. Results indicate that our experimental manipulation was successful (see the additional online material).

Table 2

Comparisons of Factor Structures (Study 1)

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$[a]	CFI	RMSEA
1. Three-factor model	109.02(62)		.98	.06
2. Two-factor model (combining perceived leader dominance and perceived leader competence)	976.62(64)	867.60(2)***	.58	.24
3. Two-factor model (combining perceived leader dominance and leadership effectiveness)	609.39(64)	500.37(2)***	.75	.18
4. Two-factor model (combining perceived leader competence and leadership effectiveness)	481.49(64)	372.47(2)***	.81	.16
5. Single-factor model	1228.58(65)	1119.56(3)***	.46	.27

Note. df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.
[a] All models were compared with Model 1.
*** $p < .001$.

more dominant than those in the low dominance condition ($M_{high} = 4.80$, $SD_{high} = 1.45$ vs. $M_{low} = 2.54$, $SD_{low} = 1.53$), $t(702) = 20.03$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.51$. The leader described as high (vs. low) in competence was also evaluated as more competent ($M_{high} = 6.07$, $SD_{high} = 1.19$ vs. $M_{low} = 4.19$, $SD_{low} = 1.73$), $t(699) = 16.85$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.27$.

Table 5 presents mean leadership effectiveness ratings across conditions. Supporting Hypothesis 1, a three-way Leader Dominance × Leader Gender × Leader Competence analysis of variance predicting leadership effectiveness was significant, $F(1, 693) = 6.19$, $p = .013$ (Figure 3). In the low competence condition, we observed a significant two-way interaction effect of leader dominance and leader gender on leadership effectiveness, $F(1, 341) = 6.47$, $p = .011$, so that women were perceived as less effective when they were perceived as more (vs. less) dominant, $t(123) = 3.72$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .67$. However, men were perceived as similarly effective regardless of their levels of dominance, $t(218) = 1.20$, $p = .233$, Cohen's $d = .16$.

Table 3

Hierarchical Linear Modeling Regression Results (Study 1)

	Leadership effectiveness	
Variable	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	5.33*** (.10)	5.36*** (.08)
Subordinate gender	0.20 (.17)	0.20 (.14)
Team gender composition	0.67 (.50)	0.41 (.40)
Perceived leader dominance	−0.05 (.06)	−0.09 (.06)
Leader gender		−.0004 (.17)
Perceived leader competence		0.63*** (.07)
Perceived Leader Dominance × Leader Gender		0.09 (.11)
Perceived Leader Dominance × Perceived Leader Competence		−0.003 (.03)
Perceived Leader Competence × Leader Gender		0.05 (.14)
Perceived Leader Dominance × Leader Gender × Perceived Leader Competence		−0.14* (.07)
Pseudo-R^2 [a]	0.03	0.27

Note. $N = 251$ (individual level) and 47 (leader level). Subordinate/leader gender: 0 = women, 1 = men. Standard errors are shown in parentheses.
[a] Pseudo-R^2 is calculated based on proportional reduction of error variance due to predictors in the models of Table 3 (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).
* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

In the high competence condition, the two-way interaction effect of leader dominance and leader gender on leadership effectiveness was nonsignificant, $F(1, 352) = .56$, $p = .457$. Having high (vs. low) dominance led both men, $t(200) = 4.73$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .67$, and women, $t(152) = 2.38$, $p = .019$, Cohen's $d = .39$, to be perceived as less effective.

In sum, Study 2a provided causal evidence that women (vs. men) were perceived as less effective when perceived as more dominant at low, but not high, levels of competence. One limitation of this study is that it may be challenging to change perceivers' evaluations of their leader's effectiveness through a single recalled episode of competence and dominance. The study manipulation also employed inconsistent use of conjunctions, which might have elicited different psychological experiences across experimental conditions. Finally, this study employed dominance descriptions developed based on previous work (Ma et al., 2022), which operationalized dominance using items with overt negative valence, even though dominance need not be undesirable (e.g., assertive). We sought to address these limitations in the subsequent study.

Study 2b

Method

Participants and Procedure

We recruited 1,027 fully employed U.S. participants who had a direct supervisor at work from Prolific Academic. We excluded 135 participants who provided irrelevant responses to an attention check question asking them to summarize the study. The final sample comprised 892 participants ($M_{age} = 40.76$ years, $SD_{age} = 12.04$, 49.7% men, 60.4% White; $M_{work\ experience} = 18.11$ years, $SD_{work\ experience} = 11.46$) from various industries (e.g., education, health services).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 (man vs. woman leader) × 2 (low vs. high perceived leader dominance) × 2 (low vs. high perceived leader competence) between-subjects study design. All participants were asked to imagine being employed at an engineering company. We chose this context because engineering is a male-dominated field (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), and therefore, biases against women leaders in this context tend to be more salient (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Participants viewed a profile of a team leader, which included brief demographic information, and a description of the target's

Figure 2
The Three-Way Interaction Between Perceived Leader Dominance, Leader Gender, and Perceived Leader Competence (Study 1)
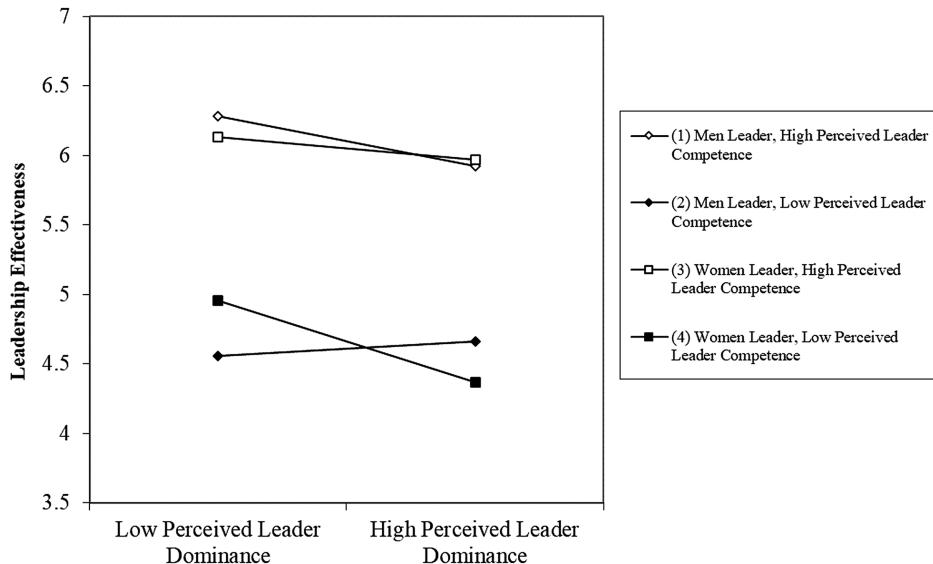
performance evaluation, which contained our manipulations of perceived leader dominance and competence (see the additional online material).

To prevent participants from guessing that our scenario was about gender, we included a filler profile presented first to all participants (Castilla & Benard, 2010). The second focal profile contained the name of the target (Ann Burr vs. John Burr, Schaumberg & Flynn, 2017, p. 1866) and gender information (man vs. woman), which manipulated the leader gender. The profile also contained the leader's performance evaluation. To manipulate perceived leader dominance and competence, we varied the content of the performance evaluation (Table 6). After reading the vignette, participants were asked to respond to the same three-item leadership effectiveness measure used in Study 2a ($\alpha = .93$). Participants also responded to two manipulation check questions, "Ann (John) Burr is

competent" and "Ann (John) Burr is dominant," before providing demographic information.

Results and Discussion

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations of our study variables. The leader who was described as high (vs. low) in dominance was perceived as more dominant ($M_{high} = 5.90$, $SD_{high} = 1.21$ vs. $M_{low} = 2.72$, $SD_{low} = 1.46$), $t(890) = 35.40$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.37$. The leader who was described as high (vs. low) in competence was perceived as more competent ($M_{high} = 5.78$, $SD_{high} = .99$ vs. $M_{low} = 4.22$, $SD_{low} = 1.39$), $t(890) = 19.38$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.30$, indicating that the experimental manipulations were successful.

Table 8 presents mean leadership effectiveness ratings across conditions. Supporting Hypothesis 1, the three-way Leader

Table 4
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations Among Variables (Study 2a)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Subordinate gender[a]	0.51	0.50	—							
2. Subordinate age	38.66	11.25	−.06†	—						
3. Subordinate's work experience[b]	17.22	10.93	−.03	.90***	—					
4. Subordinate's work time with leader[c]	4.40	4.43	.01	.39***	.38***	—				
5. Leader gender	0.60	0.49	.37***	−.06	−.05	−.01	—			
6. Perceived leader dominance manipulation	0.47	0.50	−.05	.01	.02	.01	.02	—		
7. Perceived leader competence manipulation	0.51	0.50	.03	−.01	−.01	−.03	−.07†	−.01	—	
8. Leadership effectiveness	4.98	1.87	.09*	−.00	−.02	.05	.01	−.19***	.47***	(.96)

Note. $N = 704$. Subordinate/leader gender: 0 = women, 1 = men. Perceived leader dominance manipulation: 0 = low dominance condition, 1 = high dominance condition. Perceived leader competence manipulation: 0 = low competence condition, 1 = high competence condition. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's α coefficients) are presented along the diagonal in parentheses.
[a] $N = 696$ (eight subordinates chose "other" to describe their gender).   [b] $N = 646$ (58 subordinates had missing values).   [c] $N = 695$ (nine subordinates had missing values).
† $p < .10$.   * $p < .05$.   *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Mean Levels of Leadership Effectiveness Evaluations Across Experimental Conditions (Study 2a)

Condition	Contrast	M	SD
Low competence condition	Women, low dominance	4.69	1.95
	Women, high dominance	3.40	1.92
	Men, low dominance	4.22	1.62
	Men, high dominance	3.95	1.76
High competence condition	Women, low dominance	5.93	1.50
	Women, high dominance	5.31	1.73
	Men, low dominance	6.39	0.97
	Men, high dominance	5.54	1.54

Dominance × Leader Gender × Leader Competence analysis of variance predicting leadership effectiveness was significant, $F(1, 884) = 4.37$, $p = .037$ (Figure 4). In the low competence condition, there was a significant two-way Dominance × Leader Gender interaction effect, $F(1, 435) = 5.87$, $p = .016$; women leaders were perceived as less effective when perceived as more (vs. less) dominant, $t(233) = .95$, $p = .344$, Cohen's $d = .13$, although this difference was not significant. However, in the low competence condition, men leaders were perceived as more effective when they were perceived as more (vs. less) dominant, $t(202) = 2.51$, $p = .013$, Cohen's $d = .35$. In the high competence condition, the two-way Dominance × Leader Gender interaction effect was nonsignificant, $F(1, 449) = .17$, $p = .683$; both highly competent women, $t(208) = 5.66$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .79$, and men, $t(241) = 5.41$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .70$, benefited from being perceived as more (vs. less) dominant.

Using a vignette experiment, Study 2b found that at low levels of perceived competence, women leaders who were perceived as more (vs. less) dominant did not receive less favorable leadership evaluations, even though comparable men benefited from demonstrating dominance in their leadership evaluations. At high levels of perceived competence, both men and women leaders benefited from demonstrating dominance. Perhaps this is because our operationalization of dominance in this study was not overtly negative, unlike in other studies. Nonetheless, although this result did not provide support for Hypothesis 1, we observed a general pattern across studies indicating that at low levels of competence, women leaders were either penalized or benefited less than comparable men when they were perceived as more (vs. less) dominant.

Study 3

Method

Participants and Procedure

We collected data from 54 teams in a Chinese manufacturing company. At Time 1, subordinates rated their supervisors on perceived dominance and competence, and leaders indicated their gender. At Time 2 (2 weeks later), subordinates rated their supervisors on perceived status and leadership effectiveness. We obtained matched data from 222 subordinates (59% men, $M_{age} = 28.46$ years, $SD_{age} = 3.04$; $M_{work\ time\ with\ leader} = 2.72$ years, $SD_{work\ time\ with\ leader} = 1.43$) and 54 leaders (59.3% men, $M_{age} = 33.76$ years, $SD_{age} = 2.92$).

Measures

We employed Brislin's (1986) back-translation procedures to translate all survey instruments from English into Chinese. Unless otherwise noted, all items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The same measures of leader dominance ($\alpha = .86$), leader competence ($\alpha = .82$), and leadership effectiveness ($\alpha = .84$) used in Study 1 were employed in this study. Leaders indicated their gender. To measure leader status, we used an established five-item scale (e.g., In our team, my leader has a great deal of prestige, $\alpha = .87$, Djurdjevic et al., 2017).[8,9] As covariates, we included subordinate gender and team gender composition. We also controlled for subordinates' tenure with their leader because familiarity with the leader is associated with more favorable leader evaluations (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001).

Results and Discussion

Table 9 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations of our study variables. Multilevel confirmatory factor analyses indicate that the hypothesized four-factor model fits the data well (Table 10), supporting the discriminant validity of our measures. A null model indicated substantial between-team variances for perceived leader status, $\chi^2(53) = 120.85$, $p < .001$; intraclass correlation coefficient (1) = .24, and leadership effectiveness, $\chi^2(53) = 86.71$, $p = .003$; intraclass correlation coefficient (1) = .14, indicating the appropriateness of HLM. Like Study 1, we tested our hypotheses using a two-level HLM analytic method with centering variables on their grand mean.

Supporting Hypothesis 1, the three-way Leader Dominance × Leader Gender × Leader Competence interaction was significant ($\gamma = -.29$, $p = .036$, Model 2, Table 11, Figure 5). At lower levels of competence, leader dominance was negatively associated with leadership effectiveness for women ($\gamma = -.25$, $p = .033$) but not for men ($\gamma = .14$, $p = .484$). At higher levels of competence, gender did not significantly moderate the relation between leader dominance and leadership effectiveness ($\gamma = -.04$, $p = .903$), so that both women ($\gamma = .06$, $p = .639$) and men ($\gamma = .03$, $p = .835$) were not viewed as less effective when perceived as more dominant.

Supporting Hypothesis 2, the three-way Leader Dominance × Leader Gender × Leader Competence interaction effect predicting perceived leader status was significant ($\gamma = -.32$, $p = .012$, Model 4, Table 11, Figure 6). At lower competence (1 SD below the mean), leader dominance was negatively associated with leader status for women leaders ($\gamma = -.30$, $p < .001$) but not for men ($\gamma = .06$, $p = .659$). At higher competence (1 SD above the mean), gender did not significantly moderate the relationship between

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[8] We also tested alternative mechanisms such as perceived leader communality, license to enact dominance, and perceived leader's behavioral freedom. Unlike perceived leader status, these alternative mechanisms did not significantly mediate the present effects (see the additional online material).

[9] Although our theorizing of status is centered on relational status, defined as "the level of status conferred to an individual by a specific group member" (Xu et al., 2024, p. 212) as opposed to collective perceptions of a target's status (i.e., their reputational status, Xu et al., 2024), the status measure we employed also assessed other people's perceptions of a target's status. This is an important limitation, and we encourage future research to replicate our findings using more precise measures of relational status (e.g., Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Joshi & Knight, 2015).

Figure 3
*The Interaction Between Perceived Leader Dominance and Leader Gender in Low and High Perceived Leader Competence Conditions (Study 2a)*

Low perceived leader competence condition:
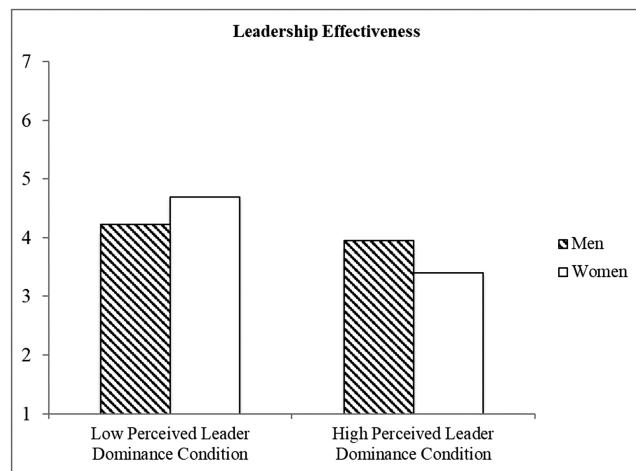
High perceived leader competence condition:
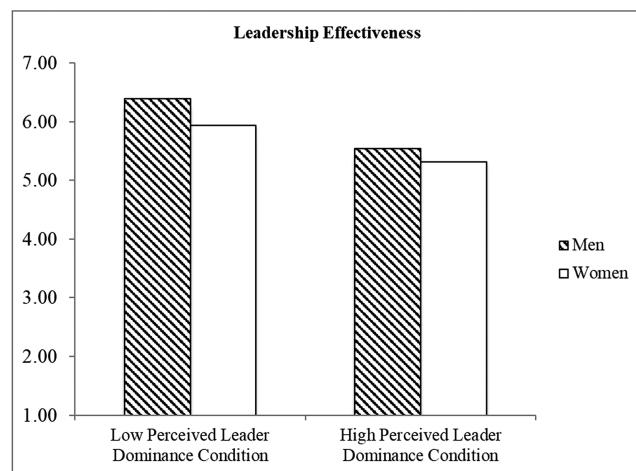
leader dominance and leader status ($\gamma = .12$, $p = .616$). Both women ($\gamma = .02$, $p = .876$) and men ($\gamma = -.07$, $p = .488$) were not viewed as possessing less status when perceived as more (vs. less) dominant.

To test Hypothesis 3, we used Krull and MacKinnon's (2001) procedures to test our moderated mediation model. Supporting Hypothesis 3, we found that at lower competence, the conditional indirect effect was negative and significant for women leaders (indirect effect = $-.05$, 95% CI [$-.11$, $-.01$]) but was nonsignificant for men (indirect effect = $.01$, 95% CI [$-.04$, $.07$]). However, at higher competence, the conditional indirect effect was nonsignificant for both women (indirect effect = $.003$, 95% CI [$-.03$, $.04$]) and men (indirect effect = $-.01$, 95% CI [$-.06$, $.02$]). In sum, Study 3 found that at lower levels of leader competence, higher (vs. lower) leader dominance was negatively related to leader status and leadership effectiveness for women (but not for men) leaders. At higher levels of leader competence, there were no

significant gender differences in the leader dominance–leader status–leadership effectiveness link.

General Discussion

Across four studies, we found that perceived competence weakened the dominance penalty (for a summary of results, see Table 12). We found consistent significant three-way interactions across studies, indicating that the dominance penalty (the Gender × Perceived Leader Dominance interaction, Williams & Tiedens, 2016) was significantly stronger at higher (vs. lower) levels of perceived leader competence. In further support of our predictions, we observed a consistent negative predictive effect of dominance for women leaders at lower perceived competence, but this negative effect was attenuated or even reversed at higher perceived competence, and that perceived leader status mediated the mitigating effect of high leader competence.

Theoretical Implications

Our findings contribute to the expectation states theory in several ways. Because employees often simultaneously possess multiple high-status and low-status characteristics (Fath et al., 2022), it is essential to examine how distinct status characteristics interactively influence observers' reactions (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003). Although research has shown that specific status characteristics extend a stronger influence than diffuse ones in studies of participants' own behaviors (Dovidio et al., 1998), limited attention has been given to the interpersonal consequences of dominant displays, even though dominance, particularly by women, carries risks for social penalties that can undermine their leadership effectiveness. Our findings further support expectation states theory by providing support for one of its core tenets within the context of understanding interpersonal reactions to dominant men and women.

Table 6
Manipulation (Study 2b)

Condition	Manipulation
High dominance	Dominance: Ann (John) is a leader who is assertive or authoritative when leading her (his) subordinates. When making important decisions, she (he) is vocal about her (his) opinions and is direct and straightforward when communicating with her (his) subordinates.
Low dominance	Dominance: Ann (John) is a leader who should learn to be more assertive or authoritative when leading her (his) subordinates. When making important decisions, she (he) should try to be more vocal about her (his) opinions and be more direct and straightforward when communicating with her (his) subordinates.
High competence	Competence: Ann (John) is a competent leader, having led subordinates to overcome a number of challenges and setbacks by drawing on her (his) knowledge and wide-ranging skills.
Low competence	Competence: Ann (John) needs to improve her (his) leadership competency. Ann (John) should bolster her (his) ability to lead subordinates to overcome challenges and setbacks by continuing to improve her (his) knowledge and skills.

Table 7

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations Among Variables (Study 2b)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender[a]	0.51	0.50	—					
2. Age[b]	40.76	12.04	−.08*	—				
3. Leader gender manipulation	0.50	0.50	−.04	−.02	—			
4. Perceived leader dominance manipulation	0.50	0.50	−.02	−.02	−.02	—		
5. Perceived leader competence manipulation	0.51	0.50	.00	−.04	.07*	−.01	—	
6. Leadership effectiveness	4.07	1.47	.08*	−.08*	.01	.17***	.50***	(.93)

Note. *N* = 892. Gender: 0 = women, 1 = men. Leader gender manipulation: 0 = woman leader, 1 = man leader. Perceived leader dominance manipulation: 0 = low dominance condition, 1 = high dominance condition. Perceived leader competence manipulation: 0 = low competence condition, 1 = high competence condition. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's α coefficients) are presented along the diagonal in parentheses.
[a] *N* = 874 (nine chose "other" to describe their gender and nine had missing values).   [b] *N* = 883 (nine had missing values).
* *p* < .05.   *** *p* < .001.

Moreover, studies grounded in expectation states theory typically focus on small-group interactions in laboratory settings (e.g., Ridgeway & Diekema, 1989; Ridgeway et al., 1985). While this methodological approach ensures precision, it is crucial to assess whether these effects generalize to field settings and in larger groups. By examining leadership perceptions in real-world organizational contexts, our research broadens the applicability of expectation states theory to more socially complex environments. Finally, our study addresses a gap in the literature by empirically operationalizing perceived status as a mediating mechanism, thus offering support for the centrality of status beliefs within the expectation states theory.

Research has shown that perceived competence plays a critical role in mitigating gender biases in leadership evaluations. For instance, Koch et al. (2015) examined how competence information can buffer gender-role congruity bias, drawing on expectation states theory to argue that specific status cues (e.g., competence) reduce the influence of diffuse status cues (e.g., gender). Their meta-analysis demonstrated that gender bias was reduced when individuals were perceived as highly (vs. not) competent, but the bias was also strongest when competence information was ambiguous or the level of individuals' competence was average. However, the categorization of ambiguous and average competence into a single group limited the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the effects of competence. Our study extends this work by providing a more precise test of the buffering effects of competence and identifying perceived status as the mechanism through which competence reduces gender bias.

We contribute to the role congruity theory, which has hitherto conceptualized agency perceptions as a unidimensional construct

comprising several varied qualities (e.g., competence and dominance, Eagly & Karau, 2002). Building on emerging, multidimensional perspectives of agentic perceptions (Ma et al., 2022), we employ an interactional approach and show that agentic perceptions are not only distinct but they can interact in a way that reduces the dominance penalty for women. Second, a core proposition of role congruity theory is the perceptual trade-off between agency and communality perceptions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). To address alternative mechanisms, in Study 3, we measured perceived leader communality. We found that competence and communality were positively correlated (see the additional online material), indicating that the well-established ideas about an agency–communality trade-off are limited to dominance.

In Studies 1 and 3, we found that dominance perceptions were either not significantly related to, or negatively correlated with, competence and other agentic factors. Although this finding is consistent with prior work (Ma et al., 2022), it also raises crucial questions about (a) the centrality of dominance to agency, (b) the distinctiveness of dominance from other agentic content, and (c) whether positively correlated agentic content (e.g., competence, independence) should be subsumed under an overarching construct (vs. viewed as separate factors). Consistent with recent perspectives of agentic content (Hentschel et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2022; Rosette et al., 2016), we view dominance as a central aspect of agency that continues to be a major impediment for women leaders but is nonetheless separate from other types of agentic content. Rather, the negative correlations between dominance and other aspects of agency might have been a methodological artifact of the overt negative connotations embedded in the dominance scale items (Ma et al., 2022). Thus, future research should continue evaluating the relationships between agency factors using less negative-valence dominance items. Finally, although some scholars subsume non-dominance-related, positively correlated agency factors under a broader construct (Rosette et al., 2016; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012), psychometric analyses nonetheless indicate that perceivers can, and do, distinguish between positively related agency perceptions (Hentschel et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2022). Future research can examine the interactions between positively related agency factors to assess their distinctiveness.

We show that although perceived competence does not drive the dominance penalty (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, & Phelan, 2012), it can mitigate these penalties. Moreover, supplementary analyses of Studies 1 and 3 data show that competence uniquely

Table 8

Mean Levels of Leadership Effectiveness Evaluations Across Experimental Conditions (Study 2b)

Condition	Contrast	*M*	*SD*
Low competence condition	Women, low dominance	3.44	1.37
	Women, high dominance	3.28	1.35
	Men, low dominance	3.09	1.22
	Men, high dominance	3.53	1.28
High competence condition	Women, low dominance	4.40	1.15
	Women, high dominance	5.31	1.18
	Men, low dominance	4.33	1.05
	Men, high dominance	5.15	1.29

Figure 4

The Interaction Between Perceived Leader Dominance and Leader Gender in Low and High Perceived Leader Competence Conditions (Study 2b)

Low perceived leader competence condition:
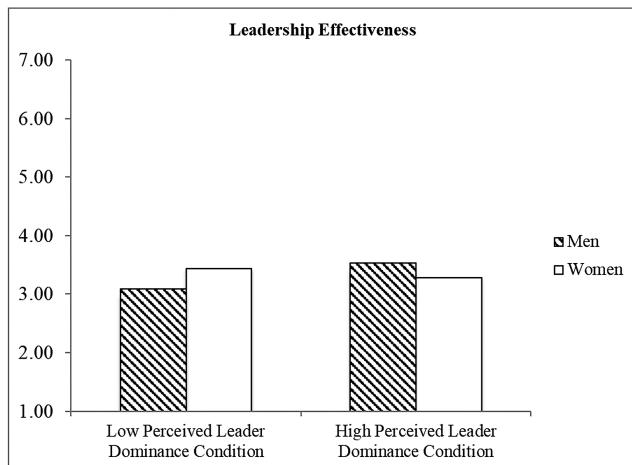
High perceived leader competence condition:
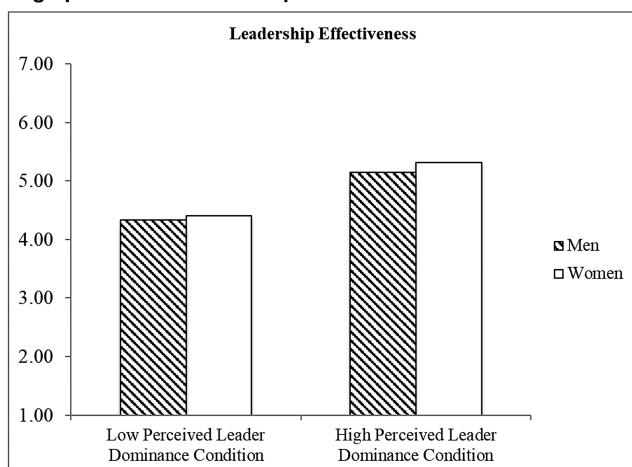
buffered the dominance penalty, an effect not shared by other positive-valence aspects of agency (e.g., diligence). This could be because competence, unlike independence, self-assuredness, or diligence, is often viewed as a central criterion for leadership effectiveness (Yukl, 2012). Therefore, certain positive agency perceptions (e.g., competence) play a more central role in explaining leadership effectiveness compared to other agency perceptions, a possibility that could be investigated in future research.

Practical Implications

An intuitive, practical implication of our work is that women should highlight their competence in situations where they have to enact behaviors that are necessary for leadership but are also likely to elicit the dominance penalty (e.g., delegating, nay-saying, Akinola et al., 2018; Chou, 2018). For example, a qualitative study of women directors of publicly traded U.S. companies found that senior women leaders employed "competence-based tactics," emphasizing their experience, credibility, and technical expertise to evade backlash (Trzebiatowski et al., 2023, p. 813). Interestingly, these women also noted that when they possessed domain-specific expertise, they felt empowered to behave more assertively (e.g., using a loud, forceful voice). Although our findings indicate that fostering perceptions of competence has the potential to weaken the dominance penalty, it is essential to note here that the onus of highlighting women's competence should not rest solely on women themselves to prevent perceivers from engaging in victim blaming as they reason that women who *do* experience backlash are then somehow lacking competence (Kim et al., 2018). As women already face numerous obstacles when pursuing leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007), it is important not to burden them further with the added responsibility of avoiding backlash when leading others.

Indeed, managers play an important gatekeeping role as they are in the position to highlight women's credentials and competence (Dwivedi et al., 2025). By recognizing women's credentials and contributions at work and providing these women with opportunities to showcase their expertise, managers can help foster perceptions of women leaders' competence, affording women protective benefits from backlash when women engage in behaviors that may elicit dominance perceptions. Doing so increases the likelihood that observers would perceive women's dominance attempts as complemented with competence and thus as legitimate, constructive, and beneficial for them and the firm (Vial et al., 2016). At the same time, stakeholders must navigate tactics employed to bolster women's perceived competence carefully and strategically, given prior evidence of a potential backlash (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Across studies, we found that incompetent men were punished less severely (Study 2a) or benefited (Studies 1, 2b, and 3) from dominance. One possibility this could have occurred is because competence is more stereotypically expected of men (vs. women), men's incompetence could have been attributed to contextual factors rather than personal deficits, leading observers to believe that men's (vs. women's) shortcomings were temporary and likely to improve (Foschi, 1989, 2000). To mitigate these effects, organizations should establish clear and defined leadership and promotion criteria to clarify evaluations of men's and women's competence and effectiveness. Moreover, in assessing targets' competence, organizations should also ensure that they prioritize objective accomplishments, and not future potential. Finally, implementing 360° feedback systems that collect input from subordinates, peers, and supervisors should ensure a broader and more accurate measure of leader competence.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

Our work has notable strengths, including a test of our predictions in different cultural contexts and across experimental and correlational methods. Nonetheless, perhaps owing to the varied contexts, we also observed inconsistent findings across our studies. For example, in Study 2b, women were not penalized for dominance at low levels of competence, whereas men benefited from dominance at low levels of competence. This lack of dominance penalty for women could have occurred because this experiment employed manipulations of dominance that did not possess overt negative valence (unlike that in other studies). Nonetheless, these findings are consistent with meta-analytic evidence indicating that the

Table 9
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations Among Variables (Study 3)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Individual level										
1. Subordinate gender	0.59	0.49	—							
2. Subordinate's tenure with leader	2.72	1.43	.09	—						
3. Team gender composition[a]	0.41	0.18	-.36***	-.06	—					
4. Leader gender[a]	0.59	0.49	-.09	.10	.24***	—				
5. Perceived leader dominance	3.69	1.04	-.04	-.15*	.09	.10	(.86)			
6. Perceived leader competence	5.86	0.71	-.01	.01	-.06	.12†	.03	(.82)		
7. Perceived leader status	5.58	0.87	.05	-.04	-.07	.11†	-.10	.51***	(.87)	
8. Leadership effectiveness	5.52	0.90	-.04	.07	-.07	.09	-.05	.40***	.39***	(.84)
Team level										
1. Subordinate gender[b]	0.60	0.19	—							
2. Subordinate's tenure with leader[b]	2.71	0.97	.03	—						
3. Team gender composition	0.40	0.19	-1.00***	-.03	—					
4. Leader gender	0.59	0.50	-.21	.15	.21	—				
5. Perceived leader dominance[b]	3.72	0.74	-.11	-.21	.11	.11	—			
6. Perceived leader competence[b]	5.84	0.54	.17	.03	-.17	.17	.19	—		
7. Perceived leader status[b]	5.60	0.61	.13	-.09	-.13	.22	.08	.69***	—	
8. Leadership effectiveness[b]	5.54	0.52	.18	.09	-.18	.13	.00	.50***	.52***	—

Note. N (individual level) = 222. N (team level) = 54. Subordinate/leader gender: 0 = women, 1 = men. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's α coefficients) are presented along the diagonal in parentheses.
[a] Team gender composition and leader gender were assigned down to the individual level. [b] Subordinate gender, subordinate's tenure with leader, perceived leader dominance, perceived leader competence, perceived leader status, and leadership effectiveness were aggregated to the team level.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 10

Comparisons of Factor Structures (Study 3)

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$[a]	CFI	RMSEA
1. Four-factor model	171.87(129)		.98	.04
2. Three-factor model (combining perceived leader dominance and perceived leader competence)	707.71(132)	535.84(3)***	.71	.14
3. Three-factor model (combining perceived leader status and leadership effectiveness)	384.01(132)	212.14(3)***	.87	.09
4. Two-factor model (combining perceived leader dominance and perceived leader competence, as well as combining perceived leader status and leadership effectiveness)	934.75(134)	762.88(5)***	.59	.16
5. Single-factor model	1127.01(135)	955.14(6)***	.49	.18

Note. df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.
[a] All models were compared with Model 1.
*** $p < .001$.

dominance penalty tends to be attenuated when operationalizations of dominance are more implicit and less overt in nature (Williams & Tiedens, 2016), indicating the importance of not conflating valence and characteristics in operationalizations of the dominance. Separately, we also observed that men and women described as having low dominance and competence were seen as most effective in studies where we collected data from across industries (Study 2a) or studies with a more gender-neutral context (i.e., a real estate company, Study 1). In contrast, we did not observe this pattern in more male-dominated contexts (Studies 2b and 3), where dominance might be viewed as less socially undesirable. The masculine context might also explain why highly competent men and women benefit from displaying more (vs. less) dominance in Studies 2b and 3. Together, these observations affirm the contextual sensitivity of the dominance penalty (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Classic studies in expectation states theory examine social interaction patterns (e.g., volubility) in small-group, experimental settings with objective manipulations of competence (e.g., false

feedback on a test) and actual dominance behaviors (e.g., argumentative confederates, Berger et al., 1969; Ridgeway & Diekema, 1989). Unlike these studies, we situated our investigation in the perceptual realm, focusing on the effects of perceived competence (vs. objective cues of competence, such as task performance) and perceived dominance (vs. actual behaviors, such as employing a dominant tone). An important limitation of the perceptual approach is that dominant and competent behaviors require interpretation by perceivers. There may be gender differences in how agentic behaviors are encoded into perceptions. For example, subtle dominant behaviors (e.g., sustained eye contact) might be perceived as dominant for women but not for men. Women also experience stricter standards for competence (Foschi, 1996), leading women to have to do more to be perceived as equally competent as men. Therefore, future research can replicate our study by using objective cues of competence and dominance.

Consistent with prior studies (Williams & Tiedens, 2016), we examined individuals' reactions toward dominant, agentic women.

Table 11

Hierarchical Linear Modeling Regression Results (Study 3)

| Variable	Leadership effectiveness		Perceived leader status	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	5.51*** (.07)	5.54*** (.07)	5.54*** (.07)	5.59*** (.06)
Subordinate gender	−0.17 (.11)	−0.14 (.12)	−0.15 (.12)	0.07 (.10)
Subordinate's tenure with leader	0.01 (.04)	0.03 (.04)	0.04 (.04)	−0.04 (.04)
Team gender composition	−0.76* (.35)	−0.49 (.35)	−0.48 (.34)	−0.13 (.34)
Perceived leader dominance	−0.12 (.08)	−0.01 (.05)	0.005 (.05)	−0.07 (.05)
Leader gender		0.18 (.13)	0.15 (.13)	0.16 (.13)
Perceived leader competence		0.35*** (.08)	0.27** (.09)	0.49*** (.08)
Perceived Leader Dominance × Leader Gender		0.17 (.11)	0.15 (.11)	0.14 (.10)
Perceived Leader Dominance × Perceived Leader Competence		0.07 (.08)	0.06 (.07)	0.06 (.07)
Perceived Leader Competence × Leader Gender		−0.23 (.16)	−0.20 (.16)	−0.17 (.15)
Perceived Leader Dominance × Leader Gender × Perceived Leader Competence		−0.29* (.14)	−0.24† (.14)	−0.32* (.12)
Perceived leader status			0.17* (.07)	
Pseudo-R^2 [b]	0.30	0.24	0.26	0.33

Note. N = 222 (individual level) and 54 (leader level). Subordinate/leader gender: 0 = women, 1 = men. Standard errors are shown in parentheses.
[a] $p = .05$. [b] Pseudo-R^2 is calculated based on a proportional reduction of error variance due to predictors in the models of Table 8 (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 5

The Three-Way Interaction Between Perceived Leader Dominance, Leader Gender, and Perceived Leader Competence on Leadership Effectiveness (Study 3)
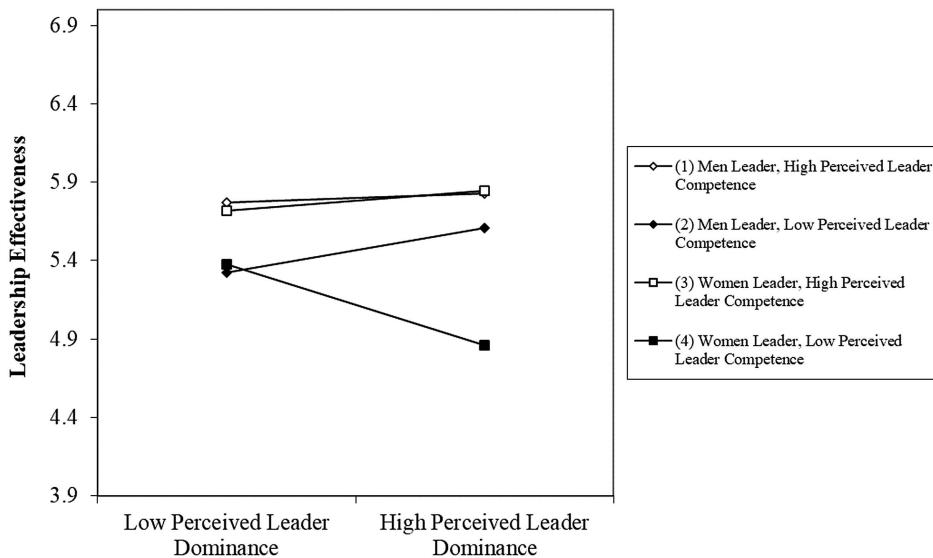
Future research could examine collective perceptions of agentic women's competence and status. As perceivers often behave in ways that accommodate others' beliefs (Vial et al., 2019), collective (vs. individual) judgments of women's competence might extend a stronger effect in buffering the dominance penalty. This underscores the importance of creating an organizational culture that provides formal and informal ways for women's accomplishments to be assessed, shared, and acknowledged accurately.

Future research can examine how multiple agency perceptions combine using latent profile analyses. Socially undesirable agentic perceptions (e.g., dominance) could co-occur to form a profile of a leader that is perceived as more dominant. In contrast, socially desirable agentic perceptions (e.g., competence) could combine to form a profile of a leader who employs a prestige-based strategy—gaining influence by sharing skills, expertise, knowledge, and experience with others, conveying helpfulness, promoting autonomy and cooperation

Figure 6

The Three-Way Interaction Between Perceived Leader Dominance, Leader Gender, and Perceived Leader Competence on Perceived Leader Status (Study 3)
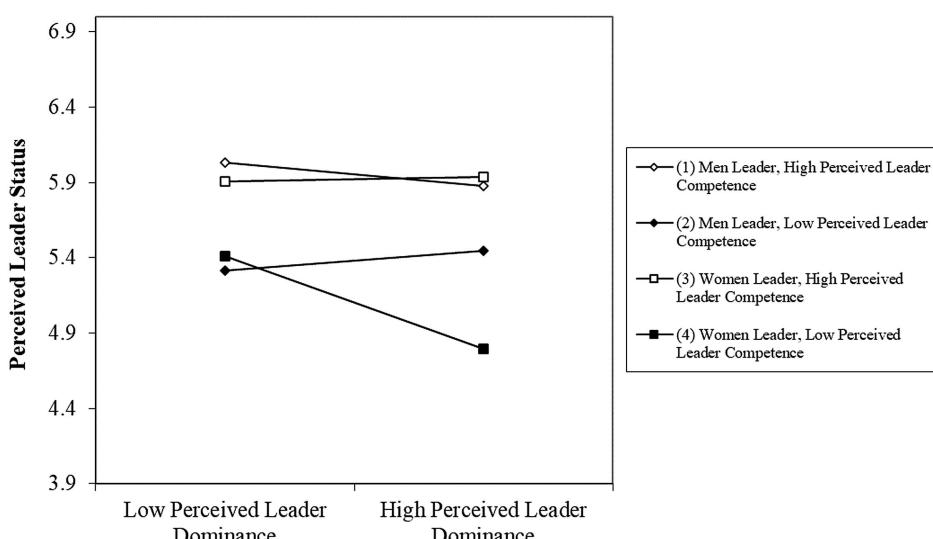
Table 12
Hypothesis 1's Result Summary of All Studies

Study	Three-way interaction	Effect of high (vs. low) dominance				Hypothesis 1 testing
		Women, low competence	Women, high competence	Men, low competence	Men, high competence	
Study 1	$\gamma = -.14$, $p = .045$	$\gamma = -.21$, $p = .006$, $M_{high\ dominance} = 3.40$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.92$ versus $M_{low\ dominance} = 4.69$, $SD_{low\ dominance} = 1.95$; $t(123) = 3.72$, $p < .001$	$\gamma = -.06$, $p = .409$, $M_{low\ dominance} = 5.93$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.50$ versus $M_{high\ dominance} = 5.31$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.73$; $t(152) = 2.38$, $p = .019$	$\gamma = .04$, $p = .762$, $M_{high\ dominance} = 3.95$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.76$ versus $M_{low\ dominance} = 4.22$, $SD_{low\ dominance} = 1.62$; $t(218) = 1.20$, $p = .233$	$\gamma = -.13$, $p = .227$, $M_{low\ dominance} = 6.39$, $SD_{low\ dominance} = .97$ versus $M_{high\ dominance} = 5.54$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.54$; $t(200) = 4.73$, $p < .001$	Supported
Study 2a	$F(1, 693) = 6.19$, $p = .013$					Supported
Study 2b	$F(1, 884) = 4.37$, $p = .037$	$M_{high\ dominance} = 3.28$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.35$ versus $M_{low\ dominance} = 3.44$, $SD_{low\ dominance} = 1.37$; $t(233) = .95$, $p = .344$	$M_{low\ dominance} = 4.40$, $SD_{low\ dominance} = 1.15$ versus $M_{high\ dominance} = 5.31$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.18$; $t(208) = 5.66$, $p < .001$	$M_{high\ dominance} = 3.53$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.28$ versus $M_{low\ dominance} = 3.09$, $SD_{low\ dominance} = 1.22$; $t(202) = 2.51$, $p = .013$	$M_{low\ dominance} = 4.33$, $SD_{low\ dominance} = 1.05$ versus $M_{high\ dominance} = 5.15$, $SD_{high\ dominance} = 1.29$; $t(241) = 5.41$, $p < .001$	Not supported
Study 3	$\gamma = -.29$, $p = .036$	$\gamma = -.25$, $p = .033$	$\gamma = -.06$, $p = .639$	$\gamma = .14$, $p = .484$	$\gamma = .03$, $p = .835$	Supported

among their followers, and so forth (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Kakkar, 2024; Lee et al., 2021).

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