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How Leaders Shape Well-Being and Retention: Dominant Leaders Undermine and Prestigious Leaders Enhance Follower Psychological Need Satisfaction

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Dominance and prestige are two key strategies through which people attain rank and influence within groups. Across three studies, we focus on how the deployment of these strategies shapes follower experiences—an important yet less well-understood question—by addressing how dominant and prestigious leaders satisfy the basic psychological needs of followers as outlined by self-determination theory. Using both observational ($N_1 = 250$) and experimental designs ($N_2 = 277$; $N_3 = 299$), we find that dominant leaders undermine followers' need satisfaction (i.e., their need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy), while prestigious leaders enhance it. Moreover, mediation analyses show that these differential patterns of need fulfillment in turn contribute to followers reporting higher leader-directed turnover intentions with dominant leaders but lower turnover intentions with prestigious leaders. Interestingly, when dominance was directed toward outgroup members—rather than ingroup members—followers report greater need satisfaction and lower desire to quit the leader.

Public Significance Statement

A growing concern in today's workplaces is employees' dissatisfaction with their managers—an issue closely tied to burnout and the desire to leave one's job. But what is it about certain leaders that leaves people feeling drained or eager to quit their team or leader, while others inspire commitment and collaboration? This research addresses the psychological impact of different leadership styles by examining how leaders either satisfy or undermine their followers' core needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Across three studies, the findings show that dominant leaders—those who rely on coercion and intimidation—tend to frustrate these needs, lowering the likelihood of retention. In contrast, prestigious leaders—those who earn respect through competence and skills—help their followers thrive and foster a desire to sustain the working relationship. By understanding how leadership styles shape our everyday experience at work, this research offers actionable insights for building healthier, more motivating workplaces.

Keywords: dominance, prestige, leadership, intergroup, self-determination theory

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Dominance and prestige—which involve influencing others via force versus persuasion—enable individuals to attain high rank within a group. However, despite a growing literature documenting how dominance and prestige strategies promote one's social rank (e.g., Brand & Mesoudi, 2019; Case et al., 2018; Cheng et al., 2013; Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017), several important questions remain unanswered. For example, followers' subjective experiences in response to treatment by their leaders are a critical yet understudied

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All studies were preregistered via the Open Science Framework before data collection (Study 1 at https://osf.io/qh6nc/; Study 2 at https://osf.io/jk8dy/; Study 3 at https://osf.io/jg385/). Anonymized data and codebook are publicly available (Study 1 at https://osf.io/pdzxs/; Study 2 at https://osf.io/zspfd/; Study 3 at https://osf.io/fe5rt/). This work was included in Zhuo Li's doctoral dissertation Chapter 3. Portions of the ideas and data were previously presented at the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology Annual Conference in 2025. The study was approved by the nonmedical research ethics board of Western University. Informed consent has been obtained. The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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component of leadership (Carsten et al., 2010; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Investigations into the psychological costs (and benefits) of following a dominant or prestigious leader are lacking.

At first glance, it may seem intuitive that following prestigious leaders should confer more benefits than following dominant leaders. Indeed, prestige-based rank asymmetries are rooted in social learning and skill cultivation, in contrast to the caustic nature of dominance-based influence that relies on fear and intimidation. Prestige-based relationships should therefore cultivate positive and productive exchanges between leaders and followers. On the other hand, dominance processes hinge on fear and coercion, which should presumably lead to resentment and feelings of oppression among followers. Yet little research has directly examined how dominance and prestige shape followers' subjective feelings and experiences. Kakkar and Sivanathan (2022) demonstrated that the followers of dominant or prestigious leaders may behave differently, such as exhibiting different helping behaviors toward peers. These findings suggest that leaders shape followers' psychology in different ways and produce divergent subjective experiences and behaviors among followers. Furthermore, existing work hints at distinct costs and benefits associated with each process, and quite surprisingly, there may even be some benefits provided by dominant leaders. Research on political voting tendencies suggests dominant leaders can be preferred in times of uncertainty and conflict (e.g., Laustsen & Petersen, 2017). The harshness associated with dominant leaders may also facilitate group coordination under higher stakes via the threat of punishment (Chen et al., 2021). Indeed, the tendency to prefer dominant leaders in certain contexts (e.g., Chen et al., 2021; Laustsen & Petersen, 2017) calls for more examination of when and why dominant leaders come to be viewed positively. We propose that the target of dominance and coercion is a critical factor: Followers may respond differently to dominance exhibited toward outgroup versus ingroup members.

Across three studies, we examine how working with dominant and prestigious leaders shapes followers' desire to continue the leader–follower relationship and the psychological mechanisms underpinning these relationships. By considering expressions of dominance toward outgroup versus ingroup members, we theorize and test the idea that followers may react positively to dominance exhibited toward the outgroup, which might explain their willingness to endorse and continue working with leaders who rely on fear and coercion.

Dual Pathways to Leadership: A Dominance–Prestige Perspective on Leadership

The dual pathways of dominance and prestige offer a powerful framework for understanding leadership—not only in terms of who ascends to positions of influence but also how they lead once they arrive and their effects on teams (Cheng et al., 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). This framework allows for dynamic and situational variation: Leaders need not be considered strictly dominant *or* prestigious. However, individuals may have general proclivities, such that they may show trait-like *tendencies* toward exercising more dominance- or prestige-based influence when interacting with followers or across time (Cheng et al., 2010). The conceptual parsimony of this framework—unifying complex suites of leadership styles and behaviors into two core influence strategies—can offer valuable insight into long-standing questions in leadership science.

Applying this framework, researchers have revealed meaningful differences in how dominant and prestigious leaders behave. Dominant leaders pursue influence through control, coercion, and intimidation (Cheng et al., 2010, 2013). As a function of this fear-based approach, dominant leaders are often self-serving and manipulative (Case & Maner, 2014; Ronay et al., 2020), highly sensitive to those who threaten their power (McGregor et al., 2023), and quick to exclude, ostracize, or otherwise suppress talented subordinates who might undermine their authority (Case & Maner, 2014; Maner & Mead, 2010; Mead & Maner, 2012). In contrast, prestigious leaders derive influence through earned respect and admiration, due to their knowledge, expertise, or skills (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). They are well-positioned and often inclined to share their know-how with less experienced members, view high-performing team members as assets, and tend to cultivate supportive, cooperative relationships with followers (Case & Maner, 2014). Although dominant leaders are vigilant to challenges to their authority, prestigious leaders are sensitive to social approval and invest in maintaining the trust of their group (Case et al., 2021). These divergent behavioral patterns suggest that dominant and prestigious leadership strategies may have distinct consequences for followers' psychological experiences.

How Dominant and Prestigious Leaders Shape Follower Experience and Well-Being

Although research has identified the behavioral tendencies of dominant and prestigious leaders, there is a growing need to examine the subjective experiences of followers under these leadership styles. Much of the literature merely infers the costs (and benefits) of dominance and prestige from the behavior of leaders but lacks evidence that directly examines the experiences of followers. For example, Maner and Case (2016) documented how dominant leaders tend to marginalize capable subordinates and obstruct collaboration among followers in efforts to suppress alliance formation. Such behaviors, particularly when coupled with overt or subtle aggression (whether direct or indirect), are likely to generate chronic stress for subordinates—conditions that are not unique to humans but are also well documented in other nonhuman primates (Abbott et al., 2003; Sapolsky, 1992; Sherman & Mehta, 2020). In human group settings, followers may comply with dominant leaders only because they lack alternatives, leading to low intrinsic motivation, psychological dissatisfaction, and a desire to exit the group when more appealing options arise (Cheng, 2020). Over time, such dynamics can result in increased turnover and reduced group or organizational stability.

In contrast, prestigious leaders foster positive experiences. Their leadership style—centered on generating attraction and admiration—is associated with mentoring, skill-sharing, and recognition of team members' contributions—all of which can promote growth and satisfaction among followers and a genuine desire to continue the relationship out of personal volition so as to reap material benefits (from social learning) and intrinsic rewards (rather than out of fear of repercussions as would be with a dominant leader). This suggests that prestige-based leadership may enhance follower psychological well-being and strengthen group cohesion and longevity. Taken together, although leader behaviors provide useful clues into the costs and

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benefits of different leadership styles, it is essential to directly examine followers' experiences and well-being. Doing so can reveal how dominance and prestige differentially shape follower well-being, motivation, and long-term engagement, which constitute key ingredients in understanding the sustainability of leader–follower relationships.

Follower Psychological Need Fulfillment: What Makes Followers Thrive and Why It Matters

Self-determination theory (SDT) identifies three fundamental psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) as essential for optimal human motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Grounded in decades of empirical research, SDT has been widely researched and applied to explain patterns of human motivation and engagement, including in the context of employees and their relation to the workplace and organizations (Gagné & Forest, 2008). According to SDT, individuals are most likely to experience intrinsic motivation—engaging in activities driven by their inherent interest and satisfaction—when these basic needs are fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017).

Autonomy refers to the experience of volition and free will in their action and decisions. Competence involves feeling effective and capable of meeting the demands of one's environment. Finally, relatedness reflects the need to feel connected and valued by others. When the local context supports these needs, individuals are more likely to thrive: They demonstrate stronger intrinsic motivation, perform more effectively, and report greater physiological and psychological well-being (Ryan et al., 2022). In any group or workplace setting, the satisfaction of these basic psychological needs is thus foundational to sustained motivation and healthy leader–follower and team dynamics.

How Prestige-Based Leadership Supports Follower Psychological Needs

Followers' basic psychological needs are more likely to be fulfilled when working with prestigious leaders. A defining feature of prestige is that deference is granted voluntarily rather than coerced or demanded (Cheng, 2020; Cheng et al., 2013). Prestigious leaders possess superior knowledge or expertise, from which followers can learn and grow (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). In return, followers express admiration and respect (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Price & Van Vugt, 2014). According to Henrich and Gil-White (2001), prestige is fundamentally rooted in social learning. Individuals who possess highly valued skills are often imitated, especially when acquiring those skills independently would be difficult or costly. By deferring to such individuals, followers gain privileged access to information and abilities that are otherwise difficult to obtain. This process of knowledge transfer supports followers' sense of competence, while the close and collaborative mentor–learner relationship that often emerges between prestigious leaders and followers helps fulfill the need for relatedness. Moreover, prestigious leaders attain influence not by suppressing others, but through the voluntary deference conferred upon them for their valued skills and abilities (Cheng, 2020; Cheng et al., 2013). Because their leadership is not grounded in coercion, followers exercise greater autonomy and freedom from control without excessive scrutiny or monitoring (Maner & Case, 2016). Consequently, we reason that followers are more likely to experience freedom and volition in their roles.

In sum, the logic above proposes that prestige-based leadership likely satisfies all three of followers' core psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—thereby fostering healthier, more enduring leader–follower relationships over time (Cheng, 2020; Redhead et al., 2019).

Why Dominance-Based Leadership Fails to Satisfy Follower Psychological Needs

Followers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are often unmet under dominance-based leaders. Dominance is characterized by coerced subordination, and thus, compliance stems not from personal volition but from pressure and fear. As such, dominant leaders may often restrict followers' perceived control over their decisions and free will, undermining their autonomy. Dominant leaders are inherently wary of subordinates banding together to subvert their power (i.e., to reverse the dominance hierarchy; Boehm, 1999; Foncelle et al., 2022). Consequently, to maintain their power, dominant leaders actively suppress subordinates from forming coalitions and meaningful bonds, in order to undermine collective action on the part of subordinates to overthrow the oppressive leader (Ronay et al., 2024). The lack of meaningful and positive relationships with other group members (as well as with their feared leader) means that followers likely experience a diminished sense of belonging and relatedness. Consistent with this logic, some evidence indicates that dominant leaders cultivate a competitive team culture in which subordinates are less invested in each other's success and are less prosocial and generous toward one another (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2022).

Finally, there is also reason to expect that dominance-based leadership impairs followers' sense of competence. Because their strategy of influence rests on coercion rather than benefit generation, dominant leaders have few incentives to improve subordinates' task ability and know-how. Consistent with this, some evidence indicates that dominant leaders are less inclined to transfer any knowledge and skill to their subordinates, likely in efforts to cultivate a sense of dependency and suppress the ability (and, in turn, prestige) of their subordinates (Paek & Kakkar, 2025). Moreover, dominant leaders are typically cautious and vigilant of any threats to their power, including talented group members who stand to rise in prestige (Maner & Case, 2016; Mead & Maner, 2012). As such, dominant leaders are likely to withhold praise or other forms of positive feedback in efforts to refrain from emboldening the confidence and prestige of high-performing subordinates.

In sum, dominance-based leadership poses a systemic threat to followers' basic psychological needs. When followers experience limited autonomy, inadequate social support from the leader and team, and suppressed feelings of competence, they are less likely to flourish.

When Followers Walk Away: Leadership and the Longevity of Leader–Follower Bonds

A central question in any leader–follower relationship is not just whether people perform well under a leader, but whether they want to continue working with that leader. This notion has been most studied under the broad umbrella of turnover intentions—people's thoughts

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about leaving their current work context (Bothma & Roodt, 2013; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). However, much of the existing turnover literature treats departure as a general decision about a job, team, or organization, without distinguishing who or what people are most interested in leaving behind. In practice, some people may wish to leave not because they dislike their work or coworkers, but because they want to stop working with a particular leader. This leader-directed form of turnover intention is especially relevant for understanding leadership processes grounded in prestige and dominance, which hinge on followers' willingness to continue engaging with, learning from, and deferring to a specific individual. Accordingly, in the present research, we focus on turnover intentions as they relate specifically to the leader—whether followers would choose to keep working with the same leader in the future—rather than on more general intentions to leave a job or team (Thomas et al., 2019).[1]

When followers feel that their personal needs are met, they are less likely to "vote with their feet" by withdrawing from the leader–follower relationship—whether through formal exit or more informal forms of disengagement. In this sense, decisions to stay are not only about the job or the team but often about the leader themselves. We propose that such decisions are shaped in part by psychological need satisfaction and by the degree to which different leadership styles fulfill or frustrate these needs. Leaders who support followers' needs should foster a stronger desire to continue the relationship, whereas leaders who undermine these needs may prompt followers to disengage and ultimately seek to quit the working relationship. It is worth noting that need satisfaction is not the only reason followers may choose to remain in a leader–follower relationship. In some cases, followers may stay because a specific leader is perceived as uniquely instrumental to their own success, such as when a leader serves as a sponsor, mentor, or gatekeeper to valued career opportunities. In these cases, followers may delay exit because the perceived costs of leaving outweigh the psychological discomfort of staying. Although this form of leader-specific instrumental dependency falls outside the primary theoretical scope of the present article, it represents an important complement to the need-based perspective we aim to develop.

Each of the three core needs likely contributes to followers' motivation to stay. When autonomy is supported, followers feel they have freedom and control over how they approach their work. This sense of volition enables them to pursue meaningful goals, which can reduce the likelihood of disengagement or exit (e.g., Martela & Riekki, 2018). Competence satisfaction fosters a sense of growth and effectiveness (e.g., Moreira et al., 2020), which should also contribute to a greater desire to remain in the current relationship with the leader. Finally, when followers experience relatedness—feeling seen, accepted, and connected—they are more likely to remain committed and emotionally invested in the relationship (e.g., Martela & Riekki, 2018).

Prestigious leaders are especially likely to support all three basic psychological needs, which in turn fosters followers' motivation to remain in the relationship and continue the existing leader–follower arrangement. By contrast, we theorize that dominant leaders are likely to undermine these needs, which increases the likelihood that followers exit the relationship, if they are able to do so. Preliminary evidence for these theorized links comes from organizational research showing that need frustration is consistently linked to increased turnover intentions, whereas need satisfaction is associated with retention and motivation (e.g., Boudrias et al., 2020; Hood & Patton, 2022). Other work indicates that prestigious leaders support career development and skill-building opportunities (Hagen & Garfield, 2019), thereby satisfying followers' needs and encouraging them to remain in the relationship. In short, the preferred longevity of leader–follower relationships is deeply shaped by whether followers experience their leaders as need-supportive or need-thwarting. Prestige-based leadership, by fulfilling autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, should encourage followers to stay. In contrast, dominant leadership may push followers to disengage and "vote with their feet."

The Intergroup Context as a Boundary Condition for the Effects of Dominant Leadership

Dominance targeted at outgroup members may paradoxically enhance follower retention by signaling status and identity benefits to ingroup followers. We theorize that aligning with a powerful leader who excludes or dominates outgroup members may provide followers with a sense of security, status, or group distinctiveness, which can in turn bolster their motivation to stay. Despite its oppressive nature and costs on followers, dominant leadership may be viewed more favorably in contexts in which dominance generates group-wide benefits—such as intergroup conflict where strength and toughness may promote success over rivals, or rampant intragroup norm violation that can benefit from strong leaders who are willing to punish (Cheng et al., 2022; Laustsen & Petersen, 2017).

From an evolutionary perspective, under this unique context of intergroup conflict, the coercive nature of dominant leaders becomes valuable (prestigious) because these dominant traits contribute to one's capacity to protect and secure resources for the ingroup (van Vugt, 2006). Research consistently shows that followers are attuned to behavioral cues that imply a leader's willingness to confront external others on behalf of the group. For example, people prefer dominant-looking, physically masculine leaders during wartime compared to peacetime (Little, 2014; Little et al., 2007), an effect rooted in biosocial mechanisms where masculine traits evoke implicit prototypes of the "warrior leader"—one who is capable of defending the ingroup and acquiring resources from competitors. Similarly, when external security concerns are made salient, followers systematically favor leaders stereotypically associated with dominance and toughness (Falk & Kenski, 2006; Holman et al., 2016). Together, these findings suggest that what drives follower preferences is not conflict itself, but the perceived alignment between a leader's dominant disposition and the ingroup's need for external defense and resource acquisition.

[1] Constructs related to turnover intentions are well established in the social science literature. A core organizing idea is "voting with one's feet," or expressing preferences by choosing whether to remain in or exit a relationship, group, or situation. This logic applies to physical migration (Boyd & Richerson, 2009; Warren, 2011) as well as movement across teams or organizations in search of more desirable arrangements (Benson et al., 2019). In organizational research, such exit-related processes are most commonly studied as turnover intentions, alongside related but distinct constructs such as withdrawal and disengagement, which capture reduced psychological or behavioral investment in an ongoing role or relationship. The present research focuses on a specific form of turnover intentions—leader-directed turnover intentions—which concern the self-chosen longevity and sustainability of an existing working relationship with a leader. Conceptually, this construct is closest to what prior work has referred to as dyadic viability (Thomas et al., 2019), as both capture followers' willingness to remain in or exit a relationship with a specific leader. Therefore, in the present studies, we assess leader-directed turnover using items adapted from existing measures of dyadic viability.

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We argue that a leader who directs dominant behavior toward an outgroup member provides precisely this kind of threat signal, even in the absence of explicitly strong reminders of intergroup competition. More broadly, coercive behavior from a leader may signal that resources are scarce or contested, thereby activating followers' sense that vigilance and self-protection are warranted—otherwise, such aggression would be unnecessary. When followers observe their leader behaving dominantly toward an outgroup member, this behavior communicates that the leader is willing to assert the ingroup's interests externally, prioritizes ingroup welfare over outgroup relations, and possesses the assertiveness needed to secure advantages for the group. In this sense, outgroup-directed dominance not only activates concerns over threat and intergroup conflict but also functions as a signal of ingroup advocacy, activating the same evolutionary preferences for dominant protectors that the broader threat and conflict literature documents.

Dominant leaders who direct their coercive threats toward *out*group rivals stand to gain support and popularity from subordinates who deem them as willing and able to advance group interests by securing resources and protecting collective well-being. (Hogg, 2001). Consistent with this, studies show that intergroup conflict reliably increases support for dominant leaders and that individuals tend to favor dominant political leaders whom they believe are capable of navigating external threats (Laustsen & Petersen, 2017). Moreover, harming the outgroup to gain more resources for the ingroup increased one's prestige to a greater degree than dominance (Halevy et al., 2012). Followers who benefit from dominant leaders' aggressive treatment of outgroups may experience a bolstered sense of need satisfaction. Subsequently, they may be more inclined to work with dominant leaders in the future. The current hypothesizing further extends this line of research by directly testing the mediating effect of follower need satisfaction in an intergroup context. In short, followers might choose to express their willingness to work with the leader in the future because they perceive dominant acts toward outgroup members as need satisfying.

Overview of Present Research and Hypotheses

The current research offers some of the initial insights into the psychology of following a dominant versus prestigious leader. Across three studies, we investigate how leaders who rely on dominance or prestige affect the satisfaction of followers' basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), which then subsequently shapes the longevity of these relationships as reflected in followers' willingness to continue working with these leaders. Study 1 used a correlational design with a sample of working adults to test whether leader dominance and prestige predict follower need satisfaction, which in turn is associated with the desire to continue the leader–follower arrangement.[2] Study 2 tested the same mediational model using an experimental design to assess causality. Furthermore, we used Helmert's contrast to test how prestigious leaders compare to the average of dominant leaders targeting either the ingroup or the outgroup. Study 3 extended this by examining dominance-based leadership in an intergroup context. Specifically, we randomly assigned participants to work with different kinds of leaders. We then tested whether followers report higher need satisfaction and, in turn, a greater desire to stay with the leader, when dominance is directed toward outgroup members compared to ingroup members. Table 1 summarizes the proposed model and hypotheses tested across all three studies.

Transparency and Openness

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study, and the study follows Journal Artical Reporting Standards (Appelbaum et al., 2018). The studies were approved by the nonmedical research ethics board of the corresponding author's institution. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. All studies were preregistered via the Open Science Framework before data collection (Study 1 at https://osf.io/qh6nc/; Study 2 at https://osf.io/jk8dy; Study 3 at https://osf.io/jg385/). Anonymized data and codebook are also publicly available (Study 1 at https://osf.io/pdzxs/; Study 2 at https://osf.io/zspfd/; Study 3 at https://osf.io/fe5rt/). All analyses were done in R 4.2.3 (R Core Team, 2022).

Study 1

Method

Participants

Study 1 adopted an observational design with a working adult sample to gather preliminary evidence in an ecologically valid context. The final sample included 250 participants recruited from Prolific who reported having previous professional work experience. Demographic information was collected via self-report at the beginning of the survey. Gender was assessed by asking participants, "Which option best describes your gender identity?" Race and ethnicity were assessed by asking participants, "What is your ethnic identity? If more than one category applies, please select all that apply." Participants had the option to refuse to answer the question or self-describe their identities. The detailed breakdown and number of participants in each demographic category for all three studies are reported in Table 2.

In Study 1, participants (M_{age} = 36.88, SD_{age} = 10.28) self-reported their gender (56% men, 40.4% women, 3.2% gender nonconforming, 0.4% did not wish to answer), ethnic background (55.20% White, 11.20% Black, 8.00% East Asian, and 8.40% mixed race), and field of work (18.8% information technology and services, 12% health care and social assistance, and 11.2% professional scientific and technical services).

Following Wang and Rhemtulla (2021), we conducted a power analysis using the Shiny app for structural equation models (SEMs) to determine the sample size. The power analysis was based on the least sensitive substantive test (i.e., indirect effect estimates). The results showed that a sample size of 200 would have a power of 0.82 after 1,000 simulations for a SEM with one latent predictor with nine indicators, one observed outcome, and one latent mediator with three indicators, assuming .70 factor loading for indicators to latent

[2] Although we preregistered hypotheses and analyses pertaining to follower belief in reciprocity in Studies 1 and 2, we encountered an issue with the measurement of belief in reciprocity. We believe that the measure used elicited a stable individual difference in one's tendency to believe in the value of reciprocity, rather than our intention to capture one's willingness to reciprocate with a given leader. This prompted us to reconsider the value of this potential mechanism. All results pertaining to follower belief in reciprocity are available in Supplemental Appendix I (available at https://osf.io/pdzxs/).

Table 1
Overview of Hypotheses for Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3

Independent variable	Hypothesized relation	Mediator	Hypothesized relation	Outcome	Indirect effect
Leader dominance (Study 1)	−	Follower need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness)	+	Follower retention	−
Leader prestige (Study 1)	+	Follower need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness)	+	Follower retention	+
Dominant versus prestigious leader conditions (Study 2 and Study 3)[a]	+	Follower need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness)	+	Follower retention	+
Dominant-ingroup versus dominant-outgroup leader conditions (Study 3)[b]	+	Follower need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness)	+	Follower retention	+

Note. The minus sign indicates negative relations between constructs; the plus sign indicates positive relations between constructs.
[a] Following Helmert's code, both dominant leader conditions were coded "−1," and the prestigious leader condition was coded "2." [b] Following Helmert's code, the ingroup dominant leader condition was coded "−1," the outgroup dominant leader condition was coded "1," and the prestigious leader condition was coded "0."

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variables, regression coefficients of .30 among variables, and .09 indirect effect estimate, and α level of .05. A factor loading of .70 reflects the conventional threshold for adequate indicator reliability in SEM (Kline, 2016). A regression coefficient of .30 corresponds to a medium effect size under Cohen's (1988) widely adopted framework for behavioral science research, representing a realistic estimate for the types of relationships examined in the present work. An indirect effect estimate of .09 was derived from the product of two medium-sized paths (.30 × .30 = .09), thus representing a medium-sized indirect effect consistent with Cohen's benchmarks. These parameter choices collectively represent a theoretically grounded, medium-effect-size scenario that is both realistic and appropriately conservative for the constructs and relationships under investigation (Wang & Rhemtulla, 2021). This sample was also used to pilot the experimental stimulus used in Study 2 (see Supplemental Appendices D–G for a description of this procedure and the results).

Measures

In Study 1, participants reported their leader's dominance and prestige, their own basic need satisfaction when working with their leader, and their willingness to continue working with their leader (i.e., leader-directed turnover intentions).

Leader Dominance and Prestige. The perceived dominance and prestige of the leader were measured with a scale developed by Cheng et al. (2010). Participants chose from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) to indicate their experience with the statements, with eight items for dominance (α = .84) and nine items for prestige (α = .94). Two sample leader dominance items are "My leader is willing to use aggressive tactics to get their way" and "My leader often tries to get their own way regardless of what I may want." Two sample leader prestige items are "My leader's unique talents and abilities are recognized by me" and "I respect and admire my leader."[3]

Follower Basic Need Satisfaction. Basic psychological need satisfaction of the participant (i.e., as a follower) was measured using a nine-item questionnaire adapted from Sheldon et al. (2001), with three questions for each need. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) to phrases with the stem "Working with my leader, I feel." Sample items included "that I am successfully completing difficult tasks and projects" (competence, α = .81), "close and connected with my leader" (relatedness, α = .92), and "that my choices are based on my true interests and values" (autonomy, α = .86).

Leader-Directed Turnover/Retention Intentions. Our goal is to capture followers' intentions to continue—or discontinue—working with a specific leader, rather than general intentions to leave a job or team. Accordingly, we measured leader-directed turnover intentions using a single item: "Given the opportunity, I would work with my leader on future projects" on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much so*). Higher scores indicate a stronger leader-directed retention intention. This item was adapted from past work (Thomas et al., 2019).[4]

Marker Variable. To address the potential issue of common method variance in cross-sectional designs, we included a marker variable (i.e., attitude toward color blue; Miller & Simmering, 2023) that was not theoretically related to any of the main variables. As a marker variable, participants' attitudes toward color blue (α = .96)

[3] Here in this work, we operationalize a leader's dominance over a specific perceiver. It remains to be examined, however, the extent to which dominance is expressed consistently across targets and situations, versus flexibly directed toward different targets and situations. Prior work suggests that individuals differ in relatively stable propensities toward dominance versus prestige, with dominance associated with traits such as narcissism, aggression, and disagreeableness and prestige associated with traits such as genuine self-esteem, agreeableness, conscientiousness, achievement, advice-giving, and prosociality (Cheng et al., 2010). At the same time, there is likely facultative flexibility in how these tendencies are expressed. Leaders may calibrate the deployment of dominance depending on contextual affordances—such as whether targets are ingroup versus outgroup members, the presence of external threat, or the likelihood of retaliation or coordination among subordinates. Thus, while some individuals may be chronically more dominant, the expression of dominance need not be uniform across all interactions. In real-world settings, trait-like tendencies and situational factors likely jointly shape when and toward whom dominance is directed.

[4] We chose this measure over more widely used Turnover Intention Scales (such as the Turnover Intention Scale, six-item; Bothma & Roodt, 2013) because these other scales assess more global intentions to leave one's job or team, rather than intentions directed toward a particular leader. For example, Turnover Intention Scale, six-item include statements such as "How often have you considered leaving your job?" and "How often do you look forward to another day at work?" These items conflate dissatisfaction with the work itself, coworkers, or the organization and do not isolate followers' desire to disengage from a specific leader. Because our theoretical focus is on leadership processes grounded in prestige and dominance—which hinge on followers' willingness to continue working with a given leader—we used a leader-specific measure that directly captures this leader-directed decision.

Table 2
Overview of the Demographics of Study 1, Study 2, and Study 3

Participants' demographic information	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Gender identity						
Male (includes transman)	140	56.00	86	31.05	150	50.17
Female (includes transwoman)	101	40.40	190	68.59	146	48.83
Two-Spirit	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.33
Trans	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Gender nonconforming/fluid/nonbinary/queer/variant/Gender X/agender	8	3.20	0	0.00	1	0.33
I do not wish to answer	1	0.40	1	0.36	0	0.00
Other (specify)	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.33
Total	250		277		299	
Ethnic identity						
Black	28	11.20	4	1.44	76	25.42
East Asian	20	8.00	35	12.64	10	3.34
Indigenous Global	2	0.80	2	0.72	1	0.33
Latino/a or Latinx	10	4.00	5	1.81	12	4.01
South Asian	9	3.60	46	16.61	4	1.34
Southeast Asian	10	4.00	4	1.44	5	1.67
West Asian or Middle Eastern	6	2.40	17	6.14	0	0.00
White	138	55.20	130	46.93	172	57.53
I prefer not to answer	3	1.20	3	1.08	0	0.00
Other (specify)	3	1.20	2	0.72	2	0.67
Two or more	21	8.40	29	10.47	17	5.69

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were measured with a seven-item scale developed by Miller and Simmering (2023). Sample items were as follows: "Blue is a beautiful color" and "I like the color blue." Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Attention Checks. Two attention checks ("I swim across the Atlantic Ocean to get to work every day" and "Please select not at all") were included in the survey. Participants who failed both attention checks (i.e., failed to select "not at all" for both of the questions) were excluded from the subsequent analyses. Fifteen participants failed the first attention check ("I swim across the Atlantic Ocean to get to work every day"), and none failed the second ("Please select not at all"). However, all responses were included in the analyses as none of the 250 participants failed both attention checks. The median survey completion time was 12.15 min ($M = 14.49$).

Analysis

Structural equation modeling was performed to test the proposed mediation relationships using the lavaan package in R. SEMs can control for measurement error while simultaneously modeling for multiple regressions (Williams et al., 2009). Following Ullman and Bentler's (2012) recommendations, we first specified the models. Dominance and prestige of the leader were the latent predictors, self-reported need satisfaction was the latent mediator, and leader-directed retention intention was the observed outcome. As different psychological needs tend to correlate together, we tested each indirect effect independently across a total of six models to ensure sufficient power. This approach allows for a more precise estimation of the indirect effects by maximizing the variability explained by each model. A latent marker variable (i.e., attitude toward color blue) was included in each model. To partial out potential common method variance (e.g., Miller & Simmering, 2023; Podsakoff et al., 2003), all measurement items were regressed onto the marker variable. The latent marker technique addresses some concerns regarding common method variance, but it cannot completely resolve the issue due to its own limitations (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Results

Table 3 depicts the correlations between key variables. Results for all models are summarized in Table 4. The models fit the data well (all model fit indices are shown in Supplemental Appendix N). As expected, leader dominance had negative relationships with followers' report of need satisfaction in all three basic needs—need for autonomy ($b = -0.36$, 95% CI [−0.45, −0.26], $p < .001$), competence ($b = -0.25$, 95% CI [−0.34, −0.15], $p < .001$), and relatedness ($b = -0.46$, 95% CI [−0.58, −0.35], $p < .001$). The indirect effects from leader dominance to leader-directed turnover intention through follower autonomy ($b = -0.34$, 95% CI [−0.48, −0.20], $p < .001$), competence ($b = -0.24$, 95% CI [−0.36, −0.13], $p < .001$), and relatedness ($b = -0.51$, 95% CI [−0.66, −0.37], $p < .001$) need satisfaction were all negative and significant, indicating that followers' lower desire to continue working with more dominant leaders is transmitted indirectly through their reduced satisfaction in these basic needs.

Leader prestige is positively related to followers' report of need satisfaction of autonomy ($b = 0.39$, 95% CI [0.30, 0.49], $p < .001$), competence ($b = 0.32$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.40], $p < .001$), and relatedness ($b = 0.63$, 95% CI [0.56, 0.71], $p < .001$). Furthermore, leader prestige exerted positive indirect effects on leader-directed retention intention via followers' greater need satisfaction of autonomy ($b = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.22], $p < .05$) and competence ($b = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.17], $p < .05$), as predicted. However, the indirect link between prestige and leader-directed retention intention

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Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations With Confidence Intervals in Study 1

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Follower age	37.05	10.35	—								
2. Follower gender (0 = *men*; 1 = *women*)	0.42	0.49	.06 [−.07, .18]	—							
3. Leader dominance	3.51	1.18	−.00 [−.13, .13]	−.10 [−.22, .03]	—						
4. Leader prestige	4.95	1.37	−.12 [−.24, .01]	.09 [−.04, .21]	−.54** [−.62, −.44]	—					
5. Follower competence need satisfaction	3.93	0.78	.04 [−.09, .17]	.02 [−.10, .15]	−.33** [−.44, −.22]	.61** [.52, .68]	—				
6. Follower relatedness need satisfaction	3.28	1.15	−.07 [−.19, .06]	−.04 [−.16, .09]	−.51** [−.59, −.40]	.84** [.80, .87]	.65** [.57, .71]	—			
7. Follower autonomy need satisfaction	3.56	1.00	−.08 [−.21, .04]	−.03 [−.15, .10]	−.49** [−.58, −.39]	.64** [.56, .71]	.69** [.62, .75]	.73** [.67, .79]	—		
8. ATCB (marker variable)	6.00	0.84	−.24** [−.35, −.11]	−.00 [−.13, .12]	.02 [−.11, .15]	.13 [−.00, .25]	.18** [.05, .30]	.10 [−.02, .23]	.11 [−.02, .23]	—	
9. Follower retention intention	5.29	1.92	−.02 [−.15, .11]	.11 [−.01, .24]	−.60** [−.68, −.51]	.86** [.82, .89]	.60** [.51, .67]	.79** [.74, .84]	.64** [.56, .71]	.08 [−.05, .20]	—

Note. Values in brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. ATCB = attitude toward color blue.
** $p < .01$.

through relatedness, while trending in the predicted direction, did not reach conventional levels of significance ($b = 0.17$, 95% CI [−0.02, 0.36], $p = .083$), as relatedness need satisfaction was not significantly associated with leader-directed retention intentions ($b = 0.27$, 95% CI [−0.04, 0.57], $p = .085$). These results indicate that followers' greater desire to work with their more prestigious leaders is transmitted indirectly through their greater satisfaction with need for autonomy and competence, but not so much through the satisfaction of the need for relatedness.

We also estimated simultaneous models where both leadership styles were entered concurrently as predictors. We included the results in Supplemental Appendices B and C. When controlling for prestige, the unique effects of dominance were attenuated. We note that because these predictors are correlated, these simultaneous models suffer from inflated standard errors, and our sample size was not a priori powered to detect these effects. Nevertheless, this attenuation is theoretically revealing. It suggests that in naturalistic settings, followers struggle to strictly differentiate the two constructs; a highly dominant leader is fundamentally perceived as a low-prestige leader.

Discussion

In Study 1, we examined our predictions in an ecologically valid professional working sample and found that, as predicted, leader dominance had a negative association with follower need satisfaction whereas leader prestige had a positive association. Moreover, with one exception for relatedness, follower need satisfaction across all three domains consistently and significantly mediated the opposing effects of leadership style (negative for dominant leadership, positive for prestigious leadership) on followers' willingness to work together in the future. The results of Study 1 revealed a critical methodological challenge: In naturalistic evaluations, dominance and prestige are so inversely related that their unique effects on follower outcomes are statistically and conceptually difficult to disentangle observationally. To address this, Studies 2 and 3 utilize an experimental design to decouple dominance from prestige, allowing us to isolate their distinct causal impacts on follower perceptions without the confounding influence of their naturally occurring shared variance.

Study 2

Study 2 aims to conceptually replicate Study 1 using an experimental paradigm. The leader's dominance and prestige were experimentally manipulated by having participants interact with a leader throughout a negotiation task.

Method

Participants

As in Study 1, we conducted a power analysis based on the least sensitive substantive test (i.e., indirect effect estimates). A sample size of 200 would have a power of 0.86 after 1,000 simulations for a SEM with one observed predictor (manipulation conditions), one observed outcome, and one latent mediator with three indicators, assuming .70 factor loadings for indicators of latent variables, regression coefficients of .30 among variables, and .09 indirect effect estimate, and α level of .05.

Table 4

How Dominance and Prestige Relate to Leader-Directed Retention Intention Through Follower Psychological Need Satisfaction (Study 1)

Path	M = Autonomy		M = Relatedness		M = Competence	
	Estimate	[95% CI]	Estimate	[95% CI]	Estimate	[95% CI]
X = Leader dominance; Y = Leader-directed retention intention						
X on M (a)	−0.36 (.05)***	[−0.45, −0.26]	−0.46 (.06)***	[−0.58, −0.35]	−0.25 (0.05)***	[−0.34, −0.15]
M on Y (b)	0.94 (.15)***	[0.65, 1.24]	1.11 (.11)***	[0.89, 1.32]	0.99 (0.16)***	[0.67, 1.30]
Direct effect (c)	−0.57 (.11)***	[−0.78, −0.37]	−0.40 (.09)***	[−0.58, −0.22]	−0.67 (0.11)***	[−0.88, −0.46]
Indirect effect	−0.34 (.07)***	[−0.48, −0.20]	−0.51 (.08)***	[−0.66, −0.37]	−0.24 (0.06)***	[−0.36, −0.13]
X = Leader prestige; Y = Leader-directed retention intention						
X on M (a)	0.39 (.05)***	[0.30, 0.49]	0.63 (.04)***	[0.56, 0.71]	0.32 (0.04)***	[0.23, 0.40]
M on Y (b)	0.30 (.12)*	[0.06, 0.54]	0.27 (.16), $p = .085$	[−0.04, 0.57]	0.31 (0.12)**	[0.08, 0.53]
Direct effect (c)	1.00 (.07)***	[0.87, 1.13]	0.95 (.11)***	[0.74, 1.16]	1.02 (0.06)***	[0.89, 1.14]
Indirect effect	0.12 (.05)*	[0.02, 0.22]	0.17 (.10), $p = .083$	[−0.02, 0.36]	0.10 (0.04)*	[0.02, 0.17]

Note. A marker variable was included in the structural equation model with all measurement items regressed onto it to partial out potential common method variance; unstandardized estimates are displayed. Standard errors are in parentheses. Structural equation model fit statistics are available in the Supplemental Material. Total effect for dominance on leader-directed retention intention, $b = -0.91$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.10, −0.72]. Total effect of prestige on leader-directed retention intention in the mediation models, $b = 1.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.02, 1.21]. CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

In anticipation of possible attrition, we recruited 300 students from a large Canadian university to participate in a study on leadership. Students signed up through an undergraduate student recruitment pool in exchange for bonus course credit and provided consent to start the study. We collected a total of 277 students after excluding 13 participants for failed attention checks. Participants in the sample ($N = 277$, $M_{age} = 18.57$, $SD_{age} = 0.99$) self-reported their ethnic background (46.90% White, 16.21% South Asian, and 12.76% East Asian) and gender (30.69% men, 68.97% women).

Procedure

Using a between-subject design, participants (who assumed the role of followers) were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: prestigious leader condition ($n = 93$), dominant leader-ingroup condition ($n = 93$), and dominant leader-outgroup condition ($n = 91$). [5]

Participants took part in a modified "blue buggy" negotiation game, which is a commonly used paradigm that elicits active engagement by having participants make decisions and receive feedback in a realistic scenario (Côté et al., 2013; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Paulson, 2006). Specifically, participants read that they were recruited to negotiate with the university regarding the rent for a newly built apartment, with a current market price ranging from $400 to $1,000. Participants were informed that the role of the opposing negotiator was played by another student representing the university. In reality, we manipulated the responses from the opposing negotiator with prefabricated text. Between the two negotiation rounds, participants received a single round of feedback from their assigned leader—who was described as someone with coaching and negotiation expertise.

Participants were assigned a leader to guide them through the negotiation, which served as our manipulation of dominance and prestige. As a means of introducing participants to their assigned leader, participants were provided with a short interview transcript, which included their leader's responses to the interview questions: "How do you make sure your team meets their high-performance expectations?" and "How do you lead your subordinates?" The dominant leaders' responses emphasized that they exert influence by any means necessary and are not afraid to reprimand team members if they do not meet expectations:

> I as the team leader should be the one in charge. … I will make sure proper hierarchy is established within the team by any means necessary, … handle subordinates with a firm hand. … I as the team leader, should make decisions. … I am not afraid to reprimand team members if they do not meet expectations.

The prestigious leader's response emphasized their willingness to share expertise and knowledge:

> I as the team leader should be the one with immersed knowledge … help subordinates when they encounter issues and pass the knowledge on … treat subordinates with respect. … Harmonious relationships with proper knowledge flow are essential for team success.

Upon entering the negotiation, participants were informed that the current leasing price the university is considering is $850 a month for a room in a three-bedroom unit with a shared washroom. They had four options to choose from (i.e., $400, $500, $600, $700) and a textbox for them to input their reasoning or negotiation. Regardless of which option participants chose, the opposing negotiator rejected the offer and wrote the following:

[5] As noted in our preregistration, our original design for Study 2 included three experimental conditions: prestigious leader condition, dominant (toward ingroup) leader condition, and dominant (toward outgroup) leader condition. However, our analyses showed that the dominant (toward outgroup) leader condition and the dominant (toward ingroup) leader condition were not successful in eliciting different follower perceptions; these two leader profiles were perceived by followers as similarly dominant toward both in- and outgroup members and therefore indistinguishable by followers. In light of this finding that the dominant (toward outgroup) leader condition did not elicit the intended leader profile, we used Helmert's coding to compare prestigious leadership condition against both dominant leadership conditions. We urge interested readers to consult the Supplemental Materials, where we detail the results based on this third experimental condition (Supplemental Appendix J). In Study 3, we address this shortcoming by revising our dominant toward outgroup manipulation so as to provide an effective test of our hypotheses.

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> The rental price you have proposed is below the market rate. If you would be willing to raise the rental price to a level that is more reflective of the current market value, I would be happy to revisit the offer. However, at this time I'm afraid I have to reject your offer.

After a short wait, participants received feedback from their assigned leader. The leader's responses served to further emphasize the characteristics of the leader. The messages from each type of leader were as follows:

> Dominant leader (ingroup): You were entrusted with representing the students' interests. The outcome has hurt our reputation and hampered our negotiations. This isn't a game; it's serious business.

> Dominant leader (outgroup): They absolutely don't know what they are talking about! This is total nonsense, and they probably need to send someone who's more capable. We just need to stand our ground!

> Prestigious leader: I appreciate your efforts in taking on the negotiation with the rental agency. Although the negotiation didn't go as expected, it provides us with valuable learning opportunities. I am here to support you in your professional growth. We can work together to enhance your negotiation skills.

In the next round of negotiation, participants were given the option to increase (or insist on) their original offer (i.e., increase by \$0, \$50, \$100, \$150).[6] Afterward, participants answered questions measuring their thoughts on the leader's dominance and prestige, need satisfaction working with the hypothetical leader, belief in reciprocity with the leader, how competent they think the leader is, and their willingness to continue working with the leader (i.e., leader-directed retention intention). To avoid the possibility of participants attributing the success (or lack thereof) of the negotiation to certain leadership tendencies, participants were not informed whether they were successful in the negotiation. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study. The full experimental materials are available in Supplemental Appendix H.

Measures

Manipulation Checks. Three manipulation check items were developed (one for each condition): "This leader would be willing to use aggressive tactics in relation to our own team members" for the ingroup dominant leader condition; "This leader would be willing to use aggressive tactics in relation to our competitors" for the outgroup dominant leader condition; "This leader would be willing to impart their unique skills and knowledge" for the prestigious leader condition. Participants answered all three questions on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Follower Basic Need Satisfaction. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness were measured using a nine-item questionnaire adapted from Sheldon et al. (2001). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Three questions were used for each dimension of need satisfaction, each of which had the prompt "Working with this leader, I felt." Sample items included "that I would be taking on and mastering hard challenges" (competence, $\alpha = .79$), "a strong sense of relatedness with my leader" (relatedness, $\alpha = .91$), and "free to do things my own way" (autonomy, $\alpha = .85$).

Leader-Directed Turnover/Retention Intention. The desire to continue working with the leader was measured with the same item in Study 1 with a minor modification (i.e., "this leader," rather than "my leader" as in Study 1): "Given the opportunity, I would work with this leader on future projects" on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

Attention Checks. The same attention check items from Study 1 ("I swim across the Atlantic Ocean to get to work every day" and "Please select not at all") were included. Participants who failed both attention checks (i.e., failed to select "not at all" for both questions) were excluded from the subsequent analyses. Seventy-eight participants failed the first attention check ("I swim across the Atlantic Ocean to get to work every day"), and 17 failed the second ("Please select not at all"). Thirteen failed both attention checks. After excluding people who failed both attention checks and people who might have taken breaks in completing the survey (e.g., more than 2 hr), the median completion time was 9.73 min ($M = 13.41$).

Analysis

We used structural equation modeling to examine how a leader's orientation—either dominant or prestigious—predicts leader-directed turnover intention through its effect on followers' psychological need satisfaction. The mediator, psychological need satisfaction, was treated as a latent variable to account for measurement error. Although our preregistration specified dummy coding, we adopted Helmert's contrast coding following a reviewer's recommendation, as it more directly addresses our theoretical question and increases statistical power. Following Helmert's contrast, both dominant leader conditions were coded as -1, whereas the prestigious leader condition was coded as 2. Helmert's coding is a statistical technique to compare one specific group against the combined average of all remaining groups (Cohen et al., 2013). In our study, this approach specifically enables us to evaluate whether the prestigious leader differs significantly from the mean effect of both kinds of dominant leaders (dominant-ingroup and dominant-outgroup), while controlling for any variance between the two dominant groups themselves.

Results

We recruited 300 students to participate in the study, 10 of whom dropped the study. After excluding participants who failed both attention checks, we have 93 participants in the dominant-ingroup leadership condition, 91 in the dominant-outgroup leadership condition, and 93 in the prestigious leadership condition. Table 5 shows the correlations among key variables in Study 2.

Manipulation Check

To test the effectiveness of the manipulations, we conducted a series of one-way analysis of variance and post hoc analysis of variance with Tukey's honestly significant difference. Participants in each manipulation condition scored highest on their respective targeted manipulation items. Leaders were rated as more dominant

[6] We examined whether leadership style (prestigious vs. dominant) differentially predicted participants' final offers in the negotiation task. No significant difference was found between prestigious or dominant conditions, $F(1, 275) = 2.29$, $p = .132$, $M_{diff} = 0.15$, 95% CI [−0.05, 0.34]. We report this analysis here for completeness, as negotiation outcomes were not the focal dependent variable and do not bear directly on our theoretical argument.

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Table 5
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations With Confidence Intervals in Study 2

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Follower age	18.58	1.00	—					
2. Follower gender (0 = *men*; 1 = *women*)	0.69	0.46	.10 [−.03, .23]	—				
3. Follower competence need satisfaction	2.96	0.88	.00 [−.13, .13]	.03 [−.09, .14]	—			
4. Follower relatedness need satisfaction	2.49	1.04	−.02 [−.15, .11]	−.01 [−.13, .11]	.63** [.56, .70]	—		
5. Follower autonomy need satisfaction	2.74	1.01	.02 [−.11, .15]	.06 [−.05, .18]	.69** [.62, .74]	.68** [.61, .74]	—	
6. Leader-directed retention intention	3.68	1.73	−.04 [−.17, .09]	.03 [−.09, .15]	.59** [.50, .66]	.74** [.68, .79]	.64** [.56, .70]	—

Note. Values in brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation.
** $p < .01$.

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in the average dominant leader conditions ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.42$) than in the prestigious leader condition ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.24$), $F(1, 274) = 71.07$, $p < .001$, $M_{diff\ =} -1.46$, 95% CI [−1.80, −1.12]. In addition, leaders were rated as more prestigious in the prestigious leader condition ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.26$) than in the average dominant leader conditions ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.38$), $F(1, 275) = 23.56$, $p < .001$, $M_{diff} = 0.83$, 95% CI [0.49, 1.16]. This indicates that our experimental manipulations effectively induced perceptions of dominant and prestigious leadership from the perspective of the followers.

Mediation Results

Table 6 displays the means and standard deviations of the main variables by conditions. In Study 2, we test the same basic hypotheses from Study 1. Compared to the dominant leader, the prestigious leader exerted a significant positive influence on followers' autonomy ($b = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.33], $p < .001$), competence ($b = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.21], $p < .001$), and relatedness ($b = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.33], $p < .001$) need satisfaction. The indirect effects from leadership style (i.e., dominant vs. prestigious leadership) to leader-directed retention intention through autonomy ($b = 0.28$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.39], $p < .001$), competence ($b = 0.15$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.24], $p = .003$), and relatedness ($b = 0.29$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.40], $p < .001$) need satisfaction were all positive and significant. All model results are summarized in Table 7.

Discussion

Study 2 manipulated dominant and prestigious leadership styles to evaluate their consequences for follower psychological need satisfaction. Consistent with Study 1, we found support for the roles of followers' need for autonomy and competence in explaining the relations between leader dominance/prestige and leader-directed turnover intention. In addition, the need for relatedness was a significant mediator between leadership style and leader-directed turnover intention, such that people had a stronger relatedness need satisfaction when they worked with a prestigious leader compared to a dominant leader. In summary, Study 2 supported our hypotheses that follower psychological need satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness varies in substantial and meaningful ways when led by dominant versus prestigious leaders, and these differences in need satisfaction play a key role in explaining why prestigious leaders are favored over dominant leaders as future leaders.

Study 3

Study 2 provided an initial experimental test of our core theoretical hypotheses that dominance and prestige differentially influence followers' basic psychological need satisfaction and leader-directed retention intention. However, Study 2 employed a relatively generalized approach in which participants did not clearly differentiate between the ingroup- and outgroup-directed dominant leadership. Study 3 was therefore designed as a more targeted follow-up investigation that builds directly on these findings by isolating the specific component of dominant leadership relevant to our theoretical argument: the target of the leader's dominant behavior.

Other than testing the broader dominance-versus-prestige comparison, Study 3 focuses specifically on whether directing dominance toward an outgroup member—as opposed to an ingroup member—drives favorable follower reactions in intergroup contexts. We propose that when followers observe a leader behaving dominantly toward an outgroup member, this serves as a signal of

Table 6
Mean and Standard Deviation Across Conditions for Study 2

Variable	Average dominant leader condition ($n = 194$)	Prestigious leader condition ($n = 93$)
Follower competence need satisfaction	2.86 (0.90)	3.18 (0.79)
Follower relatedness need satisfaction	2.26 (0.98)	2.95 (1.00)
Follower autonomy need satisfaction	2.49 (0.97)	3.25 (0.90)
Leader-directed retention intention	3.20 (1.63)	4.62 (1.50)
Manipulation check—leader dominance ratings	5.09 (1.38)	3.61 (1.24)
Manipulation check—leader prestige ratings	4.57 (1.37)	5.41 (1.26)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Table 7
How Dominance and Prestige Relate to Leader-Directed Retention Intention Through Follower Psychological Need Satisfaction (Study 2)

Path	M = Autonomy		M = Relatedness		M = Competence	
	Estimate	[95% CI]	Estimate	[95% CI]	Estimate	[95% CI]
X = Leader ingroup dominance versus prestige; Y = Leader-directed retention intention						
X on M (a)	0.25 (.04)***	[0.17, 0.33]	0.24 (.05)***	[0.16, 0.33]	0.13 (.04)**	[0.05, 0.21]
M on Y (b)	1.12 (.12)***	[0.88, 1.36]	1.21 (.08)***	[1.06, 1.36]	1.14 (.11)***	[0.93, 1.35]
Direct effect (c)	0.19 (.07)**	[0.06, 0.32]	0.18 (.05)***	[0.08, 0.28]	0.33 (.06)***	[0.22, 0.44]
Indirect effect	0.28 (.06)***	[0.17, 0.39]	0.29 (.06)***	[0.18, 0.40]	0.15 (.05)**	[0.05, 0.24]

Note. Unstandardized estimates are displayed. Helmert's code is used so that we compare the prestige condition with the average of the two dominance conditions. The two dominant leader conditions are coded "−1," and the prestigious leader condition is coded "2." Standard errors are in parentheses. Structural equation model fit statistics are available in Supplemental Appendix N. Total effect for dominance versus prestige on leader-directed turnover intention, $b = 0.47$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.34, 0.60]. CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error.
** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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ingroup advocacy and external protection, prompting followers to focus on the potential gains the leader may bring rather than the coercive costs of dominant behavior. By contrast, ingroup-directed dominance carries no such protective signal and instead communicates a direct threat to followers' own autonomy and standing within the group.

Notably, our intergroup manipulations center specifically on the target of dominance, and we deliberately excluded an outgroup-directed prestige condition from the design. Prestigious leadership relies on a mutually beneficial exchange whereby followers grant deference in return for access to a leader's valuable skills and knowledge. Extending these behaviors toward outgroup members would threaten the ingroup's advantage and would likely be perceived as an act of betrayal. Empirical work by Halevy et al. (2012) supports this reasoning: Prosociality toward outgroup members undermines the leader, suggesting that an outgroup-prestige manipulation would fail to produce a credible prestigious leader stimulus. An outgroup-prestige condition would therefore be not only theoretically incoherent within our framework but also empirically difficult to operationalize cleanly. We identify a fully crossed design as a valuable direction for future research.

To isolate this specific behavioral component as cleanly as possible, we designed the Study 3 conditions so that each dominant leader condition was paired with nondominance in the alternate direction: The ingroup dominant leader was described as nondominant toward the outgroup, and the outgroup dominant leader was described as nondominant toward the ingroup. This approach allows us to attribute differences in follower reactions specifically to the target of dominance. However, we do acknowledge that many leaders exhibit dominance in both directions simultaneously. Importantly, we do not position intergroup context as a formal moderating condition. Rather, we treat the intergroup context as a theoretically meaningful situation in which dominant leadership can exert a positive influence on followers' need satisfaction, and one that reveals the context sensitivity of dominance effects.

Method

Participants

As with the power analysis performed in Study 2, we recruited 300 working professionals from Prolific to participate in a study on leadership. Participants signed up through an online recruitment pool and provided consent to start the study. We collected a total of 299 responses after excluding one participant for failed attention checks. Participants self-reported their age ($M = 40.18$, $SD = 11.50$), years of work experience ($M = 17.23$, $SD = 11.02$), ethnic background (57.5% White, 25.4% Black, and 4% Latino), gender (48.8% women), and field of work (16.4% information technology and services, 15.1% health care and social assistance, and 15.1% education).

Procedure

Participants (who assumed the role of followers) were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: the prestigious leader condition versus the ingroup dominant leader condition versus the outgroup dominant leader condition. Participants were asked to read a brief biography of a leader and to subsequently respond to questions as if they were directly working with this person. All conditions described the leader as the CEO of a thriving technology company in a competitive market. The dominant-ingroup leadership emphasized tendencies such as maintaining an iron grip on internal operations, dominating conversations, and challenging employees. The dominant-outgroup condition emphasized dominance directed toward competitors, such as using intimidating and fear-based tactics when interacting with competitors. Finally, the prestigious condition emphasized the tendency to share expertise and know-how with employees. Supplemental Appendix M provides detailed descriptions of the manipulation conditions. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study.

Measures

Manipulation Checks. Three manipulation check items were developed (one for each condition): "The leader described is aggressive and dominant towards his own subordinates within the organization" for the ingroup dominant leader condition; "The leader described is aggressive and dominant towards his competitors from outside firms" for the outgroup dominant leader condition; "The leader described is a highly skilled and respected expert in his field" for the prestigious leader condition. Participants answered all three questions on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Follower Basic Need Satisfaction. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness were measured using a nine-item questionnaire adapted from Sheldon et al. (2001). Participants responded on a 5-

point Likert scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Three questions were used for each dimension of need satisfaction, each of which had the prompt "Working with this leader, I would feel." Sample items included "that I would be taking on and mastering hard challenges" (competence, $\alpha = .91$), "a strong sense of relatedness with my leader" (relatedness, $\alpha = .95$), and "free to do things my own way" (autonomy, $\alpha = .91$).

Leader-Directed Turnover/Retention Intention. We measured this variable using the same item in Study 2.

Attention Checks. The same two attention check items from Studies 1 and 2 ("I swim across the Atlantic Ocean to get to work every day" and "Please select not at all") were included in the survey. In total, one failed both attention checks. The median survey completion time was 7.51 min ($M = 5.94$).

Results

Planned comparisons between conditions were used to test the substantive hypotheses (i.e., average dominant leader vs. prestigious leader conditions, ingroup vs. outgroup dominant leader conditions). Table 8 shows the correlations among key variables in Study 3.

Manipulation Check

Following the analytic approach described in Study 2, we found that participants in each manipulation condition scored highest on their respective targeted manipulation items. Specifically, leaders were rated as more dominant in the average dominant leader conditions ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.70$) than in the prestigious leader condition ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.45$), $F(1, 297) = 238.40$, $p < .001$, $M_{\text{diff}} = -1.91$, 95% CI [−2.16, −1.67]. In addition, leaders were rated as more prestigious in the prestigious leader condition ($M = 6.41$, $SD = 1.13$) than in the average dominant leader conditions ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.65$), $F(1, 297) = 84.35$, $p < .001$, $M_{\text{diff}} = 1.68$, 95% CI [1.32, 2.04]. Furthermore, leaders were rated as more dominant toward ingroup in the ingroup dominant leader condition ($M = 6.36$, $SD = 1.21$) than in the outgroup dominant leader condition ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.58$), $F(1, 196) = 451.20$, $p < .001$, $M_{\text{diff}} = -4.24$, 95% CI [−4.64, −3.85]. Leaders were rated as more dominant toward outgroup in the outgroup dominant leader condition ($M = 6.39$, $SD = 1.20$) than in the ingroup dominant leader condition ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.74$), $F(1, 196) = 374.20$, $p < .001$, $M_{\text{diff}} = 4.12$, 95% CI [3.70, 4.54]. The experimental manipulations worked as intended.

Mediation Results

Table 9 displays the means and standard deviations of the main variables by conditions.

In addition to testing the same hypotheses in Studies 1 and 2, we also examined how followers respond to dominant treatment levied toward different targets (i.e., ingroup vs. outgroup). First, we tested a mediation model of how leadership style (i.e., a dominant leader or a prestigious leader) influences leader-directed turnover intention through its effect on participants' psychological need satisfaction. Following Helmert's contrast, we coded both dominant leader conditions as "−1," and the prestigious leader condition was coded as "2." Compared to the average dominant leader, the prestigious leader exerted a significant positive influence on followers' autonomy ($b = 0.38$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.46], $p < .001$), competence ($b = 0.40$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.46], $p < .001$), and relatedness ($b = 0.59$, 95% CI [0.52, 0.67], $p < .001$) need satisfaction. The indirect effects from leadership (i.e., dominant-ingroup vs. prestigious leadership) to leader-directed retention intention through autonomy ($b = 0.46$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.59], $p < .001$), competence ($b = 0.55$, 95% CI [0.43, 0.67], $p < .001$), and relatedness ($b = 0.84$, 95% CI [0.71, 0.97], $p < .001$) need satisfaction were all positive and significant.

We further tested whether followers respond to dominant leaders differently depending on the target of the dominance. We evaluated the same mechanism and outcome but changed the predictor to contrast the two dominant leader conditions. The ingroup dominant leader condition was coded as "−1," the outgroup dominant leader condition was coded as "1," and the prestigious leader condition was coded as "0." Both Helmert's codes were entered in the same model. Compared to the dominant leader who targeted ingroup members, the leader who was dominant toward outgroup members exerted a significant positive influence on followers' autonomy ($b = 0.52$, 95% CI [0.36, 0.67], $p < .001$), competence ($b = 0.61$, 95% CI [0.47, 0.75], $p < .001$), and relatedness ($b = 0.62$, 95% CI [0.46, 0.78], $p < .001$) need satisfaction. The indirect effects from leadership comparison (i.e., ingroup vs. outgroup dominant leadership) to leader-directed retention intention through autonomy ($b = 0.62$, 95% CI [0.39, 0.85], $p < .001$), competence ($b = 0.84$, 95% CI [0.60, 1.08], $p < .001$), and relatedness ($b = 0.88$, 95% CI [0.64, 1.12], $p < .001$) need satisfaction were all positive and significant. The full model results are summarized in Table 10.

Discussion

Study 3 took a different experimental procedure to manipulate dominant and prestigious leadership conditions to evaluate their

Table 8
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations With Confidence Intervals for Study 3

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Follower age	40.13	11.52	—					
2. Follower gender (0 = *men*, 1 = *women*)	0.49	0.50	.04 [−.08, .15]	—				
3. Follower competency need satisfaction	3.58	1.15	−.02 [−.13, .10]	.03 [−.09, .14]	—			
4. Follower relatedness need satisfaction	3.02	1.40	−.08 [−.19, .04]	.04 [−.08, .15]	.80** [.75, .84]	—		
5. Follower autonomy need satisfaction	3.17	1.23	−.02 [−.13, .10]	−.02 [−.13, .10]	.83** [.79, .86]	.84** [.81, .87]	—	
6. Leader-directed retention intention	4.43	2.28	−.04 [−.15, .08]	.03 [−.09, .14]	.78** [.73, .82]	.89** [.86, .91]	.75** [.70, .80]	—

Note. Values in brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation.
** $p < .01$.

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Table 9
Mean and Standard Deviation Across Conditions for Study 3

Variable	Average dominant leader condition (n = 198)	Ingroup dominant leader condition (n = 101)	Outgroup dominant leader condition (n = 97)	Prestigious leader condition (n = 101)
Follower competence need satisfaction	3.19 (1.15)	2.60 (1.11)	3.78 (0.86)	4.37 (0.64)
Follower relatedness need satisfaction	2.43 (1.30)	1.84 (1.12)	3.04 (1.19)	4.18 (0.72)
Follower autonomy need satisfaction	2.77 (1.24)	2.26 (1.25)	3.29 (1.00)	3.96 (0.69)
Leader-directed retention intention	3.53 (2.20)	2.51 (1.84)	4.57 (2.05)	6.20 (1.10)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

consequences for follower psychological need satisfaction. In designing the Study 3 manipulation, we used a more neutral language to describe the dominant leader compared to Study 2, in order to capture a broader range of leader dominance. The replication of our core findings under these more conservative conditions provides additional evidence that the observed effects reflect the theoretically meaningful distinction between dominance and prestige. Consistent with Study 1 and Study 2, we found support for the roles of followers' need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence in explaining the relations between leader dominance/prestige and leader-directed turnover intention. Extending Study 1 and Study 2, we tested how the target of dominance might influence follower responses. Consistent with our predictions, dominant leaders who primarily target the outgroup, rather than the ingroup, increase followers' basic need satisfaction.

General Discussion

Dominance and prestige are two widely recognized fundamental processes to acquire rank and influence within groups and organizations (Cheng et al., 2010, 2013). However, little is known about how dominant and prestigious leaders affect follower psychology. The present research addresses this missing gap in the literature by conducting the first investigation into how dominant and prestigious leaders affect followers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and how the nature of whether these needs are (un)met affects followers' desire to continue the current leader–follower arrangement. Utilizing an observational design and two experimental manipulation designs with diverse samples, the three studies provide important insights to demonstrate the distinctive pathways through which leader dominance and prestige can influence followers' decisions in continuing leader–follower relationships. Study 1 provides crucial ecological validity with a working adult sample, whereas Studies 2 and 3 afford greater confidence in causal inference through directly manipulating leader dominance and prestige.

We found robust support that leadership style—whether dominant or prestigious—shapes how their followers feel and their desire to continue the relationship. Dominant leaders tend to frustrate followers' core psychological needs, making followers less willing to stay. By contrast, prestigious leaders fulfill those needs and increase followers' desire to continue the relationship. Interestingly, when dominant leaders target outgroup members with their coercive capacity instead of members of their team, followers report feeling more satisfied and are more open to future collaboration—suggesting that intergroup context is an important factor that explains why dominant leaders can sometimes come to be favored.

Theoretical Contributions

The present studies make several contributions to the literature. First, they identify how dominant and prestigious leaders shape the

Table 10
How Dominance and Prestige Relate to Leader-Directed Retention Intention Through Follower Psychological Need Satisfaction (Study 3)

	M = Autonomy		M = Relatedness		M = Competence	
Path	Estimate	[95% CI]	Estimate	[95% CI]	Estimate	[95% CI]
X = Leader dominance versus prestige; Y = Leader-directed retention intention						
X on M (a1)	0.38 (.04)***	[0.31, 0.46]	0.59 (.04)***	[0.52, 0.67]	0.40 (.03)***	[0.33, 0.46]
M on Y (b)	1.20 (.13)***	[0.95, 1.44]	1.42 (.06)***	[1.30, 1.54]	1.38 (.12)***	[1.15, 1.61]
Direct effect (c1)	0.43 (.07)***	[0.28, 0.57]	0.05 (.06), p = .391	[−0.06, 0.15]	0.34 (.07)***	[0.21, 0.48]
Indirect effect	0.46 (.07)***	[0.33, 0.59]	0.84 (.07)***	[0.71, 0.97]	0.55 (.06)***	[0.43, 0.67]
X = Leader dominance in- versus outgroup; Y = Leader-directed retention intention						
X on M (a2)	0.52 (.08)***	[0.36, 0.67]	0.62 (.08)***	[0.46, 0.78]	0.61 (.07)***	[0.47, 0.75]
M on Y (b)	1.20 (.13)***	[0.95, 1.44]	1.42 (.06)***	[1.30, 1.54]	1.38 (.12)***	[1.15, 1.61]
Direct effect (c2)	0.41 (.14)**	[0.14, 0.67]	0.15 (.09), p = .112	[−0.04, 0.33]	0.19 (.14), p = .193	[−0.09, 0.47]
Indirect effect	0.62 (.12)***	[0.39, 0.85]	0.88 (.12)***	[0.64, 1.12]	0.84 (.12)***	[0.60, 1.08]

Note. Unstandardized estimates are displayed. Helmert's code is used to first compare prestige and average two dominance conditions and the two dominance conditions while controlling for the prestige condition. In the first code, the two dominant leader conditions were coded "−1," and the prestigious leader condition is coded "2." In the second code, the ingroup dominant leader condition is coded "−1," the outgroup dominant leader condition is coded "1," and the prestigious leader condition is coded "0." Both Helmert's codes were entered in a single model. Standard errors are in parentheses. Structural equation model fit statistics are available in the Supplemental Material. Total effect for dominance versus prestige on leader-directed retention intention, b = 0.89, SE = 0.06, p < .001, 95% CI [0.77, 1.00]. Total effect for dominance in- versus outgroup on leader-directed retention intention, b = 1.03, SE = 0.14, p < .001, 95% CI [0.76, 1.30]. CI = confidence interval; SE = standard error.
** p < .01 *** p < .001.

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psychological experiences of their followers. Although research has established dominance and prestige as distinct strategies for attaining influence, this study sheds light on the downstream psychological consequences these strategies have for followers. Across three studies, dominant leaders were found to undermine followers' basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), leading to a lower willingness to continue working with them. In contrast, prestigious leaders enhanced need satisfaction and promoted greater leader-directed retention intention. These findings contribute to a small but growing body of literature documenting the toxic effects of dominant leadership on follower well-being and group dynamics. They join recent research showing that dominant leaders can erode prosocial team culture; for example, one study found that followers working under dominant leaders become entrenched in a highly competitive mindset and less inclined to help their teammates (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2022). Other research shows that dominant leaders decrease, while prestigious leaders increase, trust among followers (Barends & Andrews, 2023). Relatedly to this, other evidence indicates that dominant leaders incite followers to band together in collective opposition to resist their coercive leadership (Ronay et al., 2024). Together, consistent with these existing findings, the current results emphasize the relational costs of dominance-based leadership and highlight the importance of fostering prestige-based influence to support healthier, more collaborative work environments.

Second, we integrate the previously disparate literatures on dominance and prestige and human motivation. Across all three studies, the need for autonomy and competence consistently played important roles in mediating the relations between leader dominance/prestige and leader-directed turnover intention. The importance of employee psychological need satisfaction is evident in research addressing employee turnover (e.g., Boudrias et al., 2020; Hood & Patton, 2022). The current findings extend this line of inquiry to demonstrate how basic need satisfaction relates to leader-directed turnover intention. The present study shows that dominant leaders, with their inclination for aggression and coercion, can negatively impact followers' need for autonomy and competence. Our results highlight that followers may feel that their choices are not their own and they do not have the skills and ability to do their job right when working with dominant leaders. As basic psychological needs are important to human thriving, employees working under a dominant leader are more inclined to disengage from their work or leave their workplace when a better opportunity comes along. Prestigious leaders, in contrast, are more adept at satisfying these basic psychological needs. Indeed, the current findings showed that prestigious leaders cultivate healthy relationships with their followers. Prestigious leaders, by nurturing autonomy and competence, can create a more fulfilling and sustainable work environment, promoting high loyalty.

Third, we identify intergroup competition as a key condition that explains when dominant leaders—who tend to undermine follower well-being in most contexts—can actually come to be favored. Study 3, with its extension to intergroup contexts, provides the first empirical investigation of how targets of dominant leadership treatment influence follower need satisfaction and followers' decisions to maintain leader–follower relationships. Previous research suggested that dominant leaders can be preferred in certain situations, particularly those involving intergroup conflict or economic uncertainty (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). We hypothesized and tested that followers evaluated dominant leaders more positively when the leaders' dominant behavior targeted outgroup members rather than ingroup members or the followers themselves. Specifically, followers reported significantly higher need satisfaction when their leader's dominant treatment targeted outgroup members compared to when it targeted ingroup members or was directed at the followers themselves. These findings provided new evidence on how and why dominant leaders can gather follower support despite their caustic nature.

One question raised by our findings is why dominance remains a viable strategy for influence, despite undermining followers' need satisfaction and increasing their desire to exit the relationship. One key answer is that dominance operates through mechanisms fundamentally different from those underlying prestige. Whereas prestigious leaders attract followers by providing valued benefits such as knowledge, mentorship, or competence signals, dominant leaders often secure follower compliance through the avoidance of costs (Cheng et al., 2013, 2014; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Followers may continue to tolerate dominant leaders not because the relationship is psychologically fulfilling or otherwise rewarding, but because the dominant individual retains the power to impose penalties, restrict opportunities, or otherwise make resistance costly. In such situations, followers may begrudgingly remain in the relationship even while experiencing lower need satisfaction (Cheng, 2020).

At the same time, however, dominance-based hierarchies are often inherently volatile (Cheng, 2020; McClanahan et al., 2022; Redhead et al., 2019, 2021). Research on dominance leveling suggests that individuals possess strong motivations to resist coercive authority, and groups can sometimes coordinate to challenge or depose overly dominant leaders (Boehm, 1999; Cheng, 2020; Ronay et al., 2024). Successful resistance typically requires that subordinates overcome coordination barriers and risks of retaliation. When these challenges are surmountable, leveling coalitions can reduce power disparities and destabilize dominance-based hierarchies. Importantly, however, certain contexts may favor dominance traits. As one example, during periods of intergroup conflict or heightened external threat, followers often increase their preference for leaders who display strength, decisiveness, and a willingness to impose costs on rivals (Laustsen & Petersen, 2017; Laustsen et al., 2025). In such environments, dominance-enhancing traits may appear to generate benefits for others and thus become more attractive (and by implication, prestigious; Cheng, 2020). Taken together, these considerations suggest that while dominance can undermine follower well-being, it can nevertheless persist as a pathway to influence—particularly in contexts where followers cannot easily exit, cannot coordinate resistance, or come to perceive dominance cues as desirable for current context.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present studies utilized three samples and different research designs to enhance both ecological validity and causal inference (Simons et al., 2017). However, the findings from the three studies provided mixed support for our initial hypotheses. Notably, relatedness need satisfaction helped to explain why followers expressed a stronger desire to continue working with prestigious leaders than dominant leaders in Studies 2 and 3. However, follower relatedness need did not exert the same influence in Study 1 for prestigious leaders. It is possible that the different operationalization and measurement of leader prestige contributed to this discrepancy. In

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Study 1, we directly measured participants' evaluations of their leaders' prestige, whereas in Studies 2 and 3, we used the comparison between dominant and prestigious leader conditions as the focal predictor. Consequently, the methodological differences between studies, introduced in the interest of rigor, may have contributed to variability in the findings. In Study 1, we focused on how leaders' dominant and prestigious tendencies were perceived by followers, whereas in Studies 2 and 3, we specifically compared followers under different leadership conditions. Therefore, conceptual differences may exist across these two different methods, and researchers should interpret the results with caution. That is, Study 1 examined how leader dominance and prestige are associated with follower outcomes, but in Studies 2 and 3, we tested how prestigious leaders compared to dominant leaders. Additionally, this discrepancy may also stem from the differential importance of relatedness needs between individuals with work experience and those without (i.e., students). Specifically, it is plausible that individuals in the workforce have developed alternative strategies for relatedness compared to students, who might rely more heavily on authoritative figures due to their developmental stage and social contexts. For example, even with an overall positive relationship across age groups, Lataster et al. (2022) found some variations between basic psychological need satisfaction and well-being among Dutch-speaking individuals. This suggests that the impact of relatedness need satisfaction can vary depending on the population, emphasizing a need for further investigation into how these factors influence perceptions across different demographic groups.

All three studies point to the important role of follower psychological need satisfaction. However, the satisfaction of such needs might change over time. A recent meta-analysis has revealed that motivational factors and self-esteem can develop and change throughout a student's academic journey (Scherrer & Preckel, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to conduct longitudinal studies to test how such mediators evolve over time in response to varying extents of leader dominance and prestige. It is plausible that leader dominance might be associated with a significant decrease in the need satisfaction over time, indicating a potentially unstable and deteriorating relationship. On the other hand, leader prestige can underpin a more stable relationship, such that high need satisfaction would be maintained over time. Taking a longitudinal perspective can afford us deeper insights into the temporal dynamics of these relationships, thereby enhancing our understanding of the mechanisms through which leader dominance and prestige dynamically influence followers' need satisfaction.

Across three studies, we examine leader-directed turnover intention from the followers' perspective given the important active role played by followers. However, in practice, dominant leaders may not care about their employees' desire to continue working with them as dominance relies on fear and coercion (Cheng et al., 2013; Maner & Case, 2016). Furthermore, dominant leaders, even with the negative implications on leader-directed retention intention on the part of followers, are still preferred under intergroup conflict contexts (Laustsen & Petersen, 2017) and economic uncertainty situations (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). That is, dominant leaders may have other means for retaining followers given the nature of how they wield influence. Therefore, future research can examine how divergent views on leader-directed turnover intention impact leader–follower relationships.

We focus on how leader dominance and prestige were associated with followers' willingness to continue working with their leader. Although leader-directed turnover intention is an important piece in leadership and followership research (Thomas et al., 2019), future research can delve deeper into the impact of dominance and prestige on a variety of outcome variables cross different levels. Preliminary findings from the present studies suggest a negative impact on followers' need satisfaction when they work with dominant leaders. The deteriorated basic psychological need satisfaction may further increase rates of turnover and disengagement. This could occur as employees seek to retaliate against perceived injustices or dissatisfaction with their leader who may be inclined to take a dominant approach. Disgruntled employees may either exit the organization when opportunities arise or, in the absence of such opportunities, psychologically withdraw from their roles.

Studies 2 and 3 address some of the limitations of Study 1 by directly manipulating leader dominance and prestige. However, the studies are still limited because only one part of the causal chain was manipulated (i.e., dominance and prestige), rather than both the predictors and mediators. In Studies 2 and 3, we only manipulate the predictor, which poses challenges to meet the sequential ignorability assumption, especially regarding the ignorability of the mediator (Keele, 2015; Ruissen, 2025). Therefore, we cannot establish causal links between the mediators and the outcome variable of leader-directed turnover intention. Nonetheless, there are several reasons for not directly manipulating the mediators. The mediators in the present study (i.e., psychological need satisfaction) reflect the followers' subjective experiences. Directly manipulating autonomy, relatedness, or competence need could be ethically challenging (Aguinis & Henle, 2002) as manipulating a low need satisfaction environment inevitably leads to distress for participants. Furthermore, manipulating two causal chains simultaneously in a single study is extremely challenging due to the study design limitations and the nature of the substantial variables (i.e., need satisfaction in the present study). Even though alternative approaches such as *parallel encouragement designs* can offer potential benefits, they still rely on stringent assumptions and might suffer from power issues (Ruissen, 2025). Unobserved confounding variables or additional unmeasured mediators (and the interactions of the mediators) from the manipulation procedure can further bias indirect effect estimates (Eronen, 2020), even in a randomized experimental study setting such as ours. In the present study, a full causal mediation inference cannot be achieved due to the ethical and methodological limitations. Nonetheless, results are robust in both observational and experimental designs from three unique samples. Furthermore, each dominant leader condition was paired with nondominance in the alternate direction in Study 3, allowing us to cleanly isolate the target of dominance as the operative behavioral component. However, many real-world leaders exhibit dominance toward both ingroup and outgroup members simultaneously. Future research should therefore examine whether the favorable effects of outgroup-directed dominance are robust when leaders are broadly dominant or whether concurrent ingroup-directed dominance undermines the ingroup-protective signal that drives follower favorability.

A methodological limitation of the present research is that our study design did not include measurement of conceptually adjacent constructs alongside our focal outcome of leader-directed retention intention. Although single-item measures are methodologically appropriate for capturing narrow, unambiguous behavioral

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intentions (Fisher et al., 2016), the absence of these alternative variables means we were unable to formally test the discriminant validity of our measure against related concepts. We note, however, that testing the discriminant validity for this focal outcome goes beyond the scope of the present article, whose primary aim was to test the theoretical influence of leader dominance and prestige across multiple complementary methods. In doing so, we utilized experimental designs in Studies 2 and 3 to establish causal direction and included a marker variable (attitude toward the color blue) in Study 1 to mitigate concerns about generalized response biases. Future research should build on this foundation by incorporating related constructs to formally establish the discriminant validity of leader-directed retention intention, as well as replicating our findings using observable behavioral outcomes, such as having participants actively choose whether to continue working with the leader.

An important future direction is to extend our investigation beyond the three basic psychological needs outlined in SDT—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—to consider the role of mattering in follower experiences. Mattering refers to the perception that one is significant, visible, and valued by others (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981) and is increasingly recognized as essential to human flourishing (Prilleltensky, 2020). While mattering overlaps rather substantially with relatedness, both addressing the human desire for social connection, they are conceptually distinct: Relatedness captures the need for closeness and belonging, whereas mattering emphasizes feeling recognized and impactful—that one's presence and contributions count (Flett, 2021; Martela & Pessi, 2018). Importantly, one can feel liked or connected (relatedness) without feeling valued or consequential (mattering; e.g., when a team member feels liked by others but that their input is ignored), suggesting possibly unique predictive utility for well-being and motivation. Future research should examine how leadership styles, particularly dominance and prestige, influence followers' sense of mattering—above and beyond their satisfaction of SDT needs—and how these perceptions jointly shape key outcomes such as workplace well-being, team functioning, and leader–follower viability.

Constraints on Generality

The present findings should be interpreted in light of several constraints on generality (Simons et al., 2017). Study 1 sampled working adults recruited through Prolific who reported prior professional work experience across a range of industries. Our intended population of generalization is workers who operate within leader–follower relationships in contemporary organizational settings, but our participant pool was primarily limited to English-speaking countries, which may constrain broader generalizability. For example, Witkower et al. (2024) observed cross-cultural differences in the accuracy of detecting nonverbal displays of dominance and prestige. It remains plausible that the influence of leader dominance and prestige on follower need satisfaction is moderated by cultural variables and that perceptions of dominant leaders who target outgroup members may also differ according to cultural context. Moreover, Study 1 assessed perceptions of leader dominance and prestige concurrently with follower need satisfaction, which limits conclusions about the temporal dynamics of these processes. Future research using longitudinal designs could clarify how quickly these effects emerge and how durable they are over time. Finally, although the experimental designs in Studies 2 and 3 strengthen causal inference, the use of online samples and simplified scenarios may not fully capture the complexity of real-world leadership environments.

Conclusion

Although dominance and prestige are two pathways to gain and maintain influence over others, they elicit different downstream follower psychological experiences. In three studies, we used both observational design and experimental designs to examine how leader dominance and prestige can impact followers' willingness to continue working with their leader and the associated psychological mechanisms. Working with dominant or prestigious leaders can significantly impact followers' need satisfaction, which further shapes followers' willingness to remain in the leader–follower relationship.

Practically, this work cautions leaders to attend to followers' experiences and needs should they be concerned with the longevity of the working relationship. While dominance may appear to be an effective means to install short-term compliance, it breeds resentment and leaves followers' basic needs unmet. Not only will followers contest the coercion of dominant leaders, but they will also exit the working arrangement at the sight of more attractive alternatives. However, in an intergroup context, dominant leaders who targeted outgroup members were seen more positively and instilled a sense of need satisfaction to the followers. Nonetheless, this need satisfaction might be short-lived if the dominant leader acts against the ingroup members. Prestige thus represents a more viable, consensus-based means of long-term leadership.

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