

## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

This is episode 242, and we are diving into something big and juicy today, the demonisation of dominance.

I'm also thrilled to tell you about my brand new 12-week group coaching program, The Herd Within. It is inspired by the way herds work in nature, specifically herds of horses, but it's not actually about horses. It's about you and how you relate to other people in your personal and professional life. We are going to be covering all sorts in this program. You will uncover the roles that you default to, the ones that you avoid, and also how to move fluidly between all five roles so that you can do things like set boundaries, handle power dynamics, and create relationships that feel really great at work and at home.

So, let's get into today's juicy topic, the demonisation of dominance.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen, then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Welcome, welcome, folks. Today, I want to talk to you about dominance or, more specifically, the demonisation of dominance, because I know some of you are already flinching at my use of that word. You've probably had experiences where the dominant people in your lives were also the ones who caused harm. Maybe they were mean or they used their authority or presence to control and intimidate or to get their way at the expense of others.

And that's often how dominance is portrayed in films and on TV and in books. We've got the villain, the bullies, the controlling bosses, and you've probably had personal experiences of dominant people in your life who've misused that dominant energy. Maybe a teacher, a boss, your parents, or partners who were aggressive and just unpleasant to be around. So, of course, you then grow up thinking that dominance is inherently bad and something to avoid stepping into in your own life.

## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

But dominance itself really isn't the problem. It's the misuse of dominance that causes harm. When dominance is used with intention and with maturity, it can be one of the most supportive and protective and beneficial energies in a group and for you. But when you've experienced dominance in its worst forms, when it's been mean and punishing and harmful, then of course you're going to avoid it.

But dominance doesn't have to mean domination, okay? It doesn't mean dominance over. Mature dominance is about being able to direct and protect, to drive things forward and divide things up, to split things up when that's what's needed. It's about moving people or moving yourself towards safety, towards opportunity, towards a goal

So think about two siblings that are fighting. We've just been on holiday to Greece, had plenty of this on the flight going on, plenty of it at the destination. When two siblings are fighting and a parent breaks it up, that's a great use of dominant energy. The same goes for encouraging someone to do something. So not in the gentle, "Oh, I think you'll enjoy it when you're doing it." Not that kind of energy. We're talking about more of a, "Come on, let's go. Let's do this." That kind of driving force, that type of dominant energy.

And of course, it's about judicious use of this energy. Not every situation calls for dominance. And it's not that one person has to carry that role all the time. It's one of many roles we want to be able to lean into as and when they are needed. And this is one of the five roles I'll be teaching about inside The Herd Within, my new coaching program. We're going to be looking at each role in depth and then coaching on how to use them in your life. Applications for it are now open, and we start on October 6th for 12 glorious weeks together. I would love to receive your application. So check out the link in the show notes, pay attention to my emails and social media and get your application in.

So in a herd of horses, they will use the dominant energy to keep other horses safe, to guide away from danger, and to direct towards opportunity. It's about service rather than causing harm. And there is a difference

## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

between more immature or unskilled dominance versus a mature and grounded dominance.

So immature dominance is aggressive. It's about force, intimidation, and control. That's the unskilled version, and it's the one that you probably associate the most with this idea of dominance and why you therefore flinch at the idea of using it in your own life, because you want to treat other people in the ways that you've been treated, and that's admirable.

But shying away from this role means that you have no boundaries, you're unable to stand up for yourself, and how you go about making requests of others is very wishy-washy. So nobody listens, let alone does what you're asking.

Mature dominance is assertive, it's grounded, and it's also very efficient. It doesn't need to puff itself up or waste energy in any way. And I see this play out all the time with my horse, Buttons, and the small herd that he lives in. So when there was just three of them, there was a young horse in the herd who displayed a lot of dominance, but in a very high-energy, what I would describe as immature way. He would chase my horse, Buttons, and their friend Ted all around the track that they're on, you know, lots of biting, lots of blocking my way when I went to take Buttons out, using a lot of his energy to control the others as well as trying to control me.

But then another horse joined the herd, and this horse also excels at using dominance. But his expression of it is completely different. It has a very different feel to it. He barely expends any energy. I've never seen him chasing any of the horses around. He will just move the others with a very subtle flick of his ears. That's literally all he needs to do. He just looks in their direction, and they will move on. And then the rest of the time, he shifts in and out of other roles. He will engage in mutual grooming where the horses stand next to each other and use their teeth to scratch at each other. This horse will happily share hay and just be very companionable.

So his use of dominance is very different to the other horses. It looks different, it feels very different. It's more mature and more balanced. So

## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

that's the difference. One is using a lot of energy, creating quite a lot of chaos, and the other is leading to harmony and order with almost no effort. It's incredible to see, and this horse is moving in and out of the roles within the herd.

So when dominance is used with skill, it can break up fights before they escalate, as is the case with the sibling example I gave. It can direct a group towards something important. I'm going to give you a story about that in a moment. It can also direct a group away from danger. You can use dominance to set and maintain boundaries, to motivate those who are hesitant or resistant, including yourself, and use that energy to drive forwards towards a goal.

Can you see how none of those descriptions are about causing harm and how using that dominant energy can be really beneficial? So I told you I would tell you a story about directing a group towards something important. So years ago, I think this is maybe 10 years ago, something like that. I was at my cousin's wedding, and I think it was the first time that I had been to an event like that with Paul. So we went to this wedding, and the wedding photographer was trying really hard to get everyone organised for a group photo. But they just couldn't herd the guests into a group. Nobody was listening, everyone was just chatting away, enjoying their day, taking their own photos, and the photographer just couldn't get their attention or direct them.

So I shouted, loudly, but in a very controlled and deliberate way. And I really used my energy to tell everyone what to do and direct them. And very quickly, everyone moved into position. It was quick, it was effective, and as soon as they'd been herded, is that a word? As soon as I'd herded them, I went back to chatting with people. So that's dominance in action. There's no intimidation or belittling. I was just directing the group towards what was needed, and when that goal had been achieved, I went back to hanging out. I didn't continue to yell at them for the rest of the day and control their every move, which is kind of what that horse, that younger horse, that's kind of his way of doing things.

## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

So there's actually a great deal of clarity in using dominance. It's one of the qualities that I will use when I'm coaching someone or even in the membership as a whole because it's my community. I'm protective of it. We have boundaries, and we direct people. We say, "Hey, that's not what we do here." And then we invite them to do things another way. Right? We're not saying, "How dare you do it that way? I can't believe you did that. What's wrong with you?" Notice the difference between those two things.

And because of judicious use of that dominant quality, I actually rarely need to use it. But when I do, it's highly effective, and I'm doing it for everyone's benefit in line with the vision and direction that I have for the membership, the purpose of it. And you know, once in a while, someone might not agree with that, and that's okay too, but it's on me and the team to hold the line of what's acceptable and what's not. And actually, thinking about it, what we're protecting against is immature dominance. We don't want clients who belittle or bully other clients or us. And this just doesn't happen because of the very subtle but certain ways that we use that direct and protect energy within the membership. It's fascinating to look at this.

But there was a time when I had no idea how to use this type of energy. It just wasn't available to me, and if I'm honest, I just didn't want to be an awful person, and I equated that kind of energy with being a bad person. I hadn't had mature use of dominance modelled to me. I didn't really have people around me, certainly growing up, who were skilled at using this role. And I hadn't started flexing those muscles yet. And then when I started to use them, it felt like shit, right? But it was necessary. And now I'm like the mature horse in the herd, where I can just flick my ears, so to speak, and it's no big deal, but there's this protective energy to it.

And part of why so many of you resist dominance is because when you've been socialised as female, you're rewarded for being low-maintenance. You're rewarded for not needing much and for going along with things. And as I mentioned in last week's episode, maybe you've even been told that you're not like other women, and that's a really good thing.



## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

So then when you're directive and when you say no, or when you lead decisively, you've probably been shamed for it, called bossy and aggressive or difficult to work with. Raise your hand if your school report said that you were bossy when what they ought to have said is that you display great ability to lead and direct others. Mine had a lot of bossiness on it.

And that reversal is part of the demonisation. It trains you to feel safe only when you're yielding to others, and there's an assumption that you will be a danger to others and harm others when you're being clear and direct.

But I want you to think about someone who you've come across who has a grounded sense of dominance where they are mature in their expression of it, where they're very intentional with it, where they're not charging around the place in order to direct others or make requests or get things done. Because when people like that are in the room, people tend to breathe easier. The group relaxes. Everyone has a sense of where they're going, what they should be doing, everything's clear, and you feel held and contained by their presence. That's the somatic experience of mature dominance. It's very steady and organising, and it just benefits everyone.

For my people, those of you listening to the podcast, my guess is that you don't use enough dominance in your life, or there are places where you feel able to use it, but not so much in others. And you're probably very skilled when it comes to empathy and flexibility, adaptability, resourcefulness, those types of things. The kinds of qualities that the over-dominant types are usually missing. But without learning how to lean into dominance yourself, you leave yourself exposed because it costs you a lot.

When it comes to boundaries, you probably ruminate endlessly about setting one, make it a massive deal, avoid conflict, and then any kind of pushback from other people, not even pushback, just a simple question, you then collapse.

## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

Whereas that skilled use of dominance that I'm talking about results in very straightforward, grounded boundaries, just simply saying, "This is my space. This is where I'm happy for you to be. This is what feels good to me." Right? That's dominance. And for those of you who have less skill in this area, setting that boundary in the first place will feel like a huge deal. And it is when you start doing it. It's a huge deal in that we need to celebrate it.

But then, when it comes to maintaining it, that's a whole other mountain. But this is the work, building that muscle so that it becomes casual and steady and just very straightforward, where you can draw a line and then hold that line without getting into a battle or yielding. It's like a very casual but firm authority. It's assertive, not aggressive.

It also costs you in relationships because you can end up in very one-sided dynamics, often hoping that others will just know what your needs are rather than you explicitly communicating them and giving some direction to people that would like it. And just being clear and explicit. And then when it comes to leadership, you might have a really strong vision but no ability to drive or mobilise others or yourself towards that vision. And accessing this dominant energy means that you can drive that energy forward and take action and bring some momentum into it for yourself, whilst also compelling others to do so.

And when you avoid dominance altogether, you're unable to say things like, "This is what needs to be done by this date or these are going to be the consequences." And you'll just be very wishy-washy with your team or with your family. And then when it comes to self-direction, you'll know what you want but struggle to move forward towards it, and you probably feel very stuck. And it can feel like everyone's walking all over you. Your kids, your colleagues, even complete strangers. And there'll be a lot of resentment and frustration and rage and also exhaustion because there will be a lot of unresolved issues that have built up, unnecessarily built up. Using dominance with skill means you can protect what matters, like your time, your energy, your relationships, and create some change, make changes.



## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

So if this is ringing bells, it will likely be because you've been told that dominance is bad. So you then suppress it. But when you don't access that role, it feels like you're constantly being trampled on and that others are always encroaching on your space, whether that's your schedule, your emotional bandwidth, and even your physical space too.

I can remember one time that I was in a room with a group of people that I didn't know. It was quite a small room. It was already kind of an uncomfortable environment because of the size of the room and the number of people in it. And nobody knew each other.

But the guy who was talking and kind of presenting, I guess, he was so overtly dominant. And it was a group of mainly women, there were a few guys there, too, but I noticed the effect that this guy was having on everyone. Everyone's posture had collapsed. They were making themselves shrink, not just because of the room and the environment, that had an impact, but it was mainly to avoid this guy's energy. And it's not that he was yelling or being mean. There was something not cool about this guy, though. That was my experience of him. My alarm bells were ringing. And I think they were for others, too, which is why they were trying to just disappear.

Anyway, I could see what was going on, even if I didn't fully understand it at the time, and I very purposefully put my hands on my hips in this very upright way. My posture completely changed. I made myself very big. It felt very weird to do. It probably looked very weird. But I could see how this guy was claiming space and how everyone was yielding to him. And I immediately took up way more physical space. As I said, very awkward to do in a tiny room, but it was such a good lesson of the ways that other people can affect us without us realising and then how that changes us and completely shifts our experience of what's going on.

So it can affect you on a physical level, too, which is certainly true when you're working with horses as well. There's a very physical experience to it. So, as we reflect on the use of dominance, the unskilled use of it, the mature skilled use of it, I would love for you to reflect on where you've

## Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance

avoided using dominance because you thought it would make you a bad person or that you would harm others in some way. Maybe that's happening in your life right now, or maybe there's an occasion in the past where you could have done with using this role.

Think about is there a boundary that you've been afraid to set? Just know the boundary that you've been afraid to set. Bring some awareness to it. That will start to shift things. You can also reflect on where do you need to drive yourself forwards and get that forward momentum happening. And again, think about who you know, who you've met or even your impression of someone that you haven't met, but maybe you have seen, it's a character in a movie, for example. Who do you know that embodies mature dominance, and what can you learn from how they carry it?

Because dominance isn't about control or harm. It's about being able to direct, to protect, and drive things forward for yourself and for others. And without it, you are depriving yourself and others of boundaries, of leadership, and that forward motion. And this is exactly the kind of thing that I'm going to be teaching in depth inside The Herd Within, my new 12-week group coaching program. This program is for those of you who want to finally deal with your boundary issues, not just setting them, but upholding them, and getting to experience boundaries with others, that mutual respect, mutual boundaries, not only having respect for your own, but respect for others. That is important too.

This program is for those of you who struggle with dominant characters in your lives as well, whether that's your mother, your three-year-old toddler, your boss, or someone on your team that you're supposed to be managing but can't. We are going to be looking at how to handle power plays without getting mad and how to step into dominance yourself in a way that feels really good to you and to others, where it is both safe and effective. And it's just one of the five roles that I'll be teaching you and coaching you on using. This is the kind of work we're going to be doing. I cannot wait to get started.

## **Ep #242: The Demonisation of Dominance**

So if this is what you need, applications are now open. I will be closing them when I feel that we have the group. I have a really good sense of when we have the group. Anytime I've run a group like this, I just know we've got the group or there's space for someone else. So I don't know when applications are going to close. It's going to be when we have the group. I would love to receive yours. So head to my Instagram, check out my emails, send me a message. We'll make sure you get the application form. Get it in, and I hope to see you in the group. I will be back next week. I will catch you then.

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