A R T I C L E

Where and why do women lead? The importance of leadership for private profit versus purpose beyond profit

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Abstract

To examine how personal preferences and social norms can influence women's occupancy of organizational leadership roles, this research compared leadership roles that differ in their stakeholder focus on *private profit* (PP), producing gains for shareholders, or on *purpose beyond profit* (PBP), producing gains for the community and society. Consistent with the greater representation of women leaders in non-profit than for-profit sectors, the research showed that men preferred and were expected to prefer leader roles focussed on PP and women preferred and were expected to prefer leader roles focussed on PBP. These differing preferences and normative expectations reflected divergent life goals, whereby men favoured agentic goals and women favoured communal goals, with social norms reflecting this gender difference. This research thus showed how the communal and agentic life goals of women and men are linked to their personal role preferences and to normative expectations about leader role occupancy, thus fostering gender segregated leader roles.

K E Y W O R D S

agency, communion, gender differences, leadership, life goals, management

In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders.

Sheryl Sandberg, Author of *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead.*

Sandberg's (2015, p. 173) optimistic prediction that leadership will cease to be influenced by gender[1] is far from a reality. Despite the gradual increase of women in leadership roles in many nations, these roles are profoundly segregated, with women underrepresented in the majority of leadership roles (e.g., senior corporate leadership; Catalyst, 2022) but equally or overrepresented in others (e.g., leadership in non-profit organizations; Uchida, 2024). To explain such discrepancies in representation in for-profit organizations, this research introduces the novel distinction between two types of leadership roles that differ in their *stakeholder focus*, that is, in the entities that gain from leaders' activities. Our project thus distinguishes between leader roles that focus on *private profit* (PP) versus *purpose beyond profit* (PBP). In general, men are better represented in PP leader roles, which focus on profits for shareholders and women in PBP leader roles, which focus in addition on organizational purposes beyond profit (e.g., promoting community betterment). As this research shows, this gender divide in leadership roles reflects underlying differences in *communion* versus *agency* of women and men, that is, in the communal tendency to focus on relationships and caring for others versus the agentic drive to assert oneself and to achieve individual goals (Bakan, 1966).

Explaining these prevailing gender disparities in leadership role occupancies requires understanding how goals typically held by women and men relate to these two types of leadership roles. These goals influence personal preferences for leader roles and also social norms pertaining to leader role occupancy. Personal preference operates by women and men seeking social roles that serve their life goals, and social norms define the types of goals that are expected of each gender. As articulated in the role and goal congruity perspectives on role preferences (Diekman et al., 2020; Diekman & Eagly, 2008; see also Evans & Diekman, 2009), these goals and social norms that influence people's role occupancies reflect the broad cultural themes of female communion and male agency (Bakan, 1966; Eagly et al., 2020; Hsu et al., 2021). In summary, augmenting earlier analyses of gender and leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2018; Heilman, 2001), the central premise of this research is that the gender segregation in leader roles whereby men are better represented in PP roles and women in PBP roles derives from the influence of communion and agency on the life goals and social norms that pertain to leadership by women and men.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LIFE GOALS, SOCIAL NORMS AND LEADERSHIP ROLES

Relevant to preferences for leadership roles are the many studies showing that women's life goals—that is, their aspirations for what they want to achieve—are more communal (e.g., altruism, connection with others) compared to men's goals, which are more agentic (e.g., personal achievement, power), with a larger gender gap in communal than agentic goals (Diekman et al., 2010, 2011, 2017; Hsu et al., 2021). Such differences extend to career goals (Pöhlmann, 2001; Roberts & Robins, 2000) and work values (Beutell & Brenner, 1986; Marini et al., 1996). The proximal source of these differences lies in the contrasting social roles that men and women typically occupy in society (Eagly & Koenig, 2021; Koenig & Eagly, 2014), whose diverging role expectations foster gender stereotypes of female communion and male agency. These stereotypes tend to be internalized in goals and values (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Koenig & Eagly, 2014) and externalized as social norms, both of which foster gender-segregated social roles.

Important to explaining gender differences in leadership are findings showing that stereotypes of leaders are primarily agentic, with communal qualities as only a secondary theme (Koenig et al., 2011), consistent with most leader roles affording mainly agentic goals of power and status. However, certain types of leadership roles are more likely to fulfil communal goals. For example, within organizations, managerial roles in human resources emphasize service to others (e.g., Guest & Woodrow, 2012). Also, because organizations such as non-profits are dedicated to the public good, all of their managerial roles have the potential to serve communal goals (Murdock, 2014). Although managers of for-profit

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[1]We use the term *gender* to label differences between women and men without meaning to imply causation by biological sex or cultural gender.

organizations seek to maximize private financial gains and shareholder value (Friedman, 1961) through initiatives that increase the bottom line (Abraham & Burbano, 2021), many for-profit organizations include corporate social responsibility goals (e.g., community support; environmental sustainability) that further the interests of stakeholders such as employees and the broader community (Freeman et al., 2016; Thakor & Quinn, 2013). To represent these critical differences in organizations' commitments, this research distinguishes between leadership roles in business organizations as emphasizing either PP or PBP.

From the role and goal congruity perspectives on role preferences (Diekman et al., 2020; Diekman & Eagly, 2008), individuals tend to endorse life goals that are congruent with their own gender role and to select roles, including leadership roles, that provide opportunities to fulfil these goals (Diekman et al., 2020). Given that, in general, women place greater emphasis on communal life goals and men on agentic life goals (e.g., Pöhlmann, 2001; Roberts & Robins, 2000), women, more than men, typically prefer occupational roles that involve helping and interacting with people (Konrad et al., 2000) and prefer working with people rather than things (Su et al., 2009). In addition, women, more than men, are represented in occupations with a high level of beneficence, which is the sense of having a prosocial impact (Burbano et al., 2024). Therefore, consistent with the role and goal congruity perspectives on role preferences (Diekman et al., 2020; Diekman & Eagly, 2008) as well as the known distributions of women and men into occupations (World Economic Forum, 2024), women and men tend to prefer different types of leadership roles because they seek roles that best fulfil their divergent life goals (Diekman et al., 2020). Specifically, in business leadership, women should prefer the more communally relevant PBP leadership roles relative to men who should prefer the more agentically relevant PP leadership roles. These predictions are consistent with general theories of career preferences positing that people seek alignment between their self-concepts and the benefits afforded by occupations, which include opportunities to act on personal values (e.g., Gottfredson, 1981; Tellhed et al., 2018; Wegemer & Eccles, 2019).

Concerning social norms, gender stereotypes of communion and agency foster normative expectations that women occupy communally rewarding roles and men agentically rewarding roles (Diekman & Eagly, 2008). These expectations are both descriptive and prescriptive, thus indicating not only what women and men are like but also what they should be like (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). These expectations in general advantage men in relation to most leadership roles, whose agentic focus is more consistent with the agentic qualities ascribed to men than the communal qualities ascribed to women (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). However, PBP leader roles would reduce this inconsistency for women because they offer communal opportunities and demands. By this logic, contrary to typical expectations about leadership, people would expect that women, more than men, seek PBP leader roles and men, more than women, seek PP roles.

Evidence that women and men differ in leader role occupancies

Our reasoning about these differing preferences and social expectations pertaining to leadership is consistent with evidence that the genders do tend to occupy different types of leader roles. For example, in Ireland, where this study was conducted, in the non-profit sector, women account for 50% of CEO positions (Anderson et al., 2019), and in the for-profit sector, for only 13% of CEO positions in large enterprises (Central Statistics Office Ireland, 2021). These statistics thus provide evidence that women and men in fact tend to occupy different types of leadership roles, with women well positioned within organizations and roles that serve others and men in organizations and roles that produce profits in the private sector. Consistent with this pattern, globally, women's representation in senior leadership roles varies widely by industry, from 47% in nongovernmental organizations and membership groups and 36% in education, down to 16% in infrastructure and 19% in manufacturing (World Economic Forum, 2022). These trends, evident for leadership roles, are related to overall occupational gender segregation in the economy. Research has thus shown that this segregation concentrates women and men

in occupations requiring different skills and facilitating different goals (e.g., Blackburn et al., 2002). Consistent with this generalization, occupations' requirements for social skills and their opportunities for social contribution predict a greater concentration of women (Burbano et al., 2024; Cortes & Pan, 2018; Levanon & Grusky, 2016; Sachdeva et al., 2021). Moreover, the male-dominated occupations that women do enter tend to resegregate internally by developing female-dominated subfields (Levanon & Grusky, 2016) distinguished by communal expectations, for example, human resources roles within management and teaching roles within science (Eagly, 2020).

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STUDIES

The purpose of this research is to examine whether the emphasis of some leader roles on serving others and the public good can account for variation in the representation of women and men into leadership roles. Critical to this purpose is our distinction between PP roles, which focus on shareholder profit versus PBP roles, which focus in addition on gains for community and society. Therefore, a preliminary study produced descriptions of PBP and PP leader roles for inclusion in the subsequent studies. Also, relevant to role and goal congruity perspectives on role selection (Diekman et al., 2020; Diekman & Eagly, 2008), the preliminary study examined whether PP and PBP leader roles differed in their agentic and communal goal affordances. These roles enabled assessments of women's and men's personal preferences for PP and PBP leadership roles (Study 1) and normative expectations for the preferences of female and male leaders (Study 2). Also, Studies 1 and 2 examined whether differentially valued goals underlie these role preferences and normative expectations, as assumed in the role and goal congruity perspectives.

The participants in these studies were business students at an Irish university, most of whom were preparing for careers as managerial leaders. For the preliminary study, the a priori power analysis indicated that at least 44 participants were needed for the repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to obtain 95% power for the expected medium effect size ($f = 0.25$) at $a = .05$ (see also Supporting Information). Additional a priori power analyses using G*power3 (Faul et al., 2007) guided our collection of sufficient data for our one-way design that examined the effects of participant gender (male vs. female) on leadership role preferences and goal endorsements (Study 1) and the effects of manipulated leader gender (male vs. female) on ascribed goal endorsement and leadership role preferences (Study 2). A priori power analysis using G*power3 (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that achieving 95% power to detect a medium effect size ($f = 0.25$) at $a = .05$ would require at least 210 participants in a one-way ANOVA and 119 participants in a regression model with three predictors ($f^2 = 0.15$). Sufficient data were subsequently collected. The Research Ethics Committee of Dublin City University approved the research and consent procedures for all studies. The methods, analysis code, data and codebook for interpreting data files are available at https://osf.io/pm8eg/?view_only=dca4a1e7d0574c9b96579297a831371f.

PRELIMINARY STUDY

The aim of this study was to create ten pairs of leadership roles that differed in their stakeholder focus on profits for shareholders (PP) or benefits for communities and societies (PBP), to enable assessment of leadership role preferences in Studies 1 and 2 (see Table 1 for paired versions of leader roles). We thus created 10 pairs of roles illustrating our distinction between PP and PBP leadership roles (see Table 1 for the vignettes and Supporting Information for further details). First, the study ($N = 110$) assessed whether participants perceived these roles as more focused on shareholder profit versus benefits for community and society. Second, the study ($N = 102$) assessed whether participants perceived these PP (vs. PBP) leadership roles as affording agentic goals and communal goals (Diekman et al., 2011, 2020). To explore potential confounding variables, ratings of the prestige and competence required for each

TABLE 1 Leadership roles in the PP and PBP versions.

Leadership role	PP version	PBP version
1. Director of public relations	*Green Oil*, one of the world's leading suppliers of petroleum products is seeking applicants for the position of director of public relations	*All Together*, a union of charitable organizations that assist those who lack social status and material means, is seeking applicants for the position of director of public relations
2. Senior human resource manager	*Smyth*, a large cosmetic company is seeking applicants for the position of Senior Human Resource Manager. Job requirements include setting policy for how we identify, recruit and train the best and the brightest to maintain our company's predominance in personal care products. Maintain contacts with VIPs at prestigious universities and other recruitment centres. Review and adjust company employee merit policy, such as setting bonus levels for Level III staff and planning probationary tests for Level I staff	*Jones*, a large cosmetic company is seeking applicants for the position of Senior Human Resource Manager. Job requirements include setting policy for how we identify, recruit and train individuals to become part of our company family. Maintain contacts with Equal Employment Opportunity commissioners and heads of hiring agencies. Review and adjust company procedures to promote minority hiring and the hiring of women, develop plans to create a welcoming environment, such as childcare and cultural sensitivity programs
3. Senior accountant	*Thompson*, a law firm which mainly represents and assists large corporations, is seeking applicants for the position of senior accountant	*Wright*, a law firm which mainly represents and assists lower status groups such as the poor and children, is seeking applicants for the position of senior accountant
4. Chief executive officer	*Hart Agency*, a prominent advertising agency which represents most elite Irish and UK corporations, is seeking suitable candidates to fulfil the position of CEO	*Top Agency*, a prominent advertising agency which represents national charity organizations, is seeking suitable candidates to fulfil the position of CEO
5. Senior financial advisor	*Byrne & Fallon*, a major brokerage firm which mainly invests in large profit focused corporations, is seeking applicants for the position of senior financial advisor	*Lincoln & White*, a major brokerage firm which mainly invests in socially responsible corporations and public funds, is seeking applicants for the position of senior financial advisor
6. Regional manager	*Forest Ltd.*, a property development company is seeking applicants for the position of regional manager. The new position requires the development of projects in areas with undervalued properties. Involves buying up low-priced storefronts and transforming these into lucrative commercial market space. Also, will convert low-rent apartments into stylish condominiums. Budgetary authority, autonomy and opportunities for advancement	*Rayne Ltd.*, a property development company is seeking applicants for the position of regional manager. The new position requires the development of mixed business/residential facilities for low-income neighbourhoods. Project will provide affordable housing and entry-level employment opportunities. Budgetary authority, autonomy and opportunities for advancement
7. Chief financial officer	*Brown Ltd.*, a large technology company which specifically provides services for certain government departments, such as the Department of Justice or Defence, is seeking suitable candidates to fulfil a position of CFO to help guide the business forward	*Campbell Ltd.*, a large technology company which specifically provides services for certain government departments, such as the Department of Social Protection or Children, is seeking suitable candidates to fulfil a position of CFO to help guide the business forward

(Continues)

T A B L E 1 (Continued)

Leadership role	PP version	PBP version
8. Managing director	*Williams Logistics*, a leading supplier of simulation, scheduling and optimizing solutions which is used by a variety of companies within the commercial and business sectors, is seeking suitable and qualified applicants to fulfil the position of Managing Director	*Taylor Logistics*, a leading supplier of simulation, scheduling and optimizing solutions which is used by a variety of companies within the non-government and non-profit sectors, is seeking suitable and qualified applicants to fulfil the position of Managing Director
9. Senior campaign manager	*Clark Agency*, a prominent marketing agency is seeking suitable candidates to fulfil the position of Senior Campaign Manager. This position entails managing, developing, executing and evaluating client's marketing campaigns across print and digital media to ensure our highly selective clientele meet and exceed business targets. Our accounts include the biggest names in retail, including several Fortune 100 companies and leading 'dot-com' companies	*White Agency*, a prominent marketing agency is seeking suitable candidates to fulfil the position of Senior Campaign Manager. This position entails managing, developing, executing and evaluating client's marketing campaigns across print and digital media to ensure clients meet and exceed targets. Clients include several non-profit organizations and charities. Our goal is to promote volunteerism, community knowledge of and support for these organizations
10. Head of advertising	*Moore & Milan*, a major advertisement firm whose services are tailored to large business corporations, is seeking applicants for the position for head of advertising. Job requirements include supervising department responsible for producing materials which present a positive company image of clients to potential investors and consumers. Maintain contacts with the press. Publicize client companies' actions and intervene to counteract negative publicity. Leadership in this position is vital to the company and its shareholders	*Jackson & Black*, a major advertisement firm whose services are tailored to non-profits is seeking applicants for the position of head of advertising. Job requirements include supervising department responsible for producing materials that present our clients' cause to potential donors. Maintain contacts with the media and educate the public about the need for clients' community programs and about ongoing projects. Leadership in this position is vital to our program of community service

role were also obtained (see also Supporting Information for other measures). Participants were debriefed later (see Supporting Information).

Dependent samples *t*-tests compared the PP and PBP leadership roles on the dependent variables (see Table S1). As shown in Table 2, PBP (vs. PP) role versions had higher scores overall and for each individual role on (a) benefits to communities and societies (vs. shareholder profit) and (b) communal goal fulfilment. PP (vs. PBP) role versions had higher scores on (a) prestige overall but not on any of the individual roles and (b) agentic goal fulfilment overall and on each role except for managing director, senior HR manager and regional manager. Finally, PBP and PP role versions did not differ on competence required overall or for the individual roles (see Table S1).

STUDY 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to examine (a) whether men and women differed in their preferences for PP and PBP leadership roles, despite not differing in overall aspiration to lead and (b) whether men's and women's personal endorsements of agentic and communal life goals mediated the gender difference in preferences for PBP versus PP leadership roles. The study thus tested the following hypotheses:

TABLE 2 Preliminary study means (standard deviations) and paired sample *t*-test results for the attributes of the PP and PBP versions of the leader roles.

Measure	PP version		PBP version					
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*	d_{rm} [a]
Stakeholder focus	1.98	0.51	3.83	0.41	−25.28	109	.000	2.39
Agentic goal fulfilment	4.00	0.40	3.73	0.47	6.95	81	.000	0.77
Communal goal fulfilment	2.92	0.65	3.77	0.50	−12.43	84	.000	1.34
Prestige	3.97	0.50	3.86	0.45	2.90	109	.004	0.27
Competence required	4.04	0.48	3.98	0.44	1.92	109	.056	0.17

Note: On scales ranging from 1 to 5, participants rated each leadership role of the PP and PBP versions on stakeholder focus (1 = *profits for shareholders* to 5 = *benefits to communities and societies*). Also, with higher number indicating greater extremity, participants rated; agentic goal fulfilment; communal goal fulfilment, prestige and competence required on scales.

[a]Cohen's d_{rm} was calculated for paired samples by Lakens' (2013) Formula 9.

Hypothesis 1. Participant gender affects leadership role preferences whereby women, more than men, prefer PBP (vs. PP) roles.

Hypothesis 2. Participant gender affects goal endorsements whereby women endorse communal goals more than men and men endorse agentic goals more than women.

Hypothesis 3. Participants' goal endorsements mediate the relation between their gender and their PBP (vs. PP) leader role preferences.

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 282 undergraduate business students (143 men and 139 women), 86.5% Irish and from 17 to 48 years old (*M* = 18.91, *SD* = 3.04). Following the same procedure as the preliminary study, participants rated their life goals and their preferences for the PP or PBP version of each of the 10 leadership roles.

The study's one-way design examined the effects of participant gender (male vs. female) on leadership role preferences and goal endorsements.

Measures

Leadership role preferences

In forced-choice format, participants indicated their preference for the PP or PBP version of each of the 10 paired leadership roles pretested in the preliminary study (see Table 1). Participants were presented with instructions that read as follows:

> Below are advertisements for a variety of jobs. In each section two organisations are offering positions at the same salary and workload. For each field, assume that you are qualified for each job and indicate which job you would prefer to work for by ticking the box. You can only tick one box per position.

The resulting scale, which ranged from 0 to 10, was a count of participants' PBP (vs. PP) preferences. Scores ranged from 0 (no PBP, all PP) to 10 (all PBP, no PP) and the scale had high internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .81$).

Goal endorsement

Participants rated how important communal and agentic life goals (Diekman et al., 2011) were to them personally, using 5-point scales ranging from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*). These items produced a two-component solution in a principal component analysis accounting for 34.62% of the variance: (a) communal goals (helping others, caring for others, attending to others' needs, connection with others, serving humanity, working with people, serving the community, spiritual rewards and becoming a parent; $\alpha = .81$) and (b) agentic goals (recognition, status, self-promotion, demonstrating skill or competence, career success, competing with others, focus on self, achievement, succeeding in life, power, financial success, independence and individualism; $\alpha = .78$). One item, self-direction, was removed for failing to load on either factor.

Leadership aspirations

On 14 items adapted from van Vianen (1999) and Tharenou (2001), participants rated their leadership aspirations on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A principal component analysis produced a single factor with 10 items ($\alpha = .91$), after excluding of four items with weak loadings, and accounted for 57.34% of the total variance.
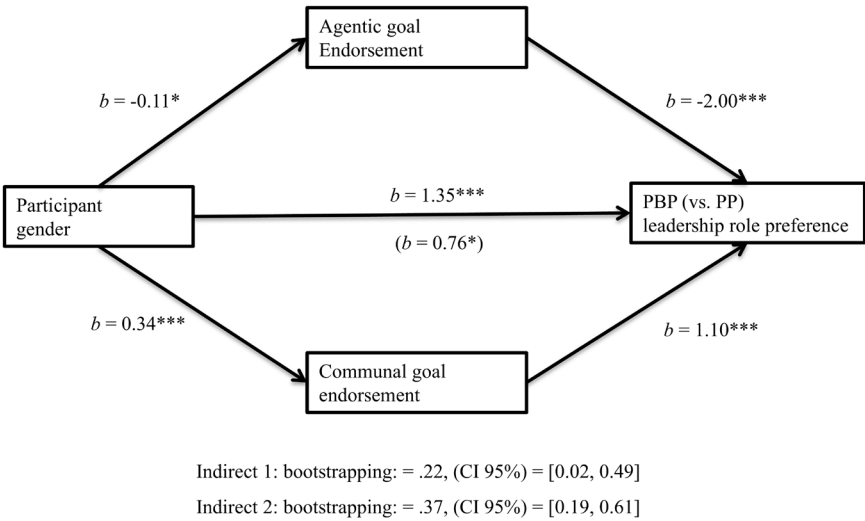
Results

As predicted by Hypothesis 1, one-way ANOVAs found that women preferred PBP (vs. PP) leadership roles ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 2.89$) more than men did ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 2.85$), $F(1, 280) = 15.17$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.46$. In contrast, women ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.78$) and men ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.71$) did not differ in their leadership aspirations, $F(1, 279) = 1.58$, $p = .210$, $d = 0.15$. As predicted by Hypothesis 2, women rated communal goals as more important ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.53$) than men did ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.65$), $F(1, 277) = 22.89$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.57$; and men rated agentic goals as more important ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.46$) than women did ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.44$), $F(1, 276) = 4.06$, $p = .045$, $d = 0.22$.

Mediation analysis

The mediational prediction is that the endorsement of agentic and communal life goals by women and men accounted for their differing preferences for PBP and PP leadership roles. The test of this prediction implemented a multiple mediation analysis using PROCESS (Model 4; Hayes, 2017), with 10,000 bootstrap samples and accelerated confidence intervals (CI 95%). In the analysis, participant gender (0 = male, 1 = female) was the independent variable, communal and agentic goal endorsements were the mediators, and leadership role preference was the dependent variable. As predicted, the results showed significant indirect effects of participant gender on leadership role preferences through (a) agentic goal endorsement, $b = 0.22$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.49] and (b) communal goal endorsement, $b = 0.37$, 95% CI [0.19, 0.61]. Yet, the effect of participant gender on leadership role preferences remained significant, $b = 0.76$, $p = .0237$, 95% CI [0.10, 1.42], thus indicating partial mediation by the goal endorsements (see Figure 1 and Table 3).

FIGURE 1 *Note:* Agentic and communal goal endorsement mediation of the effect of participant gender on PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preference. Results of multiple mediation testing agentic goal endorsement and communal goal endorsement as mediators of the effect of participant gender on PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preference. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown. Indirect 1: Participant gender ➜ Agentic goal endorsement ➜ PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preference. Indirect 2: Participant gender ➜ Communal goal endorsement ➜ PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preference. Participant gender was coded $0 = $ male and $1 = $ female. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Discussion

Study 1 tested and found that female and male participants differed in their leadership role preferences with the women preferring PBP (vs. PP) leadership roles more than the men. It further examined and showed that, consistent with our predictions, female participants' (vs. male participants') greater endorsement of communal goals and lesser endorsement of agentic goals accounted in part for female participants' (vs. male participants') greater preference for PBP (vs. PP) leadership roles.

STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 was, first, to examine whether participants have different expectations about the preferences of female and male leaders for PP versus PBP leadership roles; and second, to examine whether participants' differing expectations for communal and agentic goal endorsements by female versus male leaders would account for their expectations about these differing leadership role preferences. The hypotheses read as follows:

> **Hypothesis 1.** Participants expect greater preference for PBP (vs. PP) leader roles for female than male leaders.

> **Hypothesis 2.** Participants expect greater endorsement of communal goals and lesser endorsement of agentic goals for female than male leaders.

> **Hypothesis 3.** Participants' expectations of communal and agentic goal endorsements for female and male leaders mediate the relation between leader gender and their PBP (vs. PP) expected leader role preferences.

TABLE 3 Mediation analysis models for Study 1.

| | Model mediators | | | |
Model predictors	PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preferences (without mediators)	Agentic goal endorsement	Communal goal endorsement	PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preferences (with mediators)
Participant gender (0 = Male, 1 = Female)	$b = 1.349$, SE $= 0.345$, $t(276) = 3.92$, $p < .001$	$b = -0.109$, SE $= 0.054$, $t(276) = -2.01$, $p = .045$	$b = 0.338$, SE $= 0.072$, $t(276) = 4.73$, $p < .001$	$b = 0.759$, SE $= 0.333$, $t(274) = 2.27$, $p = .0237$
Agentic goal endorsement				$b = -2.002$, SE $= 0.354$, $t(274) = -5.65$, $p < .001$
Communal goal endorsement				$b = 1.099$, SE $= 0.268$, $t(274) = 4.10$, $p = .001$

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 431 business students [(244 men, 187 women), 83.1% Irish, 17 to 43 years old ($M = 18.81$, $SD = 1.76$)]. The data collection procedure was the same as the preliminary study. However, participants estimated the importance of agentic and communal life goals, not for themselves, but for 'female leaders' or 'male leaders' and estimated these leaders' preferences for PP (vs. PBP) leadership roles.

The study's one-way design manipulated leader gender (male vs. female), with ascribed goal endorsement and leadership role preferences as dependent variables.

Measures

Expected leadership role preference

Participants indicated the preferences of 'male leaders' or 'female leaders' for the PP or PBP version of each of the 10 paired leadership roles. Similar to Study 1, this study used the same leader roles versions (PP vs. PBP), forced-choice rating format and instructions, substituting 'male leaders' or 'female leaders'. The resulting scale of expected leadership role preferences showed high internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .83$).

Expected goal endorsement

Participants rated the importance of agentic and communal life goals (see Study 1) for 'male leaders' or 'female leaders' using rating scales ranging from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*). Principal component analysis produced a two-component solution, accounting for 36.43% of the variance: (a) agentic goals ($\alpha = .82$) and (b) communal goals ($\alpha = .83$). One item, becoming a parent, was removed from the communal scale due to its low factor loading.

Results

One-way ANOVAs showed, as predicted by Hypothesis 1, that participants indicated that female leaders prefer PBP (vs. PP) leadership roles ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 2.70$) more than male leaders ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 2.64$), $F(1, 429) = 131.88$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.11$. As predicted by Hypothesis 2, participants rated female leaders as more likely to endorse communal goals ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.60$) than male leaders ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.63$), $F(1, 426) = 26.90$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.50$ and male leaders as more likely to endorse agentic goals ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.46$) than female leaders ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.48$), $F(1, 424) = 11.59$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.33$.

Mediation analysis

Hypothesis 3 indicated that the ascription of agentic and communal goal endorsement to female and male leaders would account for the PP and PBP leadership role preferences ascribed to female and male leaders. The test of this hypothesis implemented a multiple mediation analysis using PROCESS (Model 4; Hayes, 2017) with 10,000 bootstrap samples and accelerated confidence intervals (CI 95%). Leader gender (0 = male, 1 = female) was the independent variable, expected communal and agentic goal endorsement were the mediators and expected leadership role preference was the dependent variable. As predicted, the results showed significant indirect effects of leader gender on expected leadership role preferences through (a) expected agentic goal endorsement, $b = 0.15$, 95% CI [0.06; 0.30] and (b) expected communal goal endorsement, $b = 0.33$, 95% CI [0.19; 0.53]. Yet, the effect of leader gender on expected leadership role preferences remained significant, $b = 2.47$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.97; 2.97], thus indicating partial mediation (see Figure 2 and Table 4).
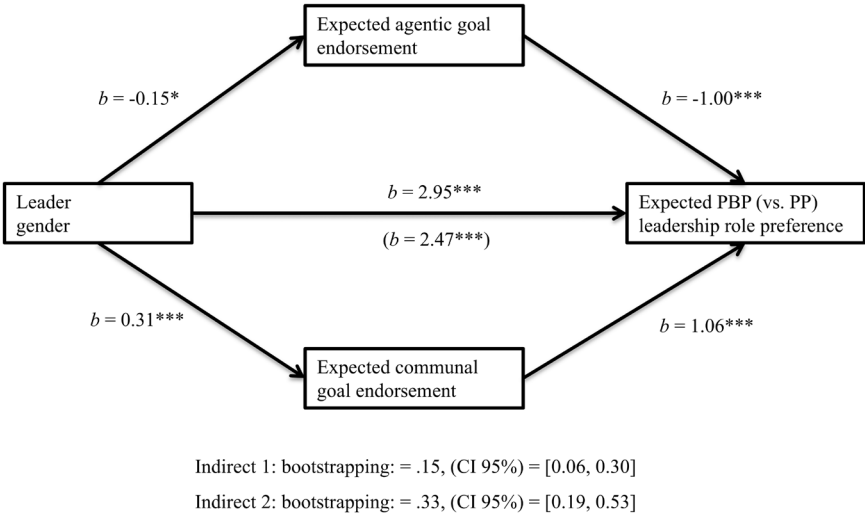
Discussion

Study 2 tested and found that participants expected female and male leaders to differ in their leadership role preferences, with female leaders preferring PBP (vs. PP) roles more than male leaders. This study also showed that the ascription of agentic and communal goal endorsement to female and male leaders partially accounted for participants' expectations about these leaders' preferences for PP and PBP leadership roles.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research examined gender disparities in leadership roles by assessing how both personal preference and normative regulation contribute to the sorting of women and men into different types of roles. To carry out this investigation, our research presented and assessed leadership roles as emphasizing either PP or PBP and then demonstrated the relevance of this distinction for explaining the tendency of leader roles to be segregated by gender. In adopting this novel approach, this research showed that, even though women and men aspire similarly to occupy leadership roles in general, they tend to choose, and are expected to choose, different variants of these roles, corresponding to their differing personal life goals and society's contrasting norms. These findings thus showed that the leadership roles in this research did not manifest Sheryl Sandberg's goal of gender having ceased to influence consensual beliefs about leaders and leadership.

This project makes several contributions to research on vocational choice, gender and leadership. First, consistent with theories of career preferences (e.g., Gottfredson, 1981; Tellhed et al., 2018; Wegemer & Eccles, 2019), and with the role and goal congruity perspective on role preferences (Diekman et al., 2020; Diekman & Eagly, 2008), this research demonstrated that business students soon to embark

Indirect 1: bootstrapping: = .15, (CI 95%) = [0.06, 0.30]

Indirect 2: bootstrapping: = .33, (CI 95%) = [0.19, 0.53]

FIGURE 2   *Note:* Expected agentic and expected communal goal endorsement mediation of the effect of leader gender on expected PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preference. Results of multiple mediation testing expected agentic goal endorsement and expected communal goal endorsement as mediators of the effect of leader gender on expected PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preference. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown. Indirect 1: Leader gender ➜ Expected agentic goal endorsement ➜ Expected PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preference. Indirect 2: Leader gender ➜ Expected communal goal endorsement ➜ Expected PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preference. Leader gender was coded 0 = male and 1 = female. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

TABLE 4   Mediation analysis models for Study 2.

Model predictors	Model mediators			
	Expected PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preferences (without mediators)	Expected agentic goal endorsement	Expected communal goal endorsement	Expected PBP (vs. PP) leadership role preferences (with mediators)
Leader gender (0 = Male, 1 = Female)	$b = 2.951$, SE $= 0.260$, $t(422) = 11.34$, $p < .001$	$b = -0.152$, SE $= 0.046$, $t(422) = -3.31$, $p = .001$	$b = 0.309$, SE $= 0.060$, $t(422) = 5.14$, $p < .001$	$b = 2.470$, SE $= 0.257$, $t(420) = 9.63$, $p < .001$
Expected agentic goal endorsement				$b = -1.003$, SE $= 0.263$, $t(420) = -3.80$, $p < .001$
Expected communal goal endorsement				$b = 1.062$, SE $= 0.201$, $t(420) = 5.28$, $p < .001$

on their careers sought alignment between their role preferences and the personal goals afforded by these roles. Specifically, the female and male business school participants differed, and believed that female and male leaders differed, in their communal and agentic life goals, which in turn predicted their preferences and their expectations pertaining to leaders' preferences. Women were more associated with communal goals and men with agentic goals, and participants preferred, and believed that leaders would prefer, leader roles that afforded their predominant agentic versus communal life goals (e.g., Diekman et al., 2017, 2020; Diekman & Eagly, 2008).

The preliminary study provided evidence that participants perceived PBP (vs. PP) leadership roles as more focused on gains for communities and societies versus profits for shareholders and more likely to fulfil communal goals and less likely to fulfil agentic goals. Given that individuals are

motivated to choose social roles providing opportunities to maximize desired outcomes (Diekman et al., 2020; Diekman & Eagly, 2008), we predicted and found that women, more than men, preferred PBP (vs. PP) leadership roles, which offered greater affordance of the communal goals that they viewed as important and lesser affordance of their less preferred agentic goals typically associated with leadership roles. Thus, these findings suggest that communal and agentic goals shape preferences of leader roles by women and men along with social norms about the occupancy of these roles by women and men.

Our research advances understanding of the concentration of women and men in contrasting types of leader roles by emphasizing that these roles typically differ in their focus on communality and agency. Given that people ascribe predominately agentic traits to leaders, with lesser emphasis on communal traits (Koenig et al., 2011), they tend to view leadership roles in general as affording mainly agentic goals. However, some leadership roles do provide opportunities to fulfil communal goals (e.g., socially responsible companies; non-profit organizations). To address this possibility, we introduced the unique conceptualization of leadership roles as emphasizing either PP or PBP, with PP roles focusing only on maximizing profits for shareholders and PBP roles focusing also on increasing value for communities and society at large.

Our study further yields insights about the mechanisms by which female and male leaders are sorted into different types of leadership roles. The research suggests that both individual preferences and social norms contribute to this sorting process that produces role occupancies ranging from strong overrepresentation to strong underrepresentation of women. Consistent with Eagly (2018), the representation of women and men in leader roles follows from gender-typed social norms and individual preferences, both of which reflect gender differences in life goals. Expanding the perspectives that emphasize only normative barriers to women's leadership (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002), our study considers individual choice processes, and in doing so, provides a more complete understanding of women's underrepresentation in many leadership roles. These individual preferences are influenced by communal and agentic life goals, which are in turn shaped by gender stereotypes that reflect the social position of men and women in society (Eagly & Koenig, 2021).

Beyond these theoretical considerations, our research has important implications for practice. Consistent with role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which posits that the perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles fosters prejudice against female leaders, this prejudice should be weaker for PBP than PP leader roles. This insight conveys a key message for organizations aiming to recruit more women into their leadership ranks. Specifically, although women are to some extent attracted to leadership roles that afford agentic goals, they are typically more strongly attracted to leadership roles that also afford their more highly valued communal goals. Therefore, to increase gender balance in leadership roles, organizations should embrace and articulate the communal goals in their mission, alongside agentic goals.

An emphasis on communal goals would be consistent with efforts of many for-profit organizations to create value beyond the organization itself (e.g., for the community) rather than maximizing value only for shareholders (Freeman et al., 2016; Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017; Thakor & Quinn, 2013). Organizations' commitments to social responsibility, which should increase their appeal to female job candidates, could be conveyed in recruitment efforts and especially in job ads whose wording can influence the likelihood that women or men apply (see Bosak et al., in press). An emphasis on corporate social responsibility should further benefit the organization by attracting younger cohorts of talent, who tend to prioritize work with PBP more than older cohorts do (Buder & Kittinger-Rosanelli, 2021).

Although this research showed how the differing life goals of women and men influence their preferences for leader roles and their beliefs about the preferences of others, it is appropriate to acknowledge that these findings have several limitations. First, the studies' cross-sectional designs preclude strong claims about causation. Second, although Study 2 demonstrated how normative beliefs about gender differences in life goals can underlie perceivers' beliefs about leader role preferences, future research could manipulate these normative beliefs to demonstrate their causal impact on organizations' choices of individuals for different types of leader roles. Third, although this research showed that valued goals

underlie the effects of leader gender on actual and inferred leader role preferences, the partial mediation implies that future research should examine other variables as possible additional mediators in future research. Fourth, the participants were business students with limited work experience. Yet, these students were in a critical phase of life for forming career aspirations (Schoon & Polek, 2011), which predict career pathways (e.g., Powell & Butterfield, 2003). Fifth, the study was conducted in Ireland with most of the sample identifying as Irish. Although Ireland resembles other Western, English-speaking countries, possible cultural differences should be considered when interpreting the results (Hofstede Insights, 2022). These limitations aside, the present research represents a first effort to examine women's leader role preferences in terms of the newly conceptualized PP versus PBP leader roles. It is our hope that future research will build on and extend this work.

CONCLUSION

This project began with the question of why, even in the 21st century, there are stark differences in the representation of women in leadership roles. Based on our research, one answer to this question is as follows: Women and men in general tend to differ in their priorities for communal or agentic goals, with women emphasizing communal and men emphasizing agentic goals. This difference underlies the preferences of female and male business professionals to occupy different types of leader roles, with women favouring roles that emphasize Purpose Beyond Profit (PBP) and men favouring roles that emphasize Private Profit (PP). This research thus applied the role and goal congruity perspective on role preferences (Diekman et al., 2020; Diekman & Eagly, 2008) to leadership in the business context by testing and demonstrating the importance of communal and agentic goals in shaping the leadership role preferences of women and men, and in turn influencing societal expectations pertaining to these preferences. In so doing, these findings address an important gap in prior research on gender and leadership by identifying the processes that contribute to wide disparities in the types of leader roles occupied by women and men. As this research shows, these processes that drive this partial gender segregation are of both internal (individual choices) and external (social norms) to leaders and potential leaders, with these processes linked to widely shared cultural stereotypes of women as communal and men as agentic.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS
Mary M. Kinahan: Conceptualization; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; methodology; formal analysis; data curation. **Janine Bosak:** Supervision; writing – review and editing; writing – original draft; methodology; conceptualization; investigation. **Alice H. Eagly:** Supervision; writing – review and editing; writing – original draft; methodology; conceptualization; investigation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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