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Conditional Representation: Gendered Experiences of Combining Work and Family among Local Politicians

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on working and living conditions among local politicians in Sweden and their experiences with combining political work and family life. Applying a sociological perspective on representation, we first map the working and living conditions among politicians, with a specific focus on gender and age. We then examine experiences of work-family conflict and subjective well-being and investigate how these outcomes are related to gender, age, and working and living conditions. The main findings show significant gender differences in working and living conditions, with substantially higher levels of work-family conflict among young women politicians.



KEYWORDS

local politicians; gender and age; working and living conditions; work-family conflict; subjective well-being; Sweden

Introduction

Equal access for citizens to participate in politics is central to the functioning of a representative democracy. Various arguments have been put forth by political scientists as to why social or descriptive representation matters. The most influential argument is the “politics of presence” perspective, which suggests a link between descriptive and substantive representation (Phillips 1995; Wängnerud 2015). Descriptive representation has indeed been linked to substantive representation in many empirical studies; for example, the presence of women in parliaments has been shown to have a tangible effect on political outcomes (Celis 2006; Wängnerud 2009, 2015; Wängnerud and Sundell 2012), even though some scholars argue that it is problematic to view women as a homogeneous group with common interests (Celis 2013). Still, the underrepresentation of specific social groups in politics, not least women, is an enduring phenomenon in most countries.

While a generally lower access to political participation among women has been well documented in many countries (Palmieri 2011), the proportion of women in politics in Sweden has risen to a comparatively high level (Wide 2015). After the 2014 election, the overall proportion of women in the Swedish national parliament and in municipal councils amounted to more

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than 40% (Statistics Sweden 2016). However, women's representation varies considerably across Swedish municipalities (Gilljam, Karlsson, and Sundell 2010; Wide 2015), ranging from a low of 23% to a high of 55% (Statistics Sweden 2016). Several barriers that prevent women from accessing politics on equal terms as men still appear to exist in Sweden. For example, recent research on women's political advancement has shown that there is a glass ceiling affecting access to higher political leadership positions. Even in a country with a long history of efforts to improve the opportunities for women to access politics, male-coded values and attitudes among dominant political elites seem to systematically hinder the vertical advancement of women (Folke and Rickne 2016a; see also Wide 2015). On the other hand, a higher degree of political competition in municipal elections seems to be a helpful factor in women's political career advancements (Folke and Rickne 2016b), ultimately affecting representation in a positive way.

The issue of dropouts from politics is of high relevance when discussing representation (cf. Erlingsson and Öhrvall 2010; Statistics Sweden 2016). While resignation from political positions in national parliament is relatively rare, dropouts among local politicians are more common and have increased over the last decades (Statistics Sweden 2016). It has been shown that young women are largely overrepresented among those dropping out. It is also more common for politicians with children present in the household to drop out, compared with politicians without children. Of those who have dropped out from politics, 32% of women and 24% of men report that the main cause for dropping out was family-related circumstances (Statistics Sweden 2016). Indeed, research indicates that women in politics, like women in society at large, take on the lion's share of housework and child-care (Djerf-Pierre 2007; Esseveld 2005). Findings like these are well in line with sociological research showing that women generally experience more difficulties in juggling work and family compared with men (Öun 2012).

Studies thus show that the barriers facing women who are engaging in politics are persistent and complex and that these barriers are connected to both political processes and to working and living conditions. We argue that the working and living conditions of politicians and, ultimately, their connection to political representation and actual politics, have not been sufficiently analyzed. One approach to further understand the gendered aspects of political representation is to focus on processes that involve the interplay between political work and family life (cf. Thomas and Bittner 2017a). These processes, which are related to actual circumstances as well as to expectations and norms, most likely influence recruitment to politics, advancement in politics, and the risk of dropping out from politics. Thus, such processes potentially affect actual political decisions and policy outcomes. A sociological perspective is fruitful here because it can contribute to knowledge about work and family-related demands that affect gendered biases in

political representation. In this study, therefore, we aim to increase knowledge about local politicians' working and living conditions and to investigate how experiences of combining political work and family in Sweden relate to gender and age, with a specific focus on young women. For this group—women of childbearing age—the issue of combining work and family is particularly salient because of gendered expectations and because of anticipations of future family obligations (see e.g., Thomas and Bittner 2017b).

Theoretical background and previous research

The typical argument put forward in relation to gender and political representation suggests that women, as a result of having different experiences than men, correspondingly tend to have different interests and concerns. These specific interests and concerns risk being insufficiently integrated into politics if women are absent and men dominate the political sphere. This line of reasoning implies that the number of women present in parliament may be an important factor affecting politics. On the other hand, the number of women in parliament may not automatically lead to the integration of women's interests and concerns in political processes. For example, Wängnerud (2015) claims that the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation should be understood as probabilistic rather than deterministic. The strength of non-parliamentary women's organizations and the presence of gender-sensitive political parties may result in women's interests and concerns being integrated into the political process, despite the fact that relatively few women are present in parliament. Conversely, a high number of women being elected to parliament may not necessarily lead to tangible consequences in terms of political outcomes if existing political institutions are rigid and patriarchal. Furthermore, the plurality of women's issues and interests and the intersection of identities make it somewhat problematic to talk about women as a homogenous group (Celis 2013; Geerts and van der Tuin 2013). Nevertheless, there is still reason to highlight the importance of descriptive representation for reasons of justice, in terms of both social representation and institutional legitimacy (e.g., Phillips 1995).

Previous research on women's representation in politics has mainly focused on factors related to political and electoral systems as well as quotas; it has also examined cultural values, political attitudes, and party competition (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005; Folke and Rickne 2016b; Krook and Norris 2014; Wängnerud 2015; for an overview, see Palmieri 2011). Only a few studies focus on the significance of working and living conditions when it comes to political participation (but see e.g., Campbell and Childs 2014; Djerf-Pierre 2007; Esseveld 2005; Silbermann 2015; Thomas and Bittner 2017a). One example is Silbermann (2015), who studies how travel time and proximity to home affect the perceived ability

to achieve a work-family balance and run for political office. She draws the conclusion that women are less likely to run for office because of potential difficulties in combining a political career with household responsibilities and that this affects the supply of women politicians in the United States (see also McKay 2011). Similarly, Mackay (2001) identifies factors related to home and care as constraints that affect both the recruitment of women into the political arena and women who have already entered into politics. In addition, Campbell and Childs (2014) point out that political life is not compatible with care responsibilities and that this incompatibility leads to an underrepresentation of parents, and particularly mothers, in British politics.

Returning to the case of Sweden, and the working and living conditions of Swedish local politicians, we first provide a brief picture of the Swedish political landscape. The Swedish political system is organized into three levels, and the regional (county) and local (municipal) levels are responsible for most of the organization of major social services, such as health care, primary and secondary schools, child and elderly care, and a range of other public services. Thus, the local political and administrative level constitutes a cornerstone of Swedish politics, not least in relation to welfare state policy and services. Municipalities have a constitutional right of self-governance and largely decide the level of income taxes levied and how the provision of public services is organized. Legislation in Sweden requires municipalities to provide a number of public services, such as child care, primary and secondary education, and elderly care (health care is primarily organized at the regional level; Montin 2015). Local politicians thus have a central role in the organization and development of the welfare state; this renders questions about representation and working and living conditions among local politicians extremely important in the Swedish context.

The Swedish welfare state is known for its aim to provide support that allows parents to combine work and family; it provides a range of policies with the aim of meeting this objective. The family policies that distinguish this dual-earner/dual-carer model include the rights to tax-financed public child care and a lengthy paid parental leave that is open to both mothers and fathers. Incorporating issues of gender equality within the family policy framework furthers two major political goals: to increase labor market participation among mothers and to increase opportunities to combine family obligations with paid work (Gornick and Meyers 2008; Korpi, Ferrarini, and Englund 2013; Sainsbury 1999). Scholars argue that this type of welfare state has been important in achieving a high representation of women in politics, mainly via its overall high female labor force participation rate (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008; Rosenbluth, Salmond, and Thies 2006).

In this study we analyze unique survey data covering elected representatives in municipal councils in Sweden. First, we map the demands that are

associated with different working and living conditions represented among local politicians. We examine what types of working and living conditions are represented among local politicians and how these relate to each other. Second, we study politicians' experiences in combining political work and family life, with a focus on two constructs: work-family conflict and subjective well-being, as well as the degree to which such experiences relate to the politicians' working and living conditions. Work-family conflict is a construct emanating from role conflict and strain theories (see e.g., Crompton 2006; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). The role strain hypothesis states that multiple roles create stressful conflict, and research shows that long working hours, a heavy workload, higher education/class position, the presence of children, and female gender increase work-family conflict (Byron 2005; Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, and Sweet 2006; Voydanoff 1988). In contrast, the role expansion hypothesis claims that multiple roles can serve as a buffer against stress (Barnett and Hyde 2001; Sieber 1974; Thoits 1983). The feeling of being needed and appreciated in different contexts can strengthen self-esteem and create a sense of security, since problems and failures in one sphere can be compensated for by success and satisfaction in the other. Thus, individuals' subjective well-being is interesting to consider in parallel to their experiences of work-family conflict.

This study is rooted in a theoretical understanding of gender as a social process that is constantly created and transformed in everyday practices and relationships through norms, beliefs, and assumptions about women and men (see e.g., Connell 2009). In addition, age is a relevant analytical dimension to consider, since it involves diverse expectations and obligations for individuals in relation to their life course. By focusing on the interplay between gender and age, with a particular interest in the group of younger women, we apply an intersectional approach (cf. Geerts and van der Tuin. 2013; Randall 2016) in order to better understand the implications of politicians' working and living conditions for their experiences of work-family conflict and subjective well-being.

Data and method

The data come from a survey covering local politicians' attitudes and values concerning the relationship between the private and public realms, regulations of the public sector, and role of the market regarding the provision of public services. It also covers information on their living and working conditions and sociodemographic background. The survey was distributed in 2014 by regular mail and email to all of the elected municipal council members in Sweden's 290 municipalities (~13,000 individuals). The response rate of the survey was 56%, resulting in a final sample of 7,109 local politicians.

For the first part of the analysis we use six variables to measure and explore the demands associated with different working and living conditions among local politicians. The variables comprise the following: (1) the presence of children in the household, which is categorized into “no children living in the household,” “children aged 8–17 years,” and “children aged 0–7 years”; (2) the division of housework, which is measured on a scale where 1 indicates that the respondent’s partner carries out most of the household chores, 5 indicates that the respondent carries out most of the chores, and the midpoint, 3, indicates an equal sharing of housework among spouses; (3) emotional and practical support from the partner, which is measured on a scale ranging from 1 (indicating low support) to 5 (indicating high support); (4) the partner’s weekly working hours, which are coded into the three categories of “0–19 hours,” “20–35 hours,” and “36 hours or more”; (5) the respondent’s weekly working hours in politics, which are divided into the four categories of “1–4 hours,” “5–9 hours,” “10–19 hours,” and “20 hours or more”; and (6) the respondent’s weekly working hours outside of politics, which are coded into the four categories of “0 hours,” “1–19 hours,” “20–34 hours,” and “35 hours or more,” (On variables 2–4, respondents without a partner are distinguished as a separate category.)

We thereafter explore the structure of these variables, by using latent class analysis (LCA). This type of analysis enables us to explore nonlinear relationships between such categorical variables in order to identify qualitatively different configurations of working and living conditions among local politicians. In LCA the notion of local independence is central: the method examines whether relationships within a set of observed indicators are explained by latent clusters (Hagenaars and McCutcheon 2002; McCutcheon 1987). LCA distinguishes dominant patterns of working and living conditions in the data, and all respondents sharing similar patterns are allocated to a specific cluster. Thus, the objective of this data-reduction method is to identify groups of individuals who share similar characteristics when it comes to their working and living conditions. For example, if two dominant patterns of working and living conditions exist among the respondents, a two-cluster model will fit the data. If the sample can be divided into three main configurations of working and living conditions, a three-cluster model will be selected, and so on. By applying different model fit statistics, the number of dominant clusters can be determined.

LCA also calculates the probability of each individual to belong to each cluster, which makes it possible to examine how cluster membership probability relates to our central analytic dimensions: gender and age. To capture intersectional aspects of these dimensions, we combine gender and age into the following eight groups: “women aged 18–29 years,” “women aged 30–44 years,” “women aged 45–59 years,” “women aged 60 years or more,” “men

aged 18–29 years,” “men aged 30–44 years,” “men aged 45–59 years,” and “men aged 60 years or more,”

In the second part of the analysis, which focuses on politicians’ experiences of combining political work and family life, we examine gender-age group differences in relation to two dependent variables: work-family conflict and subjective well-being. Work-family conflict is captured by a variable measuring work interference with family life. This is an additive index composed of two indicators asking how often the respondent has experienced the following situations over the past three months: (1) “I have come home from work too tired to do the chores that need to be done” and (2) “It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spend on my job.” The response options are the following: “several times a week,” “several times a month,” “once or twice,” or “never.” The index ranges from 0 to 100, where higher values indicate a higher level of work-family conflict.

The second dependent variable measures respondents’ subjective well-being. It is common to make a distinction between two different components of subjective well-being: life satisfaction and affective well-being (Diener 1984, 2000; Kahneman and Deaton 2010). Whereas life satisfaction concerns individuals’ cognitive evaluations of their lives, affective well-being reflects the balance between pleasant and unpleasant emotions in people’s lives (Diener 1984). Here, we use a measure that captures life satisfaction (i.e., the cognitive component of subjective well-being) based on the following survey question: If you were to consider your life in general, how happy or unhappy would you say you are, on the whole? The response options run from “completely unhappy” (0) to “completely happy” (10). (To facilitate comparisons with the first measure, the variable is rescaled to range between 1 and 100, where higher values indicate a higher level of subjective well-being.) We use regression analysis to study gender-age group differences in work-family conflict and subjective well-being and to examine the degree to which such differences are related to differences in working and living conditions among local politicians.

Results

Which dominant patterns of working and living conditions can be identified among local politicians? In order to answer this question, we use an explorative approach in which the number of latent clusters is gradually increased in order to identify the number of latent clusters represented in the data (based on the responses to the six indicators). Examining the measures of model fit (BIC and L^2 reduction), we argue that a five-cluster model fits the data satisfactorily (for detailed information about model fit, see Appendix, Table A1). The characteristics in terms of working and living conditions that are represented by each of

Table 1. Working and Living Conditions among Local Politicians. Cluster Characteristics, and Cluster Composition (Cell Entries Represent Probabilities for Indicator Responses by Cluster Membership and Cluster Allocation by Gender-Age Group).

	Cluster				
	1	2	3	4	5
Children					
No children	1.00	0.64	0.63	0.89	0.65
Children 8–17 years	0.00	0.21	0.21	0.08	0.20
Children 1–7 years	0.00	0.14	0.15	0.03	0.15
Household work					
No partner	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
1 Mostly partner	0.40	0.51	0.00	0.00	0.30
2	0.17	0.25	0.04	0.00	0.19
3	0.11	0.17	0.21	0.00	0.22
4	0.10	0.07	0.20	0.00	0.12
5 Mostly myself	0.23	0.00	0.54	0.00	0.18
Emotional/practical support					
No partner	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
1 Low	0.07	0.04	0.12	0.00	0.06
2	0.11	0.12	0.13	0.00	0.10
3	0.24	0.28	0.17	0.00	0.22
4	0.28	0.29	0.22	0.00	0.29
5 High	0.30	0.27	0.37	0.00	0.33
Partner's working time					
No partner	0.00	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.00
0–19 hr	0.80	0.18	0.11	0.00	0.09
20–35 hr	0.09	0.24	0.04	0.00	0.18
36 hr+	0.11	0.57	0.84	0.00	0.73
Working time in politics					
1–4 hr	0.19	0.34	0.37	0.20	0.00
5–9 hr	0.26	0.31	0.31	0.27	0.01
10–19 hr	0.35	0.26	0.24	0.34	0.15
20 hr+	0.21	0.10	0.09	0.19	0.84
Working time outside politics					
0 hr	0.53	0.00	0.03	0.22	0.40
1–19 hr	0.14	0.01	0.04	0.11	0.14
20–34 hr	0.16	0.09	0.17	0.22	0.19
35 hr+	0.17	0.90	0.76	0.45	0.27
Cluster allocation					
Women 18–29 years	0.04	0.15	0.45	0.25	0.12
Women 30–44 years	0.02	0.18	0.49	0.12	0.19
Women 45–59 years	0.18	0.11	0.40	0.20	0.11
Women 60+ years	0.48	0.03	0.10	0.33	0.05
Men 18–29 years	0.09	0.30	0.16	0.37	0.09
Men 30–44 years	0.03	0.43	0.17	0.17	0.20
Men 45–59 years	0.14	0.41	0.14	0.11	0.19
Men 60+ years	0.61	0.15	0.05	0.09	0.10
Cluster size	0.29	0.22	0.19	0.17	0.13

the five clusters are presented in Table 1. The cell entries in the table represent the probabilities for each indicator response by cluster membership. For example, the probability of having small children is .15 among the respondents allocated to Clusters 3 and 5, and 0.03 among the respondents allocated to Cluster 4.

When examining [Table 1](#), it becomes evident that there are indeed distinct differences in working and living conditions among local politicians, as demonstrated by the characteristics of the five clusters. Regarding the dominant characteristics of each cluster, we find that the respondents who are allocated to the largest cluster (29%), Cluster 1, have a partner who works part-time but have no children in the household. Furthermore, their working time in politics varies considerably, while their working time outside of politics is fairly limited. More than half of the respondents in this cluster do not work at all outside of politics. They also tend to do less household work than their partners, as indicated by the fact that the values 1 and 2 on the household work scale are represented by 57% of the respondents in Cluster 1.

Among the respondents allocated to Cluster 2 (22%), we find that the probabilities of having a partner who works full-time and of having children in the household are comparatively high. Among these respondents, it is also common to have a partner doing most of the household work. Unlike those in Cluster 1, it is more common among the respondents in Cluster 2 to work less within politics and more outside of politics.

Cluster 3 (19%) displays many similarities to Cluster 2, particularly in terms of having children and working time within and outside of politics. The respondents in Cluster 3, however, clearly do more household work than their partners, compared with the respondents in Cluster 2. Cluster 4 (17%) is a distinct cluster consisting of respondents without a partner; consequently, they lack values on the other indicators except for working time and children.

Finally, the smallest cluster is Cluster 5 (13%), which consists of respondents with similar probabilities of having children as are found among the respondents in Clusters 2 and 3. Most notably, among these respondents, we find that the distribution of household work is more evenly distributed than among the respondents allocated to Clusters 1, 2, and 3. In addition, these respondents are engaged in political work to a greater extent than the respondents belonging to the other clusters (and, conversely, less engaged in work outside of politics).

We thus find substantial differences in working and living conditions between the clusters, with the exception of the indicator measuring emotional and practical support from the partner. Here, we find rather limited variation across the five clusters. The probability of experiencing a high (value 4 or 5) level of emotional and practical support is about .60 across all clusters, with the exception of Cluster 4. This is not surprising, given that respondents lacking a partner are allocated to this specific cluster. Thus, a common denominator among local politicians in Sweden is that they generally experience somewhat strong support from their partners, regardless of other aspects of their working and living conditions.

We now turn to the probability of male and female politicians of different age groups being allocated to these clusters. In other words, to what extent are the eight combined gender-age groups represented in the different clusters? Cell entries in the lower part of [Table 1](#) represent the probability of belonging to each cluster for each of the eight groups. Here, we find that there are noticeable differences in men and women of different ages belonging to the clusters. Women tend to be more frequently allocated to Cluster 3, while men tend to be allocated to Cluster 2. These two clusters seem to mirror each other on several dimensions of working and living conditions. It is common for respondents in both clusters to be part-time politicians with a rather high working time outside of politics. The main difference between these clusters concerns household work; men in Cluster 2 tend to have a partner who does most of the housework, whereas women in Cluster 3 do most of the housework themselves. Interestingly, for Cluster 3, the gender difference is particularly accentuated among the two youngest age groups. Concerning Cluster 4, the cluster containing politicians without a partner, we find that the two oldest groups of women have a much higher probability to belong to this cluster than men of corresponding ages. Finally, we find that gender differences are relatively small in Cluster 5, especially among the younger groups. It is specific for these politicians to work full-time in politics. In relation to the other clusters, they report the most equal sharing of housework in the sample (although they still report that their partners do more).

In sum, we find a general tendency for women, in particular young women politicians, to take on a considerably larger responsibility for housework than their male counterparts, and for women politicians to more often have a partner who works full-time. Thus, even in a country such as Sweden, where women's representation in politics is almost in parity with men's, we find traditional gender patterns in politicians' working and living conditions.

Turning to the second part of our analysis, we examine to what extent experiences of work-family conflict and subjective well-being are related to gender and age. We also examine whether such potential gender-age differences are associated with the different aspects of working and living conditions that were examined in the first step of the analysis.

In [Table 2](#) we first examine the bivariate relationship between our gender-age group variable and work-family conflict (Model 1) by measuring each group's deviation from the grand mean. Here, we find that the level of work-family conflict is highest among the youngest age groups, especially for women. While the deviation from the mean is 7.0 points on the work-family conflict scale among women aged 18–29 years, the corresponding figure for men aged 18–29 years is 4.6. For women aged 30–44 years, the value is 4.8 points higher than the mean, and for men aged 30–44 years, it is 4.1 points higher than the mean. This can be compared with the negative

Table 2. Work-Family Conflict (WFC) (0–100) and Subjective Well-Being (SWB) (0–100) by Gender-Age Groups and Working and Living Conditions. OLS Regression Models.

	M1: WFC		M2: WFC		M3: SWB		M4: SWB	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Intercept	31.53	0.55	32.53	0.77	75.78	0.33	74.31	0.45
Gender-age group								
Women 18–29 years	7.00	2.32	8.62	2.43	–0.39	1.43	–1.46	1.52
Women 30–44 years	4.80	1.10	5.14	1.20	1.59	0.67	1.16	0.75
Women 45–59 years	0.48	0.84	3.49	0.96	1.41	0.51	1.40	0.59
Women 60+ years	–6.05	1.17	–2.29	1.39	0.42	0.55	–0.16	0.74
Men 18–29 years	4.59	2.46	2.11	2.44	–1.81	1.50	–1.16	1.51
Men 30–44 years	4.07	1.02	0.34	1.13	–1.30	0.62	–0.70	0.70
Men 45–59 years	–2.83	0.78	–4.35	0.88	–0.66	0.48	–0.62	0.54
Men 60+ years	–12.05	0.83	–13.07	1.03	0.73	0.44	1.53	0.60
Children in household								
No children			–2.24	0.68			–0.01	0.43
Children 8–17 years			1.06	0.68			–1.10	0.42
Children 1–7 years			1.18	0.83			1.10	0.52
Household work								
1 Mostly partner			4.33	0.68			–0.14	0.39
2			0.61	0.75			0.17	0.44
3			–1.01	0.72			0.09	0.42
4			–2.43	0.84			0.35	0.49
5 Mostly myself			–1.50	0.75			–0.46	0.44
Emotional/practical support								
1 Low			2.08	1.09			–4.44	0.62
2			3.64	0.86			–2.49	0.50
3			2.20	0.68			–0.38	0.39
4			–2.28	0.64			2.49	0.37
5 High			–5.64	0.62			4.82	0.36
Partner's working time								
0–19 hr			0.14	0.59			–0.17	0.34
20–35 hr			–0.06	0.66			–0.17	0.39
36 hr+			–0.08	0.51			0.34	0.31
Working time: in politics								
1–4 hr			–3.23	0.61			0.06	0.35
5–9 hr			–3.25	0.60			0.01	0.34
10–19 hr			0.05	0.58			–0.27	0.33
20 hr+			6.42	0.63			0.21	0.36
Working time: outside politics								
0 hr			–2.01	0.79			–0.33	0.39
1–19 hr			1.60	0.94			0.29	0.53
20–34 hr			–2.28	0.71			0.03	0.42
35 hr+			2.69	0.62			0.02	0.36
R ²	0.08		0.15		0.005		0.06	

b = Unstandardized regression coefficients. Coefficients represent deviations from the grand mean. Bold estimates differ statistically significantly from zero ($p < .05$).

values for the oldest women and the two oldest age groups of men. Thus, we find a pattern of higher work-family conflict among the younger age groups, with this pattern being more accentuated among women. Interestingly, the most salient difference appears to be related to age rather than to gender.

In Model 2 we introduce the indicators measuring working and living conditions. The question here is whether and how the differences found in Model 1 are affected, or mediated, by the politicians' demands from their

work and family. The results show that when these variables are included in the model, the pattern of gender-age group differences in work-family conflict that was found above changes. Gender differences appear to increase while age differences are slightly reduced, especially among men. The coefficients for women aged 18–29 years and 30–44 years now become 8.6 and 5.1, respectively. The corresponding figures for men do not differ in a statistically significant manner from the grand mean, when working and living conditions are taken into account. The fact that the difference between men and women increases in Model 2 indicates that women politicians in the younger age groups seem to have taken measures to mitigate their demands, thus reducing potential conflict between their work and family life. In other words, if female and male politicians were to experience similar demands in their everyday lives (as accounted for in Model 2), the gender difference would be more salient. This finding is largely explained by women's shorter working hours in politics and their greater responsibility for household work.

Regarding the variables that measure working and living conditions, we note that the results are in line with our expectations, according to previous research (see e.g., Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, and Sweet 2006). For example, we see that experiences of work-family conflict are clearly related to differences in household work and working time, especially working time in politics. Working long hours tends to substantially increase work-family conflict. Furthermore, emotional and practical support, which, as Table 1 indicated, was a common feature for a majority of the local politicians regardless of cluster membership, is a factor that can reduce the level of work-family conflict.

Regarding our second dependent variable, subjective well-being, gender-age differences are overall much smaller than the variation in work-family conflict. This finding is in line with previous research on subjective well-being, which generally shows that scores are skewed toward higher values and that dimensions such as gender and age explain only a small part of the variation (Dolan, Peasgood, and White 2008). In Model 3 we see a general tendency for women politicians to experience slightly higher levels of subjective well-being than men. However, this does not seem to be the case for women aged 18–29 years in our study. Although the deviation from the grand mean is -0.4 points on the subjective well-being scale among women aged 18–29 years, whereas the corresponding figure for men aged 18–29 years is -1.8 ; neither of these coefficients is statistically significant. When controlling for working and living conditions in Model 4, the pattern remains basically the same. We also see that emotional and practical support from the partner has a significant effect on politicians' subjective well-being. In sum, we find that the high level of work-family conflict that is experienced among young women is not mirrored by a corresponding lower level of subjective well-being.

Concluding discussion

The aim of this article was to contribute to knowledge about local politicians' working and living conditions and to examine their experiences in combining political work and family in Sweden. We argued that a sociological perspective focusing on processes related to gender and age can provide novel insights into group differences in politicians' work and family demands. Such processes constitute an underdeveloped theme in research about women's political representation (see e.g., Thomas and Bittner 2017a). We analyzed unique survey data collected from political representatives in municipal councils in Sweden. First, we mapped the demands associated with the different working and living conditions of local politicians and the extent to which gender and age structure these demands. Second, we analyzed potential gender and age differences in politicians' experiences of work-family conflict and subjective well-being and examined to what extent such differences can be explained by the working and living conditions of male and female local politicians.

The results from the first part of the analysis showed that five latent clusters of working and living conditions are represented in the data and that the characteristics of these clusters differ substantially. We also found that there are noticeable differences in the tendencies of men and women of different age groups to belong to the clusters. Women and men tend to be allocated to two different clusters that mirror each other on several aspects of working and living conditions. The main difference concerns household work. Men tend to have a partner who does most of the housework, while female politicians do most of the housework themselves. Interestingly, this gender difference is particularly accentuated among the two youngest age groups; this finding highlights the importance of applying an intersectional perspective in the study of politicians' working and living conditions. Among the two oldest age groups of politicians, we found considerable gender differences in the probability of having a partner (Cluster 4), indicating that female politicians in these age groups tend to be single much more often than male politicians. Drawing on Folke and Rickne (2017), this finding could mean that it is easier for these women to pursue a political career if they do not have a partner. The results also revealed some striking similarities across clusters. A common denominator among a majority of local politicians in Sweden is that they experience rather strong support from their partners, regardless of other aspects of their working and living conditions.

With regard to the second part of the analysis, we found that the level of work-family conflict among local politicians is the highest among the youngest age groups and that this pattern is particularly salient among women. When introducing the variables measuring working and living conditions into the regression analysis, however, we found that gender differences in

work-family conflict increased substantially, especially among the younger age groups. Hence, gender differences in work-family conflict are suppressed when working and living conditions are not taken into account; thus, if women and men politicians were to have more similar working and living conditions, particularly with regard to household work and working hours in politics, gender differences would be even more pronounced. We interpret this finding as an indication that women in local politics, and particularly younger women, have to adopt strategies in their everyday lives to limit their work-family conflict.

Regarding our second dependent variable, subjective well-being, differences across gender-age groups are much smaller overall than the variation that was found for work-family conflict. Although women, and not least younger women, report significantly higher levels of work-family conflict than men—and these differences would be even more pronounced if women did not adapt their situations to prevailing gender inequalities in the home sphere—gender differences in the level of subjective well-being are small. Thus, experiences of work-family conflict and levels of subjective well-being do not appear to be strongly connected among local politicians. Instead, this finding suggests that a high level of work-family conflict might be counterbalanced to some extent by a high level of subjective well-being, which is in line with previous research on individuals' experiences of work-family conflict and well-being (cf. Grönlund and Öun. 2010).

This article contributes to research about the potential barriers to women's involvement and advancement in politics by bringing in a broad perspective on working and living conditions among local politicians. Few existing studies have examined such conditions in relation to political participation. We further extended this line of research by incorporating politicians' subjective experiences of combining political work and family life. Our main results indicated that female politicians appear to experience more tension in their everyday work-family situation than male politicians, even in a relatively gender-equal country such as Sweden. These findings strongly suggest that working and living conditions are important factors when considering women's participation in politics, since they suggest that the institutional and other system-related factors that have been focused on in most previous research may not be the only barriers affecting the prevailing gender biases in political representation. Moreover, one can argue that barriers relating to work-family conditions may well be of even greater importance, since the women (and men) who have experienced the greatest difficulties in achieving a balance between their personal and political lives have already withdrawn from or even refrained from entering politics in the first place and thus are not included in our sample of active local politicians. One way to further advance knowledge in this field, therefore, would be to

focus on politicians who have resigned from politics. Another way would be to further study the relationship between living conditions and individuals' aspirations to run for political office.

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Appendix

Table A1. Model Fit Statistics for Six Latent Class Models.

	L^2	BIC(L^2)	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value	L^2 -red. (%)
1 Cluster	13,788.3	-28,504.7	4967	0.000	
2 Cluster	4897.9	-37,241.8	4949	0.7	64.5
3 Cluster	3742.6	-38,243.8	4931	1	72.8
4 Cluster	3267.1	-38,566.0	4913	1	76.3
5 Cluster	3036.3	-38,643.6	4895	1	78.0
6 Cluster	2909.2	-38,617.4	4877	1	78.9