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## The Legislature as a Gendered Workplace: Exploring Members of Parliaments' Experiences of Working In the Swedish Parliament

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### **Abstract**

Do men and women legislators have equal opportunities to carry out their parliamentary duties? An important first step to uncover the parliament's inner life is to evaluate MPs' experiences of their work environment. In this article, we explore the Swedish parliament where women have held over 40 percent of the seats for two decades to test the persistence of gendered norms and practices. Using an originally-collected survey dataset of 279 Swedish MPs (82 percent response rate), we find that women MPs experience greater pressure, higher levels of anxiety, and are subject to more negative treatment than men MPs. Yet, while men and women report participating in the debate and influencing their political party's agenda to the same degree, we conclude that the Parliament's working environment remains gendered in that women pay a higher personal cost for their political engagement.

## Introduction

A large body of research has examined political representation from a gender perspective. In recent decades, research has addressed problems concerning how representation can become more gender equal in terms of numbers (e.g. Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, Bjarnegård, 2013) as well as questions regarding whether women in politics can in fact make a difference by changing political outcomes (e.g. Bratton and Ray, 2002, Swers, 2002, Thomas, 1991).

We approach gender and political representation from a workplace perspective, which has been less frequently utilized than various other approaches. This means that rather than analyzing descriptive or substantive representation as it is usually construed, we ask whether male and female MPs enjoy equal opportunities to carry out their parliamentary duties. In seeking an answer this question, we argue that it is imperative to take the parliamentary working environment into consideration – including not only formal regulations and procedures, but also informal practices, norms, and expectations. Previous research has revealed that political organizations, including legislative bodies, are often characterized by a culture of traditional masculinity, or institutional sexism, that empowers male legislators while placing female legislators at a disadvantage (Lovenduski, 2005, Kenney, 1996). That is to say that although formal rules and regulations no longer discriminate against women, power hierarchies, informal norms, practices, and expectations may still be gendered, thereby privileging men and masculine behavior.

We maintain that evaluating how legislators themselves experience their work environment constitutes an important first step in the effort to uncover the informal aspects of a legislative body's inner workings. In this article, we evaluate how MPs experience 1) their legislative role and 2) how other MPs treat them. We maintain that if such experiences are gendered, and if men and women have different experiences that disadvantage one or the

other group, then working conditions are not fully gender equal. This can have a negative influence on the actual performance of female (or male) legislators, including the possibilities they have to affect political outcomes.

Here, we turn to the Swedish parliament, in which women have held more than 40 percent of the seats for over two decades, in order to evaluate the persistence of gendered norms and practices that could make possible male dominance while hindering women in their work as legislators. Using original survey data with Swedish MPs collected in 2016, we examine legislators' experiences of the legislative work environment and how they relate to male and female legislators' performance. The survey data, as far as we are aware, is unique in its kind, and revolves around themes such as the MPs' self-perceived power and influence, personal treatment as well as perceived pressure and expectations. 287 of the 349 Swedish legislators responded to the survey, representing a response rate of over 82 percent.

Our findings show that female legislators experience more pressure in their role as legislators and display more anxiety than their male colleagues. Women are also victims of negative treatment in the parliament to a higher degree than men. Rather surprisingly, however, there appears to be little connection between these issues and the performance of the legislators in respect to their self-reported debate participation and self-perceived possibilities to influence the agenda. We conclude that even though women legislators appear to be as influential as their male colleagues, gendered obstacles in the work environment make women pay a higher price for their political engagement.

On the empirical level, the present study provides new knowledge concerning the inner workings of the Swedish parliament, which has previously not been studied in-depth even though it serves as a prominent role model in respect to women's political representation. The findings presented also further our general understanding of gendered legislative bodies insofar as Sweden represents a unique case by enjoying more than two decades of gender-

equal representation. On the theoretical level, the study provides new insights concerning the issue of gender and representation by revealing the importance of legislators' experiences in evaluating gendered working conditions in legislative bodies.

## **Theoretical background**

### **Politics as a workplace**

Scholarship concerning women's political representation has primarily focused either on numerical issues, such as how legislative bodies can become more gender equal through quotas (e.g. Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2005, Schwindt-Bayer, 2009), or on so-called substantive issues, such as whether female legislators make a difference by contributing to bring about more gender friendly policy outcomes (e.g. Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers, 2007). A related area that has received less empirical attention concerns the inner workings of legislative bodies, or how the political game itself is gendered (see however Childs, 2016, Dahlerup and Leyenaar, 2013, Wängnerud, 2015). In this article we argue that insofar as female politicians should be able to perform their tasks as legislators on equal terms with their male colleagues, questions regarding the legislative work environment are essential.

Dahlerup (2006, 1988) draws a distinction between two different perspectives concerning women's substantive representation, namely, *the policy outcome perspective*, which tends to dominate the scholarly literature on women's substantive representation, and *the politics as a workplace perspective*, which has been less frequently discussed (Dahlerup, 2006: 513). While the former focuses on whether female legislators affect the content of political decisions by making it more "gender friendly," or by pursuing a feminist agenda, the latter is concerned with the possibilities women MPs have to act as representatives on equal terms with their male colleagues (Dahlerup, 1988, 2006). The workplace approach thus seeks to examine women's representation from a broader perspective by shifting the focus from outcomes to gendered conditions within the legislature. Following Dahlerup, we view

working conditions within the Swedish parliament both as important in their own right, and as essential for the possibilities women have to influence policy outcomes.

### **A feminist institutional approach**

We argue that feminist institutionalism, which theorizes how a given context shapes and conditions political behavior and outcomes on the basis of formal and informal institutions in respect to gender, provides an approach that is well-suited for addressing working conditions in legislative bodies from a gender perspective (e.g. Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell, 2010, Krook and Mackay, 2011, Mackay and Waylen, 2014). Subsequent to the work of North (1990) and a large number of other researchers, institutions have often been defined as “the rules of the game” that comprise the cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide social and political behavior with meaning, form, and stability (Scott, 2008). These consist of formal institutions that are codified and officially sanctioned, such as criminal laws, regulations, and policies, as well as informal institutions comprising uncodified regulations that are socially shared and sanctioned, such as norms, practices, and expectations. Although it can be difficult to observe informal institutions, of which MPs may be only partially aware, their regulative functions are as powerful as formal regulations – norms and practices within the legislative workplace regulate how MPs should appear and act as well as what is expected of them. Scholars who utilize a feminist institutional perspective maintain that institutions can be gendered in different ways insofar as they either give rise to different consequences for men and women in spite of a seemingly gender neutral construction, or prescribe different codes of conducts for men and women (Gains and Lowndes, 2014: 527). It is an empirical question, however, whether the overall pattern of gender arrangements within such an organization as a legislative body – including its gendered division of labor, power relations, rules, norms, and expectations – reproduces or departs in certain respects from gender norms and relations in the surrounding society (Connell, 2006).

### **Legislative bodies: masculine and male-dominated organizations**

As is the case in other male-dominated sectors, the gender regime within legislative bodies has often been described as permeated by a culture of masculinity (Lovenduski, 2005, p.48). This can be observed in the existence of formal rules created by men that are appropriate to a male-dominated organization as well as in norms regarding how a (male) politician should present himself and behave (cf. Acker, 1990). Women in such situations are confronted by this pre-existent culture, which can function as an institutional restraint that obstructs their work when they enter politics (Lovenduski, 2005: 47f).

Research in the field of social psychology indicates that women are often subject to discrimination in male-dominated domains because of a lack of congruence between masculine occupational norms and the attributes typically associated with women (Heilman et al. 2004; Eagly and Karau 2002; Burgess and Borgida 1999; Heilman 2001). Women thereby risk discrimination either because they are consequently viewed as less competent, or because they violate feminine attributes when they adapt to such norms. The gendered consequences of masculine norms are often manifested in the first case in the disqualification of women or the devaluation of their performance, whereas they often take the form of a disparate treatment of women in the second, including harassment (Burgess and Borgida 1999; Heilman 2001).

Dahlerup points out that open resistance to women as politicians ceased to exist in the Scandinavian countries by the early 1980s (Dahlerup, 1988: 284). Nevertheless, informal practices and norms, which are often regarded as more resistant to change, in part because actors are unaware of them to a significant degree (Franceschet, 2011: 62), may still present obstacles to the establishment of a gender-equal work environment.

## **Examining the legislature as a gendered workplace: empirical approach**

In order to evaluate whether the working conditions in a legislative body are gender equal, it is important to investigate not only the formal rules and regulations, but also the informal aspects of its inner workings, including practices, norms, and expectations, that have gendered consequences insofar as they affect male and female politicians in different ways (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell, 2010, Mackay and Waylen, 2014, Waylen, 2014).

We argue that exploring how legislators experience their working environment is a first important step in uncovering the gendered conditions in legislative bodies. When a given legislature is dominated by a masculine culture, we might expect to find not only that men and women experience their legislative roles in different ways, but also that they behave and are treated differently due to norms and practices that better suit male politicians and thus restrict women. Accordingly, gendered norms within a legislative body may function as an obstacle that renders legislative work more difficult for women MPs and negatively influences their performance.

Empirical research indicates that female legislators are negatively influenced by masculine norms and practices embedded in legislative bodies that affect both the legislative role as such and interaction between legislators. In respect to the legislative role, empirical studies have found that a feminine style of politics is perceived as less legitimate (Childs, 2004), and that men and women legislators face different expectations that put higher pressure on women (Anzia and Berry, 2011). In respect to the interaction between legislators, previous research has demonstrated that women and men in a legislative body not only practice politics differently, but are treated differently as well (Childs, 2004). There is also evidence which suggests that male legislators can be rude and disrespectful to female legislators when the proportion of women in parliament increases (Kathlene, 1994), and that female legislators are exposed to overt discrimination and sexual harassment (Lovenduski, 2005: 76).

We have investigated how legislators experience the work environment in the Swedish parliament by studying how they perceive 1) their legislative role and 2) how other MPs treat them. These issues are interrelated, but they are also analytically distinct – the former concerns how legislators view their own role, while the latter involves how others behave towards them.

We examined how MPs experience their legislative role in terms of the demands placed upon them and their anxiety in relation to making mistakes. Women feeling greater pressure and anxiety than men would suggest that norms and practices are gendered in a way that disfavors female MPs. We also inquired into the ways in which MPs experience how their colleagues treat them in terms of how often women and men either undergo various types of negative treatment, or receive positive support. Systematic gender differences in this regard would suggest that gendered norms and practices exist within the parliament.

As argued above, a work environment that disfavors women is problematic in its own right, but it may also influence the possibilities legislators have to perform on equal terms. In a second step of the article, we account for the latter through an analysis of male and female legislators' self-reported debate participation and self-perceived potential to influence their political party's agenda.

## **The Swedish case**

The Swedish parliament is unique in descriptive terms insofar as women have held over 40 percent of the seats for more than two decades. The path to equal representation was characterized by an incremental track such that there was a gradual increase in the number of women MPs, with women now holding 44 percent of the 349 seats in the single legislative chamber. A number of case studies also show that Swedish female MPs have made a difference in policy outcomes by pursuing gender equality issues (e.g. Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996, Frangeur, 1998, Freidenvall, 2006, Erikson, 2017).

More than one hundred national legislative bodies throughout the world have established gender quotas over the past two decades, which has led to many countries now having high levels of descriptive equality in their parliaments. However, none have been descriptively equal for such a long period of time as Sweden. Although this so-called “fast track” approach has proven successful in achieving high numerical representation relatively quickly, the masculine culture that has dominated legislative bodies has proven to be more resilient to rapid change (Tripp, 2006, Verge and de la Fuente, 2014, Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008). In light of this, the Swedish parliament comprises an interesting case since two decades of descriptive equality have potentially paved the way for changes in its internal culture.

There are indeed signs that such changes are taking place. For example, the parliament has engaged in systematic gender equality work since 2006 under the leadership of the Speaker. Within this context, several interview-based reports concerning gender equality within the parliament have been commissioned and published in addition to the survey we use in this article (Report 2005/06:URF2; Report 2011/12:URF1; Report *Jämställdheten i riksdagen – en enkätstudie*). Certain formal changes in legislative work have also been implemented. One concrete example is that committee chairs and vice-chairs are now regularly shared by men and women (Wängnerud, 2015: 63).

But although there has been significant progress in respect to the formal aspects of parliamentary work, there are signs that problems remain regarding its informal aspects. For example, Wängnerud (2015: 69) notes in reference to a question in the Swedish Parliamentary Survey that women are significantly less satisfied than men concerning their working conditions in party groups. Men also speak more than women, and on different issues, in parliamentary chamber debates (Bäck, Debus, and Müller, 2014).

It is thus valuable to further investigate the informal aspects of the work environment in the Swedish parliament from a gender perspective and assess whether all MPs enjoy equal possibilities for carrying out their parliamentary duties. The present article contributes new empirical knowledge in this regard by utilizing unique data provided by a gender equality survey in the Swedish parliament in combination with data from parliamentary archives.

## **Data and Methodology**

This study analyses original MP survey data in order to explore how MPs experience and perceive the inner workings of the Swedish parliament. The survey, which consisted of over 40 questions that addressed themes such as perceptions of power and influence, personal treatment, networks and contacts, expectations, and pressure, was distributed during the weekly meetings of the parliamentary party groups at the end of January 2016. Members of the 2014-2018 Swedish parliament had served one and a half years of their four-year term at that time, which meant that new MPs had been able to accumulate considerable experience of legislative work. The majority of the survey forms were filled out during the meetings and collected directly afterwards, with 287 of the 349 legislators responding – a response rate of over 82 percent. The respondents were largely representative of the parliament as a whole in terms of sex (81 percent of female MPs and 83 percent of male MPs responded to the survey) and party affiliation (response rates within the eight political parties ranged from 78 to 96 percent).

The male and female members of the current parliament are rather similar in respect to their observable characteristics. Women average 47.6 years of age, and men 46.8. 75 percent of the women and 71 percent of the men reported having studied at the university level. Women MPs have slightly more legislative experience – 6.2 years in parliament compared to 5.6 years for the men.

## **Results**

### **Background – the vertical and horizontal division of labor**

Previous research has indicated a gendered division of labor within certain legislative bodies such that women hold fewer leadership positions and are primarily grouped in less prestigious committees dealing with “soft” issues (Heath, Schwindt-Bayer, and Taylor-Robinson, 2005). Such a skewed division of labor would clearly have implications for how men and women experience their working conditions as MPs. Consequently, we turn to the division of labor between men and women in the Swedish parliament before we more closely address their experiences of the work environment.

In respect to the vertical division of labor, 21 female legislators (13.5%) and 30 male legislators (15.5%) held formal leadership positions in the parliament at the time of our survey in January 2016, being either party leader, party secretary, leader of a parliamentary party group, chair or deputy chair of one of the sixteen parliamentary committees, or deputy speaker. Seven out of sixteen committee chairs were women (44.0%) and seven out of sixteen deputy committee chairs were women (44.0%), which largely reflected the representation of women in the parliament as a whole (44.5% women).

In respect to the horizontal division of labor, Wängnerud (2015: 64) has shown that the gendered division of labor, whereby men are overrepresented in committees related to the economy and technology and women dominate committees handling issues related to social welfare, has declined over the past three decades, partly because of conscious efforts on the part of political parties to ensure equal representation of men and women in the committees.

The Swedish parliament is home to sixteen committees, whose main task is to ensure that all parliamentary business is considered thoroughly before reaching the decision-making stage. Each committee has seventeen full members, who represent political parties in proportion to their relative strength in parliament. About three-quarters of all MPs are full

members of a committee, with women comprising a somewhat smaller percentage than men (72 percent of female legislators compared to 79 percent of the men).

Ten of the sixteen committees have gender-equal representation, with neither sex holding more than 60 percent of the ordinary seats (see Figure 1), while the committees on defense, finance, justice, the constitution, industry and trade, and taxation are male-dominated, with men holding a higher percentage of seats than this. Given that 58 percent of the full committee members are men, it is not surprising that men comprise a majority in most committees. The fact that most committees have a fairly equal representation of men and women must be regarded as resulting, at least in part, from deliberate work and coordination among the political parties to ensure an equal number of men and women committee members. Nevertheless, three of the most prestigious committees, those on finance, justice, and the constitution, are all male-dominated. On the other hand, the committee with the largest representation of women, the Committee on Health and Welfare, has one of the largest budgets and heaviest workloads, indicating its importance within the legislative process.

[Figure 1 here]

In summary, the vertical and horizontal division of labor in the Swedish parliament must be regarded as gender-equal, and the fact that no committee has less than 30 percent women should be viewed as remarkable from an international perspective. Consequently, men and women operate within the same arenas in parliament and enjoy, at least formally, equal opportunities to carry out their legislative tasks.

We can now proceed to examine how MPs experience their interaction with their colleagues and their legislative role.

### **MPs' experiences of the legislative role**

In respect to how legislators experience their role as such, we examined the extent to which male and female legislators experience the demands associated with their work as MPs as well as their anxiety associated with making mistakes. We asked MPs how they experienced the demands they faced in their role as a legislator on a scale from 0 (very low) to 10 (very high), and whether they worried about making mistakes in their role as legislator on a scale from 0 (never) to 10 (always). The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that there are systematic gender differences concerning both of these survey items. Female respondents perceive the demands associated with their work as an MP to be higher in comparison with their male colleagues ( $p = .000$ ). Answering 5 on this 0-10 scale should be interpreted as meaning that such demands are neither very high, nor very low. In addition, women on average think that the demands placed upon them are slightly too high, while men on average think that they are reasonable. Women also display higher levels of anxiety related to making mistakes than men ( $p = .012$ ).

[Table 1 here]

To further explore the correlation between MP gender and these two survey items, demands and mistake anxiety, we turn to multivariate analysis (see Table 2). Women are more likely to perceive the demands associated with their job as an MP as higher than men do. Newcomers perceive such demands to be lower, perhaps because they have had fewer responsibilities as new legislators. However, women and young MPs (35 years of age or less) display higher levels of anxiety concerning making mistakes in their role as legislators.

[Table 2 here]

In summary, female legislators display more anxiety related to making mistakes and experience more pressure as well, which suggests that informal aspects of the parliament's working environment are gendered in a way that disfavors women.

### **Legislators' experiences of how other MPs treat them**

Second, we examined how MPs experience the ways in which other legislators treat them. Here, we measure experiences of personal treatment using six survey items where we asked the MPs how often they get interrupted in meetings, their looks and appearance are commented upon, other legislators receive credit for their ideas and/or work, their private priorities are questioned by other MPs, how often other MPs tell sexist jokes and how often they receive encouragement from other MPs and their party leadership. While these items by no means cover all aspects of interactions among MPs, they provide an indication of the working environment within the parliament as legislators experience it.

The descriptive statistics in Table 3 indicate that although men and women on average perceive themselves to be treated fairly well, women experience the first five negative situations more often than men do. A series of one-sided t-tests reveal that women are more likely to report that they are interrupted ( $p=.001$ ), receive more comments on their appearance ( $p=.008$ ), and experience other legislators telling sexist jokes ( $p=.000$ ). Women are also somewhat more likely to perceive that other MPs receive credit for their ideas and work ( $p=.052$ ), and that their private priorities are questioned ( $p=.076$ ), although this does not reach statistical significance at the 95-percent level. On the other hand, both men and women report that they receive encouragement from other legislators and the party leadership to the same extent. Also noteworthy is the range of responses. While some MPs report to have never experienced any of the five negative situations, other MPs seem to be very much exposed, experiencing all these forms of negative treatment very frequently.

[Table 3 here]

In order to further understand the relationship between MPs' gender and how they experience interaction with other legislators, we modelled each of the six survey items related to interaction between legislators as a function of gender and other potential explanatory variables. Table 4 below indicates that female MPs are significantly more likely to report experiencing four out of the five negative situations, even after we controlled for other possible background characteristics. We found no statistically significant differences between men and women in respect to encouragement.

[Table 4 here]

In summary, compared to the gender equal division of labor in the Swedish parliament, our analysis of legislators' experiences of the legislative role and how they are treated by other legislators stand out as more problematic from a gender perspective. Our study reveals systematic differences regarding how men and women MPs experience demands and anxiety related to their work, and how men and women experience the ways in which other legislators treat them.

### **Performance – debate participation and influence**

As a final part of the analysis, we also examined how male and female legislators perceive their own possibilities to influence political outcomes, first in relation to their self-reported debate participation in their parliamentary committee and party group, and then in respect to their self-perceived agenda-setting powers within their political parties.

#### *Debate participation*

Previous research has established that Swedish female MPs speak less in parliamentary debates than their male colleagues (Bäck, Debus, and Müller, 2014). We go beyond formal speeches in parliamentary debate in this study, focusing instead on informal aspects of the debate space, namely, MPs' self-reported debate participation in their legislative committee and parliamentary party group. It is often argued that important decisions are taken not on the floor of the Chamber, but behind closed doors, in committee and party group meetings. We thus argue that although parliamentary debates are an important aspect of legislative work, particularly when it comes to visibility, it is also necessary to understand what goes on behind the scenes.

The Swedish parliamentary party groups meet once a week in order to discuss their party's policy positions regarding current legislative business. These meetings are chaired by the leader of the party group and are closed to all outsiders. The parliamentary committee meetings, held twice a week, are only open to full members, substitutes, and the committee secretariat, which consists of five to ten staff officials. Since neither of these two types of meetings is recorded or transcribed, MPs' statements concerning their own experiences provide the only means for collecting information about the debate in these highly important legislative arenas.

We asked MPs how often they spoke in their parliamentary party group and in committee meetings, with their responses recorded on a scale from 0 (never) to 10 (always). On average, both men and women answered 5 concerning speaking in the party group and slightly above 7 for speaking in committee meetings (see Table 5). T-tests revealed no significant differences between men's and women's responses to these two questions.

[Table 5 here]

We modelled self-reported debate participation in committees and party groups as a function of MPs' sex as well as other background characteristics (Table 6). No significant differences between men and women emerged when we controlled for other variables. Adding together the first four types of marginalization experiences (speech interruptions, looks commented upon, others take credit, priorities questioned) into the Negative Treatment variable revealed no systematic correlation between negative treatment in general and self-reported debate participation (Table 6, model 2), which is to say that legislators who experience more negative treatment are not less likely to participate in debates in their committees or party groups. We interacted the Negative Treatment variable with women (Table 6, model 3) in order to test whether negative treatment might have differing effects upon men's and women's debate participation. The small and non-significant coefficients led us to conclude that negative treatment does not appear to affect the extent to which female legislators speak in these two highly important but informal settings.

[Table 6 here]

In summary, men and women report similar levels of debate participation in committee and party group meetings. In addition, experiencing negative treatment by other legislators does not seem to affect MPs' debate participation. Consequently, the fact that women experience more negative treatment does not appear to hinder their participation in political debate.

#### *Power over the party agenda*

Finally, we examined how MPs perceive their possibilities to affect the agenda of their political party, both descriptively and in connection with negative treatment, asking them to rate their ability to do so on a scale from 0 (very poor) to 10 (very good). The descriptive

statistics in Table 7 indicate that both men and women are rather confident concerning their own influence – men reported 5.8 and women 5.5 on average. It is worth noting, however, that both men's and women's responses vary from 0 to 10.

[Table 7 here]

Turning to a multivariate analysis of agenda-setting powers, MP gender does not reach statistical significance when controlling for background characteristics (Table 8, model 1). Once again, adding the first four types of marginalization (speech interruptions, looks commented upon, others take credit, and priorities questioned) into the Negative Treatment variable resulted in no statistically significant effect on perceived agenda setting powers – MPs who report being treated poorly do not systematically rate their agenda-setting powers lower (Table 8, model 2).

Although not reaching statistical significance, a calculation of predicted agenda setting powers for different levels of negative treatment for men and women separately (based on model 3) indicates that women who never experience negative treatment rate their agenda setting powers at 6.11, while women who very often experience negative treatment rate them at 4.55, 1.5 scale steps lower. In contrast, men who experience more negative treatment rate their powers slightly higher than men who experience less negative treatment.

[Table 8 here]

In summary, men and women evaluate their ability to affect their political party's agenda in remarkably similar ways. This is noteworthy from a comparative perspective – the Swedish parliament has indeed come a long way towards being gender equal not only in

descriptive terms, but also in that men and women perceive themselves as having equal power over the political agenda. The fact that women MPs experience both their legislative role and interaction with other legislators in more negative terms than their male colleagues appears to be unrelated to how they perceive their impact. While this is an encouraging finding, it is also a sign that masculine norms still significantly influence women's political engagement, which potentially hinders women MPs in ways not yet examined.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that women legislators in the Swedish parliament experience more pressure than their male colleagues and display higher levels of anxiety concerning making mistakes. Women also experience negative treatment of various types, such as being interrupted in debates, having their appearance commented upon, and being exposed to sexist jokes, to a significantly higher degree than men.

The Swedish parliament is a gender-equal workplace in formal terms – there are no different rules or regulations for men and women. Men and women are also very similar in respect to their age, previous parliamentary experience, and education. The parliament is thus descriptively gender equal, not only in terms of its overall composition, but also in respect to leadership positions and committee assignments. In addition, there are no significant differences between men's and women's responses to survey questions concerning whether they enjoy a sufficient level of administrative support.

So why do women MPs experience more pressure, display more anxiety, and experience more negative treatment than their male counterparts?

We suggest that such differences indicate that informal aspects of the work environment in the parliament are gendered in a way that continues to disfavor female MPs in spite of its formal and descriptive gender equality. Discrimination against women in male-dominated domains because of a “misfit” between attributes associated with women and masculine

occupational norms is a well-known phenomenon that has been documented in research within other sectors (Heilman et al. 2004; Eagly and Karau 2002). Women can thus be subject to discrimination because they either do not fulfill masculine occupational norms, or break with feminine norms when they try to adapt to them. Our findings prompt consideration of the possibility that norms and practices embedded in the legislature are still masculine in the sense that they suit men better than women. For example, women having to work harder to be accepted could explain why they report higher levels of pressure and anxiety, while female behavior not being regarded as natural in the legislature may be a reason for why women experience more negative treatment.

One aim of this study has been to map how gender plays out within the Swedish parliament. Connell (2006) argues that the gendered aspects of a given workplace may both reproduce and differ from gender arrangements in the surrounding society. This implies that the norms and expectations that Swedish MPs – both men and women – face in their work as legislators most likely stems from sources both within and outside the parliament. Although it is an empirical task to further analyse how norms and expectations within the legislature overlap with and/or diverge from norms and expectations in the wider society, our findings nevertheless indicate that the parliament is not a gender-equal workplace.

While the gendered patterns found in this study are indeed problematic in their own right, we have also examined whether they influence the performance of MPs in respect to their influence over their party's agenda and their debate participation. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, men and women evaluate their debate participation and influence in very similar terms. Thus, female legislators' performance as we measure it does not seem to be negatively affected by these gendered experiences. Women report influencing the agenda and participating in debate to the same degree as men, in spite of experiencing high levels of pressure and anxiety as well as greater exposure to negative treatment. This finding is

encouraging in the sense that women seem to not permit these informal obstacles to stand in their way when conducting their legislative work.

Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that male and female MPs enjoy the same opportunities to carry out their legislative duties. Our results in fact support previous research, which has established that women pay a higher price than their male colleagues for their political engagement (Folke and Rickne, 2016, Okimoto and Brescoll, 2010).

The primary aim of this study has not been to identify or uncover the character of specific norms or practices in the Swedish parliament. Not only is this beyond the scope of this study, it requires different types of data, such as in-depth interviews or observational studies. We argue, however, that examining MPs' experiences constitutes an important first step in the effort to identify gendered working conditions that might otherwise be difficult to capture in empirical research. If researchers first examine the observable effects of norms and practices, they will then be able to proceed with interviews and observations in order to map the character and nature of the masculine norms and practices that cause gender differences, such as those which we have observed in this study.

## **Conclusion**

The Swedish parliament is regulated not only by formal rules, but also by informal practices and norms. Previous research concerning gender equality in its work environment has focused primarily on women's numerical representation and on the possibilities female MPs enjoy to influence policy outcomes, while less attention has been directed to the gendered conditions of the parliament's inner workings. We agree with Dahlerup (2006) that the workplace perspective has much to offer if we wish to broaden the research agenda and include informal as well as formal aspects of the work environment in research concerning gender and legislative bodies. Adopting a workplace perspective is necessary not only for gaining an understanding of gendered conditions in politics, but also for seeing more clearly how policy

outcomes become gendered. If we do not understand the conditions in which politics is conducted, we cannot thoroughly interpret the outcomes.

We have focused in this article on how MPs experience their work environment within the Swedish parliament by investigating how they experience 1) the legislative role and 2) how other legislators treat them. These issues are of a sufficiently general character that they can be examined in other contexts as well in order to further our understanding of the inner workings of legislative bodies.

Our empirical findings provide new knowledge concerning the existence of persistent gendered patterns in the Swedish parliament that have not been previously studied. The findings indicate that although the Swedish parliament has come a long way in improving gender equality in both formal and descriptive terms, elements of a masculine culture still exist. Although changing formal rules may end officially sanctioned gender discrimination, more than two decades of nearly gender-equal descriptive representation have not been enough to change informal norms and practices and overcome all institutionalized forms of male bias. Chappell and Waylen have convincingly argued that such informal institutions as gendered norms are often more resilient to change than formal regulations (Chappell and Waylen, 2013: 607), and the Swedish parliament exemplifies this point. Consequently, conscious gender equality work in parliament must not only address the formal aspects of working conditions, but also raise gender awareness among legislators concerning the need to transform established norms and practices.

Our findings also serve to reveal the complexity of gendered norms and practices as such. For example, even though we have identified evidence which suggests that masculine norms obstruct women in their parliamentary work, gendered patterns do not seem to have negatively affected their self-perceived influence and participation. This finding needs to be further investigated using other types of data before we could conclude that differing

expectations and treatment have in fact not had a negative impact upon the conduct and political influence of women MPs. Such questions also demand further investigation in the light of previous research which indicates that female legislators may be generally more competent than their male colleagues due to male bias in the electoral process (Besley et al., forthcoming, Anzia and Berry, 2011). This raises the question that if female MPs are more competent than their male colleagues, would we not expect them to be even more influential than men?

An important issue for future research is to compare the findings presented here with empirical studies from other legislative bodies having both similar as well as different formal conditions in order to identify mechanisms that either foster or obstruct gender-equal working conditions for legislators.

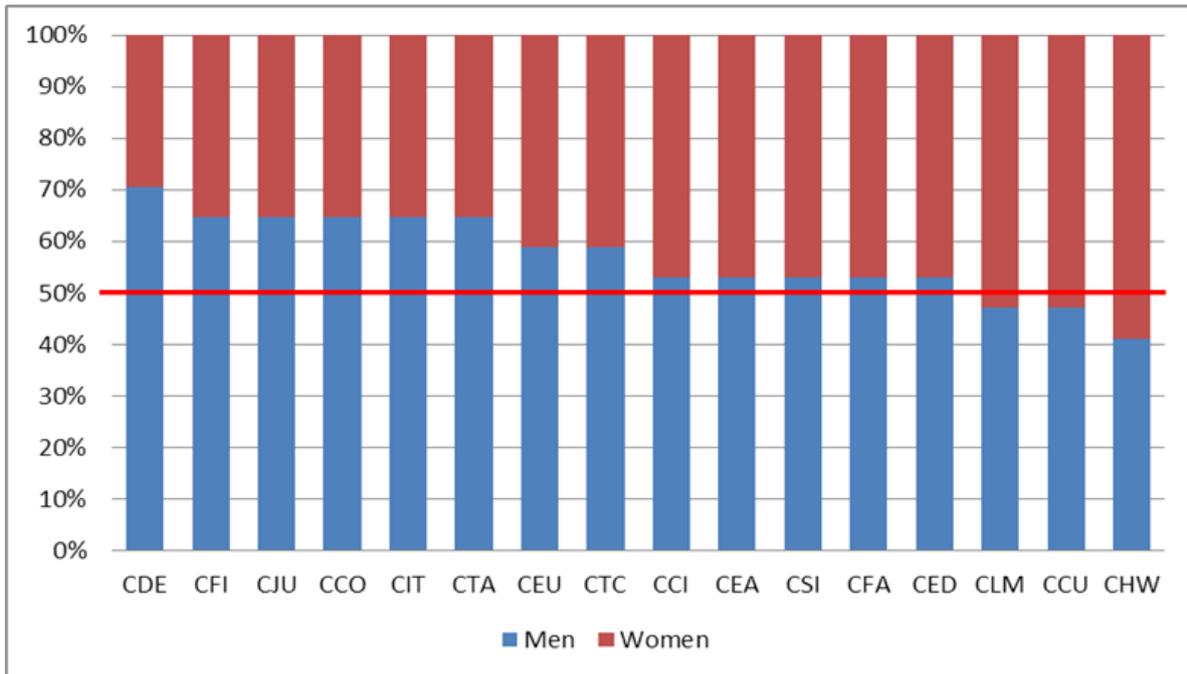
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Figure 1. Proportion male and female MPs in different committees. January 2016.



Note: 17 MPs in each committee. **CDE**: Committee on Defense; **CFI**: Committee on Finance; **CJU**: Committee on Justice; **CCO**: Committee on the Constitution; **CIT**: Committee on Industry and Trade; **CTA**: Committee on Taxation; **CEU**: Committee on EU Affairs; **CTC**: Committee on Transport and Communication; **CCI**: Committee on Civil Affairs; **CEA**: Committee on Environment and Agriculture; **CSI**: Committee on Social Insurance; **CFA**: Committee on Foreign Affairs; **CED**: Committee on Education; **CLM**: Committee on the Labor Market; **CCU**: Committee on Cultural Affairs; **CHW**: Committee on Health and Welfare.

Table 1. Demands and mistake anxiety: Descriptive statistics.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Experience of demands (0: very low – 10: very high)</i>					
Men	4.89	1.82	0	10	160
Women	5.69	1.87	1	10	124
<i>Worried about making mistakes (0: never – 10: always)</i>					
Men	4.38	2.53	0	10	160
Women	5.10	2.84	0	10	126

Table 2. Demands and mistake anxiety: OLS regression results.

	<i>Demands very high</i>	<i>Worry about mistakes</i>
Women	0.86*** (0.22)	0.74** (0.31)
Young	0.41 (0.30)	1.87*** (0.42)
Newcomers	-0.89*** (0.29)	-0.33 (0.40)
Leadership position	-0.59* (0.32)	-0.21 (0.44)
Committee seat	-0.29 (0.28)	-0.58 (0.38)
Party controls	√	√
Constant	5.60*** (0.37)	4.94*** (0.51)
Observations	273	275
R-squared	0.14	0.16

*Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$*

Table 3. Interaction between legislators: Descriptive statistics.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Interrupted in meetings (0: never – 10: very often)</i>					
Men	2.97	2.55	0	10	159
Women	3.98	2.94	0	10	125
<i>Clothes or looks are commented on (0: never – 10: very often)</i>					
Men	2.52	2.60	0	10	160
Women	3.31	2.95	0	10	126
<i>Others get credit for the work I do (0: never – 10: very often)</i>					
Men	3.58	2.61	0	10	160
Women	4.10	2.74	0	10	124
<i>Others question my private priorities (0: never – 10: very often)</i>					
Men	1.91	2.20	0	8	160
Women	2.33	2.68	0	10	125
<i>Other legislators tell sexist jokes (0: never – 10: very often)</i>					
Men	1.68	1.83	0	7	159
Women	2.62	2.54	0	10	126
<i>Receive encouragement from other legislators/leaders (0: very rarely – 10: very often)</i>					
Men	4.62	2.01	0	9.25	150
Women	4.61	2.05	0.25	10	121

Table 4. Interaction between legislators: OLS regression results.

	<i>Interrupted in meetings</i>	<i>Looks commented</i>	<i>Others get credit</i>	<i>Priorities questioned</i>	<i>Sexist jokes</i>	<i>Encouraging comments</i>
Women	0.89*** (0.34)	0.88*** (0.33)	0.56* (0.33)	0.40 (0.30)	0.91*** (0.27)	-0.08 (0.24)
Young	0.16 (0.45)	0.65 (0.45)	0.04 (0.44)	0.85** (0.41)	0.71* (0.36)	0.28 (0.32)
Newcomers	-0.78* (0.43)	0.39 (0.43)	-0.91** (0.42)	-0.71* (0.39)	-0.49 (0.35)	0.27 (0.31)
Leadership position	-0.06 (0.48)	1.10** (0.47)	-0.08 (0.47)	-0.02 (0.43)	0.44 (0.38)	1.90*** (0.37)
Committee seat	-0.46 (0.42)	0.81** (0.41)	0.22 (0.41)	0.12 (0.37)	0.36 (0.33)	-0.13 (0.30)
Party controls	√	√	√	√	√	√
Constant	3.87*** (0.55)	0.91* (0.54)	3.49*** (0.54)	1.96*** (0.49)	1.48*** (0.44)	4.08*** (0.39)
Observations	274	275	273	274	274	260
R-squared	0.08	0.12	0.07	0.04	0.11	0.15

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Table 5. Debate participation: Descriptive Statistics.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Debate participation in the party group (0 never – 10 always)</i>					
Men	5.27	2.51	1	10	160
Women	5.03	2.98	0	10	126
<i>Debate participation in the committee (0 never – 10 always)</i>					
Men	7.31	1.95	2	10	159
Women	7.11	2.35	0	10	122

Table 6. Debate participation: OLS regression results.

	<i>Speaking in party group</i>			<i>Speaking in committee</i>		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Women	-0.14 (0.27)	-0.18 (0.28)	-0.03 (0.54)	-0.16 (0.24)	-0.17 (0.25)	0.03 (0.48)
Negative Treatment		0.08 (0.08)	0.10 (0.11)		0.02 (0.07)	0.06 (0.10)
Negative Treatment x women			-0.05 (0.15)			-0.06 (0.13)
Young	0.44 (0.37)	0.37 (0.37)	0.38 (0.38)	-0.47 (0.32)	-0.48 (0.32)	-0.46 (0.33)
Newcomers	-0.76** (0.35)	-0.69* (0.36)	-0.69* (0.36)	0.02 (0.31)	0.04 (0.31)	0.03 (0.31)
Leadership position	1.19*** (0.39)	1.16*** (0.39)	1.15*** (0.39)	1.49*** (0.34)	1.48*** (0.34)	1.47*** (0.35)
Committee seat	0.08 (0.34)	0.04 (0.34)	0.04 (0.34)	1.65*** (0.30)	1.65*** (0.30)	1.65*** (0.31)
Party controls	√	√	√	√	√	√
Constant	3.84*** (0.45)	3.63*** (0.49)	3.56*** (0.54)	6.11*** (0.39)	6.05*** (0.43)	5.96*** (0.47)
Observations	275	272	272	270	268	268
R-squared	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.23	0.23	0.23

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Table 7. Power over the agenda: Descriptive statistics.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>n</i>
<i>Ability to affect your party's agenda (0: very good – 10:very poor)</i>					
Men	5.84	2.40	0	10	161
Women	5.51	2.45	0	10	126

Table 8. Power over the agenda: OLS regression results.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Women	-0.15 (0.27)	-0.14 (0.27)	0.53 (0.53)
Negative Treatment		-0.06 (0.07)	0.06 (0.11)
Negative Treatment x women			-0.21 (0.15)
Young	0.08 (0.36)	0.06 (0.36)	0.11 (0.36)
Newcomers	0.16 (0.34)	0.19 (0.35)	0.17 (0.35)
Front Bench	2.25*** (0.38)	2.27*** (0.38)	2.22*** (0.38)
Committee seat	0.01 (0.33)	-0.02 (0.33)	-0.01 (0.33)
Party controls	√	√	√
Constant	4.42*** (0.44)	4.55*** (0.48)	4.24*** (0.52)
Observations	276	272	272
R-squared	0.25	0.25	0.26

*Notes: Standard errors in parentheses, \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$*