Work-family Conflict among Professional Visual Artists in Sweden: Gender Differences in the Influence of Parenting and Household Responsibilities

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This article explores contemporary Swedish artists’ experiences of work–family conflict from a gender perspective. Sweden is a critical case as the country is well-known for its official gender equality policy stressing the importance of possibilities for women and men to balance family and paid work. The analysis of survey data collected from 2,025 Swedish professional visual artists shows their self-reported levels of work–family conflict to be generally low. Women artists, however, were found to experience more conflict than men artists. The results suggest that women face more pressure from the demands of both work and home than men. While an OLS regression analysis showed a relationship between the artists’ parenting responsibility and their perceived level of work–family conflict overall, for men artists this was so only at the second child. An unequal division of housework had negative consequences for women artists’ work–family balance, while the effect of being single was in this regard more pronounced among men than among women. This suggests that men, to a greater extent than women, depend on a spouse to handle the balance between work and family. Although much has happened regarding the gender issues in the art world, patterns of dependence and traditional gender roles in work and caring thus continue to persist, limiting individuals’ choices and actual ability to work as an artist, especially for women.

**Keywords:** artistic work, children, gender equality, Sweden, work–family conflict

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Introduction

Through their ability to reflect upon human existence beyond prevailing conventions, artists are often considered to play a subversive role in society. Art theorists (e.g., Danto 1964), writers (e.g., Kundera 2005), and philosophers (e.g., Heidegger 1989) have frequently drawn attention to artists’ capacity to widen horizons of understanding and oppose established truths. Even political actors have come to accept this function for the artists and the arts, embracing it as something positive for the public good. In its statement of cultural policy objectives, the Swedish government, for instance, proclaims artists and other cultural workers to have an integral role in society as contributors to its development: “A rich cultural life creates, preserves, and develops indispensable values in society” (Swedish Government 2009, p. 18).

At the same time, it seems that this very role that artists have as challengers of everyday reality, conventions, and established truths is also what helps to perpetuate certain structures of social inequality in the art world. These inequalities are organized along gender lines and, looking at developments over time, have proved resistant to change. When artistic work is seen as fundamentally a matter of boundless activity centred on the role of artists as challengers, the entire occupation comes to be understood as one both expressing and taking shape as a contrast to mundane life and its features like assuming responsibility for others. In consequence, it may become complicated to reconcile artistic work with family life, especially for women artists: as history reveals, women have for long shown a tendency to deselect family life when confronted with the demands of their careers as art professionals (Cowen 1996; Greer 1979; Pollock 1983). Even in Sweden, women artists have fewer children than women on average in the population, and tend, more often than men, to give up their careers after having children (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2010; Swedish Government Official Reports 2003).

Although gender inequality within the professional field of arts is an issue raised in previous studies, too (in the Swedish context, e.g., Andersson 2008; Edling 2010; Hermele 2009), with a few exceptions (Heian, Løyland & Mangset 2008; Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2010), not enough attention has been paid to the interconnections between gender, family, and artistic work. In this article, we empirically investigate and theoretically discuss the relationship between artistic work and housework/family responsibilities to examine the extent and type of work–family conflict among 2,025 surveyed Swedish visual artists, considering the extent to which this conflict might be explicable as a gender issue. Where work–family conflict is noted, we, moreover, consider whether it is due to the tendency of the respondents’ artistic work to interfere with their ability to handle their responsibilities at home or whether it is about their domestic responsibilities interfering with their work.

Most of the visual artists in Sweden are self-employed (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2010). However, for a long time research on work–family conflict has focused mostly on the employee–employer relation (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti & Burke 2009; Crompton & Lyonette 2006; Gerson 2002; Grönlund & Öun 2010; Hochshild 1997). While some research on work–family balance among self-employed workers has been undertaken (e.g., Baines & Gelder 2003; Loscocco 1997), it has marginalized occupational groups, such as artists. The artistic sphere is well-known since long as a domain fraught with risk and insecurity. As we are facing a new global working life, with demands on a more flexible labour force expected to accept short-term jobs, lower wages, remote work, and freelance assignments (e.g., Beck 1998), a closer exploration of the gendered dimension of work–
family conflict among artists will contribute with interesting results that are relevant as well in other occupational domains.

In examining artists as an occupational group with atypical working conditions and a history of gender inequality, the aim of this article is thus to integrate artists into the wider discussion about work–family issues in Western societies. Against this background, Sweden provides an interesting case for study. The country’s official gender equality policy has typically stressed the importance of equal rights and possibilities for women and men to balance family and paid work (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009). The dual-earner family model has for long been aided by the supportive family and employment legislation of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002; Morgan 2012; Stier & Lewin-Epstein 2007). Public policy measures aimed at framing Sweden as a gender-egalitarian society have meant implementation of extensive childcare and parental support programmes, including, among other things, a non-transferable two-month's quota in parental leave (since 2002).

Indeed, the Swedish gender equality policy proclaims it to be a universal right of both women and men to be able to shape society and their own lives (Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality 2009). If the work of artists is to play the important role envisioned for it in societal debates and discussions, it then seems vital that combining it with parenting is made possible for both women artists and men artists. What we examine in this article is, in other words, whether Swedish visual artists experience this to actually be the case in their lives. Before engaging with this question, we will, however, review previous work in the field so as to outline the broader context in which the problematic is embedded. Since our statistical analysis of work–family conflict among visual artists is the first in its field, a detailed review of previous research is needed. Following the description of the data and methods used for our research, in the Results section we then present our main findings, discussing them in light of the existing knowledge in the field. Our argument, in short, will be that although much has happened regarding the gender issues in the art world, patterns of dependence and traditional gender roles in work and caring continue to affect the lives of both women and men artists. Where, as in Sweden, the ability to combine career and family is considered a universal right, this poses serious challenges for cultural policy – a subject we discuss in the concluding section of this article.

Researching work–family conflict among Swedish visual artists: Current knowledge and beyond

In this section, we first briefly describe the historical conditions that have affected the dynamics between artistic work, gender, and family. After that, we look at previous research on the atypical working conditions artists face when trying to earn a living, with an eye to the extent to which these conditions show gendered differences. Thereafter, in order to contextualize existing research in relation to our own analysis, we particularly consider relevant research on work–family conflict. Lastly, we present four hypotheses based on the findings from our examination of these three research arenas.

The historically gendered conditions in the art field

The past conditions of a professional field keep influencing its present, shaping the realities and options available for those engaged, or wishing to engage, in it. The artistic profession itself is something made possible by social institutions of the past, institutions that enabled education and
promoted the ability to perform creative work, just as it is by the historical symbolic belief systems about what art and artists are and should be about (see, e.g., Edling 2012; Flisbäck 2013; Lindberg 2002). In Europe, as well as in Sweden, female artists were for a long time excluded from the public education system. Although privately funded and organized alternatives had existed even before, it was not until 1864 that women won the formal right to have access to arts training, which even then was limited in its extent and to be given in classes separate from men (Cowen 1996; Lindberg 1975; Winell-Garvén 2005).

The first women to take advantage of the opportunity to access higher education in the arts came primarily from bourgeois backgrounds. For them, traditional handicraft skills and an education in the arts represented an important asset for marriage, while these could also enable a career in professional crafts or in illustration, more likely than in the more prestigious fine arts – fields like painting and sculpture – which were considered “male” spheres (Cowen 1996; Lindberg & Werkmäster 1975; Rosenqvist 2007). Without an opportunity to engage in the professional practice of the arts on equal terms with men, women aspiring for artistic careers thus frequently needed access to additional resources in the form of cultural, social, and economic capital such as through support from relatives (e.g., Winell-Garvén 2005). This pattern of social class and gender differences is one that still today continues to make its presence felt in the institutions and programmes of arts education, especially in the field of fine arts (e.g., Börjesson, Edling & Gustavsson 2012).

In the history of arts, access to education and family support have been critical for the development of creativity and professionalism. At the same time, however, there is also a third factor explaining women’s difficulties of entering into artistic professions on equal terms with men: the restrictions imposed upon them by childbearing and marriage. Traditionally, women have shouldered the lion’s share of the responsibility for housework, children, and close relationships, leaving both their parenting identity and their occupational identity as artists strongly interwoven with social perceptions of gender. In their role as “the other,” women artists often had to reject both marriage and children, under pressure from the extensive demands made on one’s time by artistic work which collided with familial duties (Chicago 1975; Greer 1979; Pollock 1983, 1999, 2003).

The compensation one receives for one’s artistic work is often described in terms of internal rewards where the pleasure derived from the work itself, in the form of self-realization, creativity, and personal development, can outweigh the negative economic consequences of one’s career choice (e.g., Bourdieu 1996; Lund 2009; Menger 2006; cf. Korpi 1978). Indeed, as art historians and sociologists have pointed out, artists, ever since the dawn of modernism, have been expected to follow the ideal of “art for art’s sake,” regardless of their economic security and the surrounding social conventions. Accordingly, the modern concept of fine art presents artists as a vanguard creating work in conditions of absolute autonomy, free from economic constraints and the burdens of everyday life like having a family and children (Bourdieu 1996; Garrard 1994; Greenberg 1993; Pollock 1999, 2003).

The historical idea of autonomous art can be seen as providing a symbolic structure that even today impacts the possibilities of working artistically, of forming a family as an artist, and of being able to combine the two spheres of artistic work and family life (Flisbäck 2013). Since the second-wave feminism of the late 1960s, however, this romantic notion of a modern artistic vanguard has increasingly been called into question (Lindberg 2002; Nyström et al. 2005; Perry 2006). Feminist artists have sought to dissolve the (imagined) separation between art and caring work, using experiences from the private sphere as a motif for their artistic work. Their strategy has been, for
example, to visualize the plight of working mothers and thereby contextualize the private sphere as political (Lindberg 2000, 2002; Nyström et al. 2005; Perry 2006). Nevertheless, not even political art is likely to enable artists to better combine work and family life. To uncover the reasons why political ideals regarding gender equality differ from actual opportunities to act in accordance with them in everyday life, it is necessary to also tackle the conditions facing artists’ working life, something that we will do in the following part.

The contemporary artistic work field and the glass ceiling

The demand for artistic work is significantly smaller than its supply. Of all those wanting to become professional artists, there are few that will ultimately be able to devote themselves to their chosen vocation on a full-time basis. Nevertheless, the number of professionally practicing artists in Sweden has remained relatively stable over time, fluctuating between 20,000 and 25,000 since the late 1990s. The artist group focussed on in this article, those working in visual art and design, is estimated to comprise approximately 6,000 professionally practicing individuals (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2010).

Despite their generally high education levels and long working hours, the income earned by Swedish artists tends to be highly irregular and relatively low. In 2007, the median income of the country’s visual artists was 68 per cent of that of the total population (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2010). The majority of the artists do not earn a living from their artistic work, and must thus seek other work to supplement their earnings from their artistic work. In consequence, artists tend to work longer hours than the average of the country’s wage-earners (Swedish Art Grant Committee 2010, 2011). In addition, financial support from family and relatives often serves to compensate for the meagre income artists earn (Lindström 2012). According to the Swedish Art Grant Committee (2011), in 2008 25 per cent of all Swedish artists received financial assistance from relatives either on a regular basis or at some point, while the corresponding figure for the population as a whole was around ten per cent (cf. Fritzell & Lennartsson 2005). Just as in the total population it was women artists who more often than men were the recipients of such assistance (Swedish Art Grant Committee 2011).

In terms of working conditions, Swedish visual artists differ markedly from the average of the labour force. In 2009, approximately 85 per cent of people in employment had a permanent employment contract (Larsson 2010), while approximately 70 to 80 per cent of Swedish visual artists are self-employed (Swedish Art Grants Committee 2011, p. 27). Although often considered a way to attain professional autonomy and flexibility, in an employment-based social insurance system, self-employment entails significant economic consequences. Low-income self-employment also means lower benefits paid under the parental insurance plan. The low demand for artists’ work combined with long working hours and a weak position in the social insurance system may then lead artists to reconsider, or even abstain from, having children. The same is also likely to complicate their re-entry into employment after having taken time out for childrearing (Swedish Government Official Reports 2003).

In recent studies of the country’s artist population show income equality between women and men to be greater in visual arts than on average in the Swedish population (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2010). The gender income gap among artists might indeed look fairly insignificant. However, what is important to keep in mind is that, unlike on average in the Swedish population...
where women much more often than men work part-time, women artists and men artists tend to
work an equal number of hours per week (Statistics Sweden 2012; Swedish Arts Grants Committee
2011, p. 41). Moreover, women artists have on average a higher education than their male
to indicate gender equality, thus, in fact conceal an inequality aspect with regards to the “equal work,
equal pay” principle. Just as in many other areas of society, women in the art world need to be better
educated than men to minimize the negative career impact of their gender and to transcend the
limits imposed upon their career development. In other words, as in many other sectors, there is
still a glass ceiling (Kanter 1993) for women artists to reach the same positions as men (Swedish
Arts Grants Committee 2010). Male visual artists continue to receive higher scholarship awards for
longer periods of time (Gustavsson 2012; Hermele 2009; Lindström 2012), and there are more men
than women in manager positions within the culture sector (e.g., Jordansson 2007). In addition, to
cope with the demands of the insecure artistic labor market and counter the negative effects of
being a woman pursuing a career, for most women artists the family still needs to be deselected.
Data indicate that women artists in Sweden are childless more often than both men artists and
women on average in the Swedish population, while men artists are childless less often than men
on average in the population (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2010).

Work–family conflict

A fundamental starting point for research in the area of work–family conflict is that caring
responsibilities in the family sphere have the potential to conflict with the demands of time- and
energy-consuming paid work. A work–family conflict arises when managing one of the spheres of
life takes too much time or energy from another, making prioritizing difficult in relation to the
individual’s life values. The situation may then also lead to stressful negotiations with other members
of the family (Björnberg & Kollind 2003; Greenhaus, Bedeian & Mossholder 1987; Greenhaus &
Beutell 1985).

Researchers in the field of work–family conflict regularly stress the importance of individuals’ ability
to achieve an appropriate balance between different life spheres such as work and family life. The
assumption here is that for persons to be able to create a healthy life for themselves, they need time
and space for both self-development (through work) and recognition from others (through
engagement in loving relationships in family life) (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti & Burke 2009; Crompton
& Lyonette 2006; Gerson 2002; Hochshild 1997). In modern society, the potential conflict between
these two different ways of creating meaning has often been resolved through a gendered division
of labour where “women have been expected to seek personal development by caring for others,
while men care for others by sharing the rewards of their independent work achievements” (Gersons
2002, p. 8). In this dual model, the duties of fatherhood are primarily oriented towards the public
arena and fathers’ role as providers, while motherhood is more focused on caring work in the
private sphere (Brandth & Kvande 1998). In practice, however, the model of the male breadwinner
has taken on different forms depending on geography, social welfare orientation of the state, and
class affiliation. Among the most resource-poor segments the single-earner model has never even
been an option (Crompton 1999).

For a long time, work–family conflict has been explained in terms of the amount of hours worked
per week, with long hours at work considered to increase work–family conflict (e.g., Keith & Schafer
1980). According to Grönlund (2007), also the type of work and what the work offers the individual
performing it are important aspects in this respect, since the internal value of the work may reduce
the conflict. Grönlund (2007) is one of the researchers in the area who stresses the need for a bi-directional perspective that can take into account both how work may hinder family life (work-to-family conflict) and how family life may hinder work (family-to-work conflict). Indeed, it has been found, women often experience the direction of the conflict differently from men, as being of the work-to-family rather than the family-to-work kind (e.g., Frone, Yardley & Markel 1997; MacEwen & Barling 1994; Reynolds 2005). This seems to hold even for the Nordic countries where generous parental insurance benefits and publicly funded universal child care form key components of the Scandinavian welfare state model (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002).

It is well known that the way domestic work is divided influences work–family conflict. Feelings of dissatisfaction arise where one feels exploited, being encumbered with more than one’s fair share of the household chores, and being left with not enough time to invest in self-realization (Björnberg & Kollind 2003; Sullivan 2000). Even in Sweden, where the responsibility for caring and household work is perhaps more equitably shared than anywhere else in the world, women still provide the lion’s share of unpaid family work (Evertsson & Nermo 2007; Statistics Sweden 2012; Sz. Oláh & Gähler 2012).

Research on work–family conflict often address the question of whether having multiple roles (such as being both a worker, an artist, and a parent) might increase one’s sense of conflict and stress or, instead, bring about a sense of well-being due to increased recognition from the different spheres and satisfaction from responsibilities well managed in one role offsetting one’s experience in another. Two different perspectives can be seen to have formed around this question (cf. Grönlund 2007; Grönlund & Oun 2010; Marshall & Barnett 1993). On one side, a “scarcity hypothesis” has been advanced to explain why perceptions of conflict and stress increase in dual-earner families where it is more common to strive for self-realization in both work and family life. Work adhering to this perspective identifies factors such as gender (being a woman), large amount of educational capital/higher class position, high workload and long working hours, care for young children, and larger family as causes behind the increased experience of conflict between the different life spheres in these cases (e.g., Drentea 2003; Goode 1960). On the other side, the “expansion hypothesis” put forward proposes that a traditional gender division of labour will not lead to increased perceptions of work–family conflict, with more roles likely leading to increased well-being instead: when time and energy are invested in multiple areas, it is proposed, the chances of reward in the form of recognition from one of these correspondingly increase (e.g., Thoits 1983).

Cutting across both of these hypotheses, however, some researchers have pointed out that one can appreciate both work and family life while at the same time experiencing a conflict between them (e.g., Gerson 2002; Repetti, Matthews & Waldron 1989). The latter, seems to describe the state of affairs more common in Scandinavian-type welfare states like that in Sweden, where individualized social security and a universal child care have made possible, and today even favour, the increasing prevalence of the dual-earner family model (see, e.g., Strandh & Nordmark 2006).

The objective of this article is not to take sides in this debate or to test the validity of either the expansion or the scarcity hypothesis. Nevertheless, the perspectives are useful for our argument. It is likely that at the same time as artistic work creates significant internal value for the parents performing it, it is also a major contributor to stress for them, given the considerable demands it sets upon one’s time and the relative lack of resources typical of the economic situation of the practitioners in this field. Here, to be sure, welfare states that (as in the Scandinavian countries) have well-developed social security systems aimed to counteract dependency on work by others in the
private sphere (friends, family, relatives) through provision of universal child care, may not only provide effective buffers against work–family conflict (Crompton & Lyonette 2006; Orloff 1993), but also help produce alternative norms to counter the traditional notion of fathers as providers and mothers as carers (Grönlund & Öun 2010, pp. 182–183).

Research hypotheses

Based on the above survey of the research areas relevant to our study, four research hypotheses can be formulated for our exploration of work–family conflict among visual artists in Sweden. In the following, we present these hypotheses one by one, giving them as two-partite constructions with a more general-level hypothesis regarding the Swedish visual-artist group as a whole (H1a–H4a) followed by our more particular hypothesis regarding expected gender differences within that group (H1b–H4b). In each case, we preface the hypothesis with assumptions summarizing its rationale based on our discussion thus far. This way of classifying our hypotheses corresponds with the aim of the article; to examine the degree of work–family conflict among artists, and to understand to what extent the conflict can be analyzed as a gender issue.

Judging from previous research it seems reasonable to assume that artists today are likely to experience a conflict between their work and family lives. They tend to work long hours, which is one indicator of a high level of work–family conflict. Artists’ working life conditions are generally insecure and there seems to be an inherent historical tendency to regard creative activities as something separated from the domain of the private sphere. Artistic work as an activity and artists’ occupational identities, furthermore, tend to be all-embracing. The same appears to be true about motherhood as well, at least at the level of expectations. It, consequently, seems reasonable to assume women artists to experience more conflict than their male colleagues.

Our first hypothesis is then that artists experience a high level of work–family conflict (H1a), and that women artists experience a higher level of work–family conflict than men artists (H1b).

Second, as indicated by previous research, artistic work seems to have so high internal value as to lead to a desire in practicing artists to spend most of their time on that work. Hence, when artists experience a conflict between their family and work lives, this conflict will more likely be experienced as a family-to-work conflict than as a work-to-family conflict. In other words, we may assume that for most artists, it is more likely family life that is seen as interfering with work than the other way around.

In general, however, the conflict women experience between their work and family lives is more often of the work-to-family kind, in contrast to men whose conflict experience tends to more often be of the family-to-work kind. The difference has been explained by the general understanding that women’s identity is still more closely tied to the family than work. At the same time, however, shouldering their household responsibilities is very time- and energy-consuming for women. Given the high internal value that artistic work offers them, family life may then interfere more strongly with women artists’ work life than male artists’, at least on the level of experience. We may, consequently, assume women artists to want to spend more time working and to feel that the traditional gender-typed household chores preventing them from acting upon this desire.

Our second hypothesis is then that when artists experience work–family conflict, this conflict is likely to more often be of the family-to-work kind than of the work-to-family kind (H2a).
Moreover, we may assume the level of this experienced conflict to be higher among women artists than among men artists (H2b).

Third, as evident from the research carried out around the “scarcity hypothesis” and beyond, caring for younger children and larger families in general increases work–life conflict. It seems plausible to assume this to be the case among Swedish artists as well. At the same time, however, one needs to bear in mind the differing normative expectations surrounding motherhood and fatherhood. Even in Scandinavian welfare states like Sweden, women still carry the main responsibility for parenting. There is no reason to expect anything different to hold for visual artists, too, in the country.

Our third hypothesis is then that parenting responsibility will increase the experience of work–family conflict and that this experience is more acute among artists with more than one child (H3a). This pattern can be assumed to be more pronounced among women artists than among men artists (H3b).

Research on housework and gender inequality, as noted, has shown unequal division of family responsibilities between men and women to lead to higher levels of work–family conflict. Compared to men, women spend more time on household chores, also in Sweden despite the long-since established dominance of the dual-earner family model in the country. The same can be expected to hold true for visual artists as well.

Our fourth hypothesis is then that having the main responsibility for unpaid household work increases the experience of work–family conflict among artists (H4a). This tendency may, moreover, be assumed to be more pronounced among women artists than among men artists (H4b).

Data and methods

Our analysis below draws upon survey data from a broader research project on artistic careers and family life in Sweden. In studying artistic careers, the question arises as to where to draw the line between professional and lay activity (see Melldahl 2012). One solution in previous research has been to make the selection based on union membership (e.g., Swedish Art Grants Committee 2009, 2010, 2011). A particular problem in the case of Swedish artists in the field of visual arts and design, however, is that no unions currently represent this group of occupations. Instead, Swedish visual artists, craft artists, and designers all share a more general professional organization, the Swedish Artists’ Organization/Craftsmen and Designers’ Organization (KRO/KIF). In the project, the research questionnaire was therefore sent to all members of this organization.

With a current membership of nearly 3,200, KRO/KIF works to improve and monitor artists’ economic and social situation in the country. The criteria for membership in the organization include a degree from a higher education institution in the field of arts, crafts, and design and/or ability to demonstrate substantial professional experience. In other words, all of the organization's members possess an advanced arts degree or have demonstrated an ambition to earn a living from their artistic work and regularly exhibit their work to further their careers.

The survey questionnaire for this study was mailed to all KRO/KIF members, (3,154 individuals) in fall 2011. The response rate was 64 per cent, with 2,025 respondents returning the questionnaire. 70 per cent of those returning the questionnaire were women (1,426 respondents), a proportion
that roughly corresponds to the percentage of women in the population under study. The respondents were on average 59 years old, corresponding to the overall population studied. This relatively high average age is probably due to the membership criteria of KRO/KIF, which favour older artists (it usually takes long to professionally establish oneself in the art world). However, it could also involve different attitudes held by younger artists towards collective organization in general. In Sweden, there has been a general decline in union membership, most notably among younger workers aged 16 to 24 (Kjellberg 2011), with the reasons for the falling interest in trade union membership among the young often attributed to the prevalence of temporary and precarious employment in this age group.

Constructing dependent and independent variables

To help narrow the research focus on the artists’ ability to combine their career with family responsibilities, the study participants were asked to assess their own individual ability to do so in response to four survey questions. These were: 1) “Do you consider yourself able to combine your artistic work with family relationships?”; 2) “To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement: I am able to individually plan my artistic work, with positive effects on my family life”; 3) “To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement: I often have trouble finding time for my artistic work due to my family responsibilities”; 4) “To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statement: I often have trouble finding time for my family due to the time I spend on my artistic work.” The five-point scale used for the last three questions included the response options “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neither agree nor disagree”, “Agree”, and “Strongly agree”. Since the study concerned the ability to combine parenting with career, respondents with no children were excluded from the analysis.

We explored if there were any possible systematic links between the responses given to the above mentioned four questions by using principal component analysis. The analysis revealed one such principal component based on the four questions, which was interpreted and termed as “work–family conflict.” The index was tested for reliability and the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.71, indicating reliability (see Djurfeldt & Barmark 2009). A 1 to 16 scale was adopted, with 16 being the highest rating of a positive attitude, interpreted as the lowest level of self-reported work–family conflict. With the help of the index, the first of our four hypotheses could then be tested. The second hypothesis was tested using 1) bivariate analysis comparing whether and in which ways women and men answered the questions differently, and 2) a multiple regression analysis to test for spurious relationships.

Following, in order to test our third and fourth hypotheses we have also studied the relationship between gender, parenting responsibility, division of domestic work and work–family conflict. However, we expect social phenomena such as work–family conflict to be the complex result of many factors. The multiple regression analysis allowed us to handle several independent variables at once. By controlling for factors such as age, education, work hours and income, we could test for spurious relationships. In the regression analysis, the independent variables have been constructed as dummy variables. The interpretation of the dummy variables is to see how much higher or lower the expected value on y (work–family conflict) are for those coded as 1, compared to those coded as 0.

In the analysis, the variables reflecting our theoretical basis were expected to influence the dependent variable (work–family conflict). Parenting responsibility was operationalized as the number of
children living with the respondent full time, and division of housework was categorized into the following response options: “No particular division”, “I do most of the housework”, “My partner does most of the housework”, and “We share housework equally”. These were controlled for by variables such as age (in years, categorized into aged “25 to 45”, “46 to 65”, and “66 to 96”, census data), level of artistic education (categorized into “No higher artistic education”, “One to four years of higher-level artistic education”, and “Five or more years of higher-level artistic education”), country of origin (categorized into “Sweden”, “Other Nordic country”, “Europe outside the Nordic countries”, and “Rest of the world”; census data), hours spent on artistic work per week (categorized into “0 to 30”, “31 to 50”, and “51 or more”), and income (in SEK thousands in 2011; categorized into “0 to 50”, “51 to 100”, “101 to 150”, “151 to 200”, and “201 or more”; census data).

We use three levels of significance in our analyses: a significance at 0.001, 0.05 and a 0.1 level. Results that are significant at the 0.1 level needs to be interpreted with caution.

Results

In this section we present the results of the analysis. The analysis itself and the subsequent discussion of our findings, as already explained, are guided by the four hypotheses presented above. First, however, a brief description of our findings on the respondents’ working hours, income, relationship status, and family situation is in order. These descriptive statistics is illustrated in table 1.
### Table 1. Descriptive statistics. \( (n = 2,025) \)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age categories</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-45</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>1022</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 or more</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other residence</td>
<td>1310</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income, SEK thousand</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-50</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-150</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151-200</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201 or more</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work hours/week (artistic work)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-30</td>
<td>1088</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 or more</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of artistic education, years</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-habitant partner</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-cohabitant partner</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partners gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different from respondent</td>
<td>1553</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same as respondent</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Division of domestic work</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular division</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do the most</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My partner does the most</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal division</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No division – not living with partner</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or more</td>
<td>1571</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental responsibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No children living with the respondent full time</td>
<td>1490</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 children or more</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The largest proportion of the respondents spent around 0–30 hours per week on artistic work.\(^9\)

According to the most recent comprehensive survey data on artistic work in Sweden, the average
number of hours the country’s visual artists spend on their artistic work is 32 (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2011). Census data from the Swedish Tax Agency show that the median annual income of the respondents was low to average: SEK 156,000 in 2011, with individual incomes ranging from zero to SEK 917,000. These figures correspond to those for professional Swedish artists as a whole (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2011). In our sample, men’s median income was higher than women’s: SEK 163,000 compared to SEK 154,000. 88 per cent of the respondents were born in Sweden and 35 per cent lived in the country’s three largest cities (Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö), probably due to the greater presence there of galleries and art institutions and the greater access to income-generating bread-and-butter jobs that major cities such as, especially, Stockholm in the Swedish case offer (Menger 2006).

As Table 1 shows, most respondents (72 %) lived with a partner, either married or co-habiting. Of these relationships, 98 per cent were heterosexual. Notably many of the respondents lived with partners who, too, were artists (22 %). As regards the division of housework in their homes, the largest proportion (31 %) of the respondents reported it to be equal; proportionally more men (48 %) than women (40 %) did so. While 35 per cent of the women reported themselves to be the one doing most of the housework, only eight per cent of the men did so. The private sphere of these visual artists is thus in many respects similar to that of the other Swedes, as concerns the gendered allocation of household work. 79 per cent of the respondents had children, with the child/children living full time in the respondent’s home in one in every three of these cases. The women respondents were childless or had only one child more frequently than men, while men more often than women had three or more children. In both cases, this corresponds to the findings for the artist group as a whole in the country (Swedish Arts Grants Committee 2010). However, women more often than men had their children living with them full time in their homes, and they also reported having taken longer parental leaves: while 36 per cent of the women had taken a minimum of 12 months of parental leave, the majority of the men (57 %) had not even taken any parental leave at all. Most respondents had high levels of education: 66 per cent of them had studied for at least one year at a university or another institution of higher education. Proportionally more women (30 %) had a college/university degree than men (17 %). One in every five men and seven percent of the women respondents had no more than an elementary school education. All in all, the respondents’ low income levels, combined with their working hours and high levels of education, can then be said to be indicative of the economically insecure situation that Swedish visual artists face.

Overall level of work–family conflict

To examine our hypothesis H1a that the level of work–family conflict is high among visual artists, we calculated the mean of the work–family conflict index. Since the scale used was 1 to 16, with 16 indicating the lowest level of conflict, a mean value below 8 would suggest a high overall level of work–family conflict in the group. The mean value obtained for the index was, however, 9.86, indicating that, contrary to expectation, the respondents overall experienced only moderate levels of work–family conflict instead of high levels on average. The hypotheses H1a could thus not be confirmed.

This finding of a moderate level of work–family conflict in our sample may be a function of the respondents’ living and working in a Scandinavian welfare state that, among other things, actively supports dual-earner families through provision of extensive childcare services and generous parental leave schemes. It is measures like these that make reconciling the demands of work and
family easier for working parents. Another possible explanation might be found in the particular nature of the activity of working as an artist. As already noted, artists often are deeply committed to, and strongly identify themselves with, their work (Einarsdotter-Wahlgren 1997; Røyseng, Mangset & Borgen 2007). This can then mean that the feelings of pleasure and meaning – the internal value – derived from the artistic work help offset experiences of work–family conflict. However, it is important to keep in mind here that the average age of the respondents was high (59 years), suggesting that the respondents probably had less parenting responsibility (with their children likely to have already left home) and a more secure labour market position than their younger colleagues that are at the early stages of adult life and professional careers. Our data do support that the moderate work–family conflict in the case of these artists is an effect of age, as seen in Table 2 where the work-family conflict is higher for artists aged 25-45 than for older artists.

Besides age, when taking gender into consideration, the picture of moderate levels of work–family conflict in the artist group becomes more nuanced. The reported levels of experienced conflict were higher among the women artists than among the men artists surveyed. With higher values indicating a more positive outlook with less experienced conflict, men’s mean value in our sample was 10.81 and women’s 9.45, representing a statistically significant difference on a 0.001 per cent level. When testing the expected value on work-family conflict on women compared to men in a multiple regression analysis (table 2), the result remains significant on a 0.001 per cent level. Thus, table 2 shows that gender has an significant impact on work–family conflict, when controlling for other factors such as parenting responsibility, division of housework, age, artistic education, work hours peer day and income. Accordingly, this finding confirms our hypothesis H1b, indicating as it does that women artists experience more work–family conflict than men artists. The table also depicts that all factors, except for education, is correlated with work-family conflict. We will elaborate on these results in the forthcoming analyses. Firstly, however, we examine the type of conflict our respondents experience. Does artistic work hinder family life (work-to-family) or is it family life that hinder artistic work (family-to-work)? Is the direction of conflict a question of gender?
The direction of the conflict: Work-to-family or family-to-work?

Our analysis also covered the direction of the work–family conflict in those cases where it was reported or detected. Here we examined whether it was a question of a work-to-family conflict or rather a family-to-work type of conflict (our hypothesis H2a), and whether the causes behind the conflict’s direction could be said to be gendered (our hypothesis H2b). The results with regards to hypothesis H2a are presented below in Tables 3 and 4.
Although the largest share of the respondents neither agreed or disagreed about the existence of any kind of work–family conflict in their case (33 %), where a conflict was experienced it was more often of the family-to-work kind than the work-to-family kind. While 21 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they often had trouble finding time for their family due to their time spent on working on their artistic projects, the corresponding figure for those agreeing or strongly agreeing that they often had trouble finding time for their artistic work due to their family obligations is clearly higher, or 33 per cent. This then seems to confirm our hypothesis H2a. To establish the role of gender on the perceived direction of conflict, the results from the analysis were broken down between men and women artists, as presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 3. Percentage of respondents agreeing/disagreeing that they often have trouble finding time for their artistic work due to their family responsibilities (family-to-work conflict) (n=1445).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Percentage of respondents agreeing/disagreeing that they often have trouble finding time for their family due to their artistic work (work-to-family conflict) (n=1447).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the largest share of the respondents neither agreed or disagreed about the existence of any kind of work–family conflict in their case (33 %), where a conflict was experienced it was more often of the family-to-work kind than the work-to-family kind. While 21 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they often had trouble finding time for their family due to their time spent on working on their artistic projects, the corresponding figure for those agreeing or strongly agreeing that they often had trouble finding time for their artistic work due to their family obligations is clearly higher, or 33 per cent. This then seems to confirm our hypothesis H2a. To establish the role of gender on the perceived direction of conflict, the results from the analysis were broken down between men and women artists, as presented in Tables 5 and 6.
As table 5 indicates, proportionally more women artists (39%) than men artists (20%) agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced family-to-work conflict, with the difference being statistically significant at a 0.001% level. The results obtained thus confirm our hypothesis H2b. In the same fashion, proportionally fewer women artists (44%) than men artists (54%) seemed to experience no work-to-family conflict, either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they had trouble finding time for their family due to their time spent on artistic work; also this difference is statistically significant at a 0.001 % level. The women in the sample, in other words, seemed to experience the conflict more frequently and more acutely than their male colleagues in both directions. A bivariate analysis (not shown) found that this was related to working hours. Women in this study who worked part time (37 % of the respondents) experienced family-to-work conflict more frequently than women who worked more than full time (13 % of the respondents), with the latter, reversely, reporting themselves experiencing work-to-family conflict more often than the part-time working women. Grönlund and Öun (2010, p. 190) found that the part-time work option may be a “double-edged sword”: in their study, part-time workers tended to experience both conflict and satisfaction and well-being at the same time, in regard to their work–family balance.

The differing results obtained in the bivariate analysis for more than full-time working women artists and part-time working women artists, in terms of the direction of the perceived conflict, explain why there were a larger proportion of women than men in our sample who felt there to be a work–family conflict in their life, whether this was of the family-to-work or the work-to-family type. The competing expectations of being a hard-working artist and being a good parent might, namely, simply be experienced as more severe among women. Why this should be so, and what the consequences of this are, is what we will look at more closely in the following section.
Parenting responsibility and unequal division of domestic work as contributors to work–family conflict

So far we have seen that the levels of self-reported work–family conflict among the respondents are generally moderate, but that experiences of work-family conflict is gendered. What we want to examine further, however, is what kind of factors impact the experience of conflict for women and for men. Using OLS regression analysis we can test the validity of our last two pairs of hypotheses: whether increased parenting responsibility (hypothesis H3a) and having the main responsibility for unpaid household work (hypothesis H4a) are connected to the level of experienced of work–family conflict, and whether there might be any differences between men and women in this regard (hypotheses H3b and H4b). The results of the regression analysis are given in Table 7, which also shows the results when controlled for four other factors: age, level of education, hours worked, and income.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting responsibility (ref. no parenting responsibility)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>-0.095</td>
<td>-0.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 children or more</td>
<td>-1.768***</td>
<td>-0.799**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of housework (ref. equal division)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular division</td>
<td>-0.722*</td>
<td>-0.670**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do the most</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>-1.218***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My partner does the most</td>
<td>-0.493</td>
<td>-0.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No division – single</td>
<td>-2.061***</td>
<td>-1.230***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age, years (ref. 46-65)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-45</td>
<td>-1.119**</td>
<td>-0.336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 or more</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>0.528**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in higher artistic education (ref. no higher artistic education)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>-0.508</td>
<td>-0.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work hours per week, artistic work (ref. 31-50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-30</td>
<td>0.207</td>
<td>-0.423**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 or more</td>
<td>-0.373</td>
<td>-1.258***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income, 2011 SEK thousand (ref. 201 or more)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.305</td>
<td>0.773*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-50</td>
<td>0.424</td>
<td>0.557*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-150</td>
<td>0.754**</td>
<td>-0.248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151-200</td>
<td>0.498</td>
<td>-0.843**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>11.353***</td>
<td>10.894***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Work-family conflict by gender. Higher value indicates a lower predicted value on work-family conflict compared to the reference category. Scale 1-16. Unstandardized regression coefficients. (n\_men = 410, n\_women = 948).

Before presenting the results for our main variables, however, and confirming or refuting the third and fourth hypotheses, a few comments are in order on whether our four control variables correlated with gender. As Table 7 shows, the expected value on work-family conflict for men artists aged 25 to 45 was lower compared to men artists aged 46 to 65, indicating higher work-family conflict. Among the women artists in the sample, work–family conflict in the oldest age group was lower than that in the reference category (women artists aged 46 to 65). While, in the case of both women
and men artists, no statistically significant effect could be found for higher arts education (compared to no higher arts education), while working both fewer and more hours per week in one’s arts occupation than the reference category (31 to 50 hours per week) indicate higher work-family conflict in the case of the women artists. For the men artists, no statistically significant effect was found for this variable. With regards to the income variable, work–family conflict was lower (compared to the reference category of SEK 201,000 or more) for those men who had an annual income of SEK 101,000–150,000 (statistically significant at a 0.1 % level). For the women artists, work–family conflict was affected for both those who had low income or no income (lower conflict, statistically significant at a 0.1 % level) and those who had an annual income of SEK 151,000–200,000 (higher conflict).

Returning to our main variables, the questions we wanted to pursue were: Does parenting responsibility influence one’s experience of work–family conflict? And if it does, does the number of children matter? Does the way housework is divided (equal vs. unequal division of domestic chores) affect one’s level of experienced conflict, and if it does, how? As concerns the influence of parenting responsibility (compared to having no parenting responsibility), the results showed a statistically significant effect for higher work-family conflict for women artists that began already at the first child, while in the case of men the work-family conflict was higher only at the second child. However, when the respondents had two or more children, the difference in expected value for work–family conflict was more pronounced among men than among women, with all other factors controlled for.

Also the way in which domestic work was divided had a different effect on work–family conflict for women and men. Compared to where housework was equally shared, having no particular division of housework is associated with higher work–family conflict among both genders, although the statistical significance being higher for women. Having the main responsibility for household work increases conflict among women, but not among men. In the case of men, there were no statistically significant differences between those reporting an equal division of housework and those reporting an unequal division.\textsuperscript{12} At the same time, however, being single here seemed to imply a greater negative effect for men than for women, suggesting that the impact of single parenting must be taken into account when examining work–family conflict. These results then confirm our hypotheses H3a and H4a, although this conclusion is somewhat complicated by the fact that having two or more children appeared to entail a more negative effect for men artists than for women artists. The results also confirm our hypothesis H4b, that having the main responsibility for household work increases conflict among women.

\textbf{Gender differences in the significance of parenting responsibility}

Our analysis revealed a strong relationship between work–family conflict and being single, compared to having a partner to equally share the housework with. This was so especially on the part of the men. The result we obtained, however, is not surprising. The consequences of separation and divorce are associated with psychological distress and social problems, such as depression and economic hardship (Gähler 2006). What our findings suggest is that men, to a greater extent than women, rely on a partner or a spouse for support in household chores to be able to combine career and family. Since, in Sweden, as in other countries, women continue to perform the lion’s share of unpaid domestic and caring work (Björnberg & Kollind 2003; Evertsson & Nermo 2007; Sz. Oláh & Gähler 2012; Statistics Sweden 2012), single parenthood can be expected to be experienced as more difficult among men, as the burden of that work will then become relatively greater for them.
after separation. No similar tendency, in any case, has been observed among women (Gähler 2006). Other sources of strain brought on by separation and divorce include loss of social support and social network. Given that, in Sweden at least, visual artists in general report dependence on support, whether financial or social, from family and partner, a divorce or separation may thus have particularly significant consequences for those trying to pursue an artistic career (Arts Grants Committee 2010; Lindström 2012).

This finding adds to previous research on artists’ dependency on support from family and partner. Even where, as in Sweden, services and institutions aimed to increase the autonomy of individual citizens have been introduced, the insecure conditions of the artistic labour market may significantly increase the need for informal social networks and support from partner and family, especially for those with responsibility for the welfare of children. Our results thus indicate that the pursuit of an artistic career in combination with parenting to a notable extent continues to be a gender issue, but also that single fathers may experience higher work–family conflict than single mothers, probably due to their greater reliance on a partner to manage the demands of child care and domestic work in heterosexual relationships.

**Gender differences in the significance of the division of housework**

As already noted, the analysis of gender differences for the division of housework showed a strong relationship between unequal division and work–family conflict for women, while the same did not hold true for men. In a bivariate analysis (not shown), the gendered division of housework according to working hours among the respondents was found to be rather traditional. Among the women working 31 to 50 hours per week, 31 per cent reported themselves doing most of the housework, and among the women working more than that, 27 per cent did so. The corresponding figures for men were eight and seven per cent. Regardless of how much they worked, then, a higher proportion of women seemed to do most of the domestic work.

Several factors may account for our findings here. Firstly, women’s shouldering the main responsibility for unpaid domestic labour may negatively affect their ability to engage in artistic work, with, correspondingly, men artists then likely to benefit from their female spouses’ taking on more of the responsibility for children and the home. As artistic work often requires large amounts of time, the way housework is divided may then seem unfair and unjust to women. In a normative environment that, as in Sweden, to a high extent embraces gender equality, especially women may experience a discrepancy between the official ideals of equality and the actual inequality they encounter in both the private and the public domain (Sz. Oláh & Gähler 2012). Interestingly, the existence of “no particular division” of housework is associated with higher levels of work–family conflict among both genders, indicating that in households where the allocation of responsibility for domestic work has not been negotiated, both genders feel they do more than their partner (cf. Björnberg & Kollind 2003). However, women nevertheless are likely to bear the main share of it, in turn affecting their self-reported levels of work–family conflict. This possibility is supported by the fact that, in our sample, all the alternative ways in which household work was divided (or not) correlated with increased work–family conflict for the women respondents, compared to equal sharing.

All in all, the gender differences shown by our variables concerning parenting responsibility and the division of housework indicate that women are still shouldering the bulk of the responsibility in areas where the allocation of responsibilities has traditionally been unequal between the partners in
a heterosexual relationship. In consequence, women artists will likely experience more work–family conflict in their lives and the glass ceiling effect hindering them from advancing in their chosen career. In the final section of this article, we look more closely at the kind of cultural policy considerations that this situation gives rise to.

Concluding discussions

The tendency of Swedish visual artists to be self-employed, to cope with insecure and low income and a less favourable situation in the social security system, prompts important questions regarding their susceptibility to work–family conflict. Given that women artists in Sweden have lower income, are more dependent on private support systems, and have fewer children than their male counterparts, it seems important to analyse work–family conflict as a gender issue. As feminist art historians have shown, women’s responsibility for children and domestic work has often hindered them from pursuing artistic careers or, reversely, led them to decide not to invest in family life.

In this study, we first wanted to find out whether visual artists in contemporary Sweden experience work–family conflict. Based on previous research, we expected the conflict to be high among visual artists in Sweden. Conversely, our findings indicated that the overall level of self-reported work–family conflict was moderate. One consideration to keep in mind here is the high average age of the respondents, since it indicates a more secure occupational situation and responsibility for older and more independent children. Our results also indicate that the moderate work–family conflict in the case of these artists is an effect of age, as the work-family conflict is higher for artists aged 25-45 than for older artists.

Another possible explanation for this may be that the internal reward from artistic work might compensate for the friction between family life and work. However, at the same time, it is reasonable to assume that a job that provides immense internal value, also leads to more time-extensive efforts, which particularly have effects on individuals that also are engaged in many hours of unpaid work at home. Such a scenario would, in other words, imply that the conflict for women artists is higher than for men artists. Our data indicates that women artists are likely to experience more work–family conflict than their men colleagues.

The result that the conflict is experienced differently among women and men implies that traditional gender questions about self-development in work, housekeeping and caring needs to be further explored. As our data shows, women artists (still) shoulder the main responsibility for domestic work. This gender difference can in part be explained by the division of housework in the private sphere. Our findings also suggest that having children has a negative effect on work–family conflict, an effect, moreover, that varies depending on gender. For women this effect is significant already at the first child. Among the artists with two or more children, this effect, however, is more pronounced for men, suggesting that the amount of responsibility for children increases from the first child to the second for men. Women can be assumed to have had the most prevailing responsibility already for the first child.

We also wanted to know the direction in which visual artists experience the conflict, looking at whether the question was of not having enough time for work or of not having enough time for the family. When women artists in our sample experienced work–family conflict, they primarily wanted to find more time for their work from their caring and household responsibilities. This was so especially among the women working part time. This finding stands in contrast to conclusions
from other research on work–family conflict, in which women have been mostly found to experience work-to-family type of conflict. Again, it can be explained by the specific nature of artistic work, characterized as that work is by artists’ strong commitment to it and the feelings of personal pleasure and meaning it offers to those performing it.

Both Sweden (with comprehensive policies of gender equality in all spheres of society) and artists as an occupational group (with their time-consuming work and insecure working conditions) offer interesting cases for those studying work-family conflict. Nonetheless, especially artists are given sparse attention in previous research, with artistic work in the margins. On the other hand, the research on artistic work has not been properly concerned with the kind of conflicts arising between artistic work and family life. Even if similar questions have been highlighted many times in feministic art (Nyström et al. 2005), there have been no empirically research on work–family conflict among artists in Sweden. The area thus remains to be more fully explored. In addition with the ongoing transition towards a “new” flexible working life expanding to more and more industries, our findings are of more general interest.

When exploring work–family conflict, most research tends to focus on the employee-employer relation in more conventional settings. As our findings demonstrate, however, a focus on occupational groups with an insecure working life will bring somewhat different results, adding to the existing knowledge in the area. Although the role of the extensive childcare policies and provisions of the modern social welfare state, as in Sweden, will no doubt remain important in helping to alleviate work–family conflict, the inherent insecurity of artistic work may very well offset their impact, creating, moreover, a strong dependency on family support in the process.

Even if our results indicate that artists working in Sweden experience only moderate levels of work–family conflict, the gender dimensions of our findings call for more political attention to the issue of artists’ ability to combine work and family life. Previous research has stressed the positive role that the welfare state and family-friendly organizational cultures can play in making the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities easier in practice, especially for women. Strategies to solve work–family conflict at the individual level are only seldom successful, whether from the individual’s own or the society’s point of view. Nevertheless, visual artists, at least in Sweden, are often left to handle their work–life issues like a conflict between their work and family roles alone, given their tendency to be self-employed and their weak position in the social insurance system. Visual artists, furthermore, lack union recognition and show too low levels of collective organization in general to be able to address their problems at a collective level.

To be able to perform their subversive role and challenge conventions, it seems a gender policy capable of impacting the private sphere is needed for artists. Based on the Swedish official gender equality policy, both women artists and artists who are single parents need to be in a position to exercise their right to shape their own lives, in both the private and the public sphere. Besides continuing to encourage women and men to equally share the responsibility for children and housework, it is important to also promote discussion of how the welfare state can meet the needs of those with a more vulnerable situation, and of how the goals of gender equality policy could be linked to cultural policies. In addition, as also our results suggest, there is also a need for further discussion among researchers, representatives of interest organizations, and politicians on what appear to be different expectations placed on men and women regarding their parenting and occupational roles in general.
The findings from both previous research and our own study stress the need for further investigation of work–family conflict among artists. Representing the first attempt of its kind to explore family-related issues among Swedish artists, our study used statistical analysis to examine factors affecting the perceived relationship between work and family among visual artists in Sweden. At the same time, our main variables could not fully account for the experiences of work-family conflict. More studies and analyses are necessary to adequately tackle the question of work–family reconciliation among artists, to gain a deeper understanding of the different factors contributing to work–family conflict in their occupational group.

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References


All translations from the original Swedish by the authors.

The median income of Swedish visual artists in 2007 was SEK 148,000 (approx. EUR 17,213) while the corresponding figure for the total population (aged 20 and over) was SEK 217,900 (approx. EUR 25,343).

According to a recent survey, Swedish visual artists work a total of 47 hours per week on average, of which 67 per cent go to their creative arts work and related administrative work. Only 47 per cent of their total income, however, is derived from their principal arts occupation (Swedish Art Grants Committee 2011).

In 2008, the share of women artists in the country to have received financial assistance from relatives was 29 per cent, compared to 18 per cent of men artists (Swedish Art Grants Committee 2011, p. 79).

In addition to this promise of the universal and comprehensive welfare state as a solution to the conflict between family and work, research has, furthermore, stressed the role of organizational cultures in actively counteracting work–family conflict through reasonable work requirements and flexible working hours (e.g., Bond 2004; Hill et al. 2001; Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness 1999). Whether, however, the conflict can be mitigated by a lenient organizational culture with leeway for flexibility and negotiation, or rather by a strong welfare state through its policies and provisions, it seems difficult in those cases the individuals have to resolve the work–family conflict on their own (cf. Hochschild 1997).

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The proportion of women in the study population (professionally practicing visual artists in Sweden) is 68.5 per cent. This minor source of possible bias in the sample was not adjusted for in light of the overall response rate.

In the survey, respondents who were single/lived alone were asked to skip this question and were therefore coded as internal missing data. These respondents were included in the variable as “single” to explore the effect of single parents compared to the reference category in the regression analysis.

A full-time job in Sweden is defined by law as being at least 35 and at most 40 hours per week.

One in every four women respondents who had children had not taken any parental leave at all, which might point to difficulties women artists have in taking parental leave due to its perceived career-compromising consequences, or simply to artists’ different needs for parental leave compared to the population on average, able as the artists often are to work at home.

The frequency for male respondents doing most in the household is only 29 (7 %). We are aware that this gives us poor basis for evidence regarding this particular category. At the same time, it also points to the precence of the unequal allocation of domestic work among the respondents, as the corresponding percentage for women reporting to do the most in the household was 38 per cent (n=289).