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Postindustrial Fertility Ideals, Intentions, and Gender Inequality:

A Comparative Qualitative Analysis

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### *Abstract*

Fertility ideals remain centered on two children in most postindustrial societies, presenting a puzzle for demographers interested in very low fertility. This paper explores the conditions producing a gap between fertility ideals and intentions among young highly-educated adults in different postindustrial contexts. We employ in-depth interviews to analyze reasoning about fertility ideals and intentions in two countries with very low fertility (Japan and Spain) and two with slightly higher fertility (the U.S. and Sweden). We find that American and Swedish female interviewees are more likely than those in Japan and Spain to cite work-family conflict as a reason for their ideals-intentions gap. Our results also suggest that gender inequality is more important in generating low fertility intentions among highly-educated interviewees in Japan than Spain. Taken together, these findings suggest complexities in how gender inequality affects fertility intentions among the highly-educated in postindustrial contexts.

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Low fertility has been a central concern of demographers and policymakers in Europe and East Asia over the past few decades, and a voluminous literature addresses the causes of postindustrial fertility decline and the possible reasons for cross-national variation. Although no European or East Asian societies now have replacement-level fertility, some countries have witnessed a decline to much lower birth rates than others. An ongoing puzzle is why the “two-child norm” for fertility ideals persists, even in countries that experienced an early decline to sub-replacement fertility (Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014).

This paper aims to contribute to an understanding of this puzzle by analyzing the reasoning young highly-educated partnered individuals offer for their fertility ideals and intentions and for the ideals-intentions gap, if it exists. Fertility intentions lie in-between family size ideals and completed fertility, reflecting constraints that people perceive in reaching their ideals (Bachrach and Morgan 2013; Brinton 2016; Philipov and Bernardi 2011). Analysis of individuals’ reasoning for their ideals-intentions gap can thus shed light on the conditions they perceive as important for the translation of their aspirations into action.

Existing research on fertility ideals generally compares mean ideals with completed fertility, measured at the aggregate level as a country’s total fertility rate or as completed cohort fertility (Goldstein et al. 2003; Philipov and Bernardi 2011; Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014). The underlying question motivating these studies is the extent to which ideal and completed fertility diverge—in short, why ideals are often unrealistically high. This line of research has generated debate about whether ideal family size is a normative construct to which most individuals subscribe, or whether ideals reflect actual underlying aspirations (Philipov and Bernardi 2011).

This paper focuses on highly-educated young adults in four strategically-chosen countries, two with very low fertility (Japan and Spain) and two with sub-replacement but higher fertility (the U.S. and Sweden). The goals of our analysis are three-fold. First, we compare the prevalence of a gap between interviewees' family size ideals and intentions. By asking young partnered individuals about the fertility ideals they hold for themselves, this “anchors the respondent to his or her specific family situation” (Philipov and Bernardi 2011: 500). Second, we compare interviewees' reasoning for fertility ideals vs. intentions. In doing so, we contribute to an understanding of the constraints individuals perceive in translating their ideals into intentions. Third, given the theorized importance of gender inequality in explaining variation in fertility rates across the postindustrial world (Anderson and Kohler 2015; Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider et al. 2015; McDonald 2000a, b; 2006), we pay attention to how country-level gender inequality may be important in generating a gap between women's fertility ideals and intentions. We also compare the reasoning of male and female interviewees. In these ways, we bring a gender perspective to bear on the analysis of fertility intentions and their possible mismatch with ideals.

Our methodological approach differs in significant ways from studies that analyze survey responses from large nationally-representative samples in order to compare ideal or intended family size with completed fertility (either at the individual or national level). In contrast, we draw on more than 200 structured in-depth interviews with purposively-selected samples of partnered young adults in four strategically-chosen countries, querying interviewees about their fertility ideals and intentions and eliciting their reasoning for both. A principal strength of this approach is that we hear interviewees' own articulation of their reasoning. This opens a window into what they view as *desirable*, what they view as *possible*, and *why*. Our approach is consistent with several other demographers' use of in-depth interviews (Bernardi et al. 2008; Miller and Carlson 2016; Miller and Sessler 2012; Randall and Koppenhaver 2004; White et al. 2012). A key strength of using in-depth interviews in demographic research lies in the ability “to get closer to understanding ‘why’ people

behave in certain ways and their own representations of their rationales” (Randall and Koppenhaver 2004: 58).

As in all empirical studies, it is critical that research design decisions reflect underlying theoretical purposes. We selected independent samples of men and women in an equivalent demographic group in each country: highly-educated native-born individuals age 24-35 in marriages or stable cohabitations; all interviewees belong to the country’s majority ethnic group and reside in large urban areas. Consistent with other qualitative research, we do not make claims about the representativeness of our samples. Rather, our use of purposeful sampling is designed to generate equivalent groups of interviewees in each country to facilitate meaningful cross-country comparisons. Our focus on the highly-educated is motivated by two reasons, one theoretical and one empirical. McDonald’s gender equity theory suggests that highly-educated women are likely to face the greatest opportunity costs and the most severe difficulties balancing household and labor market responsibilities when gender inequality is high (McDonald 2013); this is postulated to lower their fertility. Our research design is consistent with McDonald’s viewpoint that “it is likely the gender equity theory can be tested more readily by examining the behavior across countries of women with higher levels of human capital” (2013: 981).<sup>1</sup> In addition, an empirical motivation for focusing on the highly-educated is the prior finding that their fertility intentions are more predictive of actual fertility than the intentions of other groups (Toulemon and Testa 2005).

Our research design offers several additional advantages. First, because we sampled individuals who are in a stable heterosexual partnership and are in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, questions concerning ideal and intended family size are highly relevant for them. In addition, in each society we queried equivalent numbers of men and women. Attention to men’s role in fertility decision-making has been underemphasized in fertility research, even though studies report that men’s intentions have as great an impact on couples’ subsequent childbearing as women’s (Schoen et al. 1999; Thomson 1997).

Second, we carefully designed the interview questions and in our subsequent analysis we strove to remain cognizant of the claims that can and cannot be made from interview data. As prior studies have pointed out, answers about abstract ideal family size are more likely to reflect societal norms than a question asking about personal ideals (Goldstein et al. 2003; Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014). Accordingly, we asked interviewees about fertility ideals for themselves. Also, by simultaneously asking interviewees about their fertility ideals and intentions, we are able to analyze how they compare these as distinct constructs. By eliciting their underlying reasoning, we heard their perceptions of the conditions they felt would facilitate or hinder them in reaching their family size ideal.

Some qualitative sociologists argue that while interviews can reveal “what people think about situations and how they feel about them” (Jerolmack and Kahn 2014: 184), ethnography may be better for elucidating the link between attitudes and actions/events. Other qualitative sociologists assert that interview questions phrased in terms of “under what conditions” an interviewee would do X behavior may have greater predictive validity than questions that ask an interviewee to estimate the likelihood of engaging in a behavior (DiMaggio 2014). We consider our research to be consistent with these views on what interview questions can reveal.

### ***Fertility ideals and intentions***

#### *Fertility ideals*

The study of fertility ideals has a long history in demography (Blake 1974) but demographers have recently shown that there is not necessarily a strong relationship between ideal family size and fertility behavior (Bongaarts 2001; Goldstein et al. 2003; Philipov and Bernardi 2011). Research in Europe (Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014) and the U.S. (Hagewen and Morgan 2005) has demonstrated the persistence of a two-child fertility ideal, despite sub-replacement fertility levels in all postindustrial countries (Morgan and Taylor 2006; Wilson 2004). Sobotka and Beaujouan find convergence to a two-child norm among women across a large number of countries since the late

1970s, driven mainly by declining proportions who say that the ideal number of children for a family is more than two.

Sobotka and Beaujouan also evaluated two claims made by proponents of the “low-fertility trap” (Lutz et al. 2006): that ideal family size is more likely to drop below two children in countries that were forerunners in experiencing below-replacement fertility; and the lower a country’s fertility level, the more probable that ideal family size is below-replacement level. They did not find support for either assertion. Instead, they concluded that “There appears to be no systematic relation between the early spread of low fertility and recent ideal family size.” Even in countries with completed cohort fertility below 1.6, “ideal family size remains very close to the replacement threshold” (2014: 406). The reasons behind the divergence in fertility ideals and completed fertility levels in Europe are not entirely clear. Moreover, little comparative research has investigated whether this divergence exists in other low-fertility regions such as East Asia.

### *Fertility intentions*

Recent demographic research has devoted considerable attention to fertility intentions, which have been shown to have greater predictive power than ideals. This predictive power is greater when the question is addressed to partnered individuals (Schoen et al. 1999; Westoff and Ryder 1977) and involves short-term intentions, e.g. in the subsequent three years (Liefbroer 2005; Miller and Pasta 1995; Philipov 2009; Quesnel-Vallée and Morgan 2003). While most research has focused on women’s intentions, some studies have also analyzed men’s (Puur et al. 2008; Thomson 1997; Toulemon and Testa 2005).

Studies comparing fertility intentions and realized fertility at the individual level are rare, mainly because they require longitudinal data (Harknett and Hartnett 2014; Symeonidou 2000; Toulemon and Testa 2005). Régnier-Lollier and Vignoli (2011) found individuals’ expressed certainty of intentions to be important for fertility outcomes in France and Italy. Moreover, among couples with positive fertility intentions, those in France were more likely to have a birth than those

in Italy. Based on this, the authors suggested the role of French social policies in encouraging fertility.

Harknett and Hartnett (2014) compared women's short-term (three-year) fertility intentions to realized fertility using European Social Survey data for 22 countries. Among women intending to have a birth within a three-year period, an average of 61 percent did so. This rate was substantially lower in Southern European countries, supporting claims of an "inhospitable childbearing environment" that includes low gender equity in households (Harknett and Hartnett 2014: 271; Esping-Andersen et al. 2013; McDonald 2000a). The authors also found intentions to be more closely related to fertility outcomes for mothers than for childless women.

Brinton (2016) posited that individuals in *very* low-fertility European countries place greater weight than those in low-fertility countries on the conditions necessary for fulfilling the intention to have a child in the next three years. She contrasted four very low-fertility countries (Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Italy) with three countries with somewhat more moderate fertility (Belgium, France, and Norway), using the GGS question: "How much would the decision on whether to have or not to have a/nother child during the next 3 years depend on the following?" This GGS question was followed by a list of seven conditions for which respondents indicated level of importance. Almost without exception, respondents in the four countries with very low fertility rates reported feeling greater constraints related to all seven conditions compared to respondents in the other three countries.

### ***Explaining unmet fertility goals: the role of gender inequality***

The gap between ideals or intentions and completed fertility is often conceptualized in the demographic literature as the "unmet demand" for children (Bongaarts 2002; Chesnais 2000; Harknett and Hartnett 2014). Gender inequality has received considerable attention as an explanation (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider et al. 2015; McDonald 2000a, b). As the opportunity costs of focusing on the home have risen with women's increased education and



labor market opportunities, women's ability to simultaneously manage employment and domestic life has become more important. But most households have not "adjusted" to the revolution in women's lives by substantially rebalancing household work between men and women; while men's participation in housework and childrearing has increased in many countries, it has not matched the increase in women's employment hours (Bianchi et al. 2000; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). The "second shift" discussed in Arlie Hochschild's classic work (1989) has thus been suggested by many social demographers as a possible reason for very low fertility. In particular, McDonald's gender equity theory postulates that in very low-fertility countries, fertility aspirations are likely to remain unfulfilled due to a high level of gender inequality that is not adequately addressed by social policy or by more symmetrical gender roles at home. This draws attention to how gender relations may generate a gap between fertility ideals and intentions.

Micro-level empirical research on the relationship between gender inequality and fertility in specific countries has focused especially on how the intended or actual transition to second birth is affected by individual-level factors such as husbands' and/or wives' gender-role ideology, husbands' share of housework, wives' labor force participation, and husbands' and wives' employment type (Adserà 2011; Brodmann et al. 2007; Cooke 2004, 2008; Klesment et al. 2014; Mencarini and Tanturri 2004; Mills et al. 2008; Nagase and Brinton 2017; Oláh 2003; Puur et al. 2008; Torr and Short 2004). Couples who experience a higher degree of gender inequality in the household are predicted to have a lower probability of transitioning to a second birth. Studies have found mixed support for this expectation, and the influence of the macro-level normative, institutional, and policy context of gender relations on micro-level dynamics is not always clear in these studies, despite McDonald's theoretical emphasis on the macro-level context. Macro-level theoretical and empirical work, on the other hand, has focused on how the interplay between gender-role ideology and the institutions that either encourage or deter greater role-sharing between the sexes affects a country's

birth rate (Brinton and Lee 2016; Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Esping-Andersen et al. 2013; Goldscheider et al. 2015; Mills 2010).

Our empirical examination of fertility ideals and intentions in four societies—two with very low fertility and two with slightly more moderate fertility—aims to bring the macro-level gender context into the analysis of fertility ideals, intentions, and the gap between them. In particular, we examine whether individuals’ reasoning for fertility intentions is more reflective of issues regarding women’s labor force participation and work-family conflict in very low- than in more moderate-fertility societies, as gender equity theory would suggest. We are particularly attuned to how couples’ own economic arrangement and women’s employment shape the reasoning men and women in each country offer for their fertility intentions.

#### *Four country contexts: Japan, Spain, the U.S., and Sweden*

Figure 1 shows each country’s total fertility rate over the period 1960- 2012.<sup>2</sup> Japan’s fertility decline began in the late 1960s and has been gradual compared to Spain’s rapid fertility decline, commencing a decade later. The two countries’ patterns contrast with fluctuations in the U.S. and Sweden that eventuated in fertility rates closer to replacement level in 2012, the year we conducted our interviews.

----- Figure 1 about here -----

Table 1 summarizes key characteristics of each country context with respect to gender inequality and attitudes, work hours and economic conditions, and family policies and expenditures. Japan is by far the most gender-inegalitarian, ranking 101 out of the 135 countries included in the World Economic Forum’s report on gender inequality (World Economic Forum 2017). The other three countries rank successively higher (with Spain at 26, the U.S. at 22, and Sweden at 4). The gender wage gap among full-time employees follows a similar pattern, except that Spain exhibits an unusually narrow gap. (Olivetti and Petrongolo [2008] suggest that this can be attributed to a high degree of selectivity for women into the Spanish labor market.) An additional indicator of women’s

labor market position relative to men is the share of all prime-age part-time employees who are female. Here again, Japan has the highest proportion, followed by Spain, the U.S., and Sweden.

----- Table 1 about here -----

To measure the strength of gender essentialism (the belief that men and women are suited to different tasks and social roles), we rely on two attitude questions from the World Values Survey: Disagreement with the statement that “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do” and with the statement that “Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay.” On the former question, Japan is once again an outlier, with a much lower percentage of people (42.7) disagreeing than in the other three countries (with more than 80 percent disagreement). Disagreement with the statement about women’s fulfillment as housewives is greater in the two European countries (Spain and Sweden) than in the U.S., and is much lower in Japan. Thus while Japan’s position as the most gender-essentialist regime among the four countries is consistent, ambivalence in the U.S. over whether women can be fulfilled as housewives suggests heterogeneity in Americans’ attitudes towards married women’s work.

Thus, despite the fact that Japan and Spain have much lower fertility rates than the U.S. and Sweden, the former two countries differ sharply with each other in the degree of gender inequality and the extent of gender-essentialist attitudes. Spain has undergone rapid liberalization in gender-role attitudes over the past two decades (Arpino et al. 2015; Esping-Andersen et al. 2013), and as our qualitative interview data suggest, highly-educated Spanish men’s and women’s assumption that men will be the sole breadwinners in the family now appears to be quite weak.

In terms of work hours and economic conditions, Japan stands apart in that nearly 40 percent of male employees work over 50 hours per week, a far higher percentage than in the other three countries. This renders work-family balance for Japanese men very difficult, consistent with what existing literature has shown (Nagase and Brinton 2017; Takahashi et al. 2014; Tsuya et al. 2013). Men’s long work hours indirectly exert a strong impact on wives; studies consistently find that

Japanese married women do an average of 80 percent of the housework and childcare (Fuwa 2004; Nagase and Brinton 2017; Tsuya and Bumpass 2004). In terms of the economy, Spain is distinct from the other three countries in its level of economic insecurity. Spain's unemployment rate (27.6 percent for people age 25-34 in 2012) is five times higher than Japan's and more than three times higher than in the U.S. or Sweden.

Turning to family policies, at least one-quarter of very young children are in formal childcare or pre-school in all four countries, with this figure reaching nearly 50 percent in Sweden. Japan and Sweden offer a substantial number of weeks of paid childcare leave, but Spain offers only a short paid leave and the U.S. offers none. Public spending on families as a percentage of GDP is the highest in Sweden.

To summarize, Japan is marked by large distinctions between the working conditions of men and women, a high gender wage gap, and strong beliefs about gender essentialism compared to the other three countries. It has a system of childcare leave with partial wage replacement, comparing favorably to the situation in Spain and the U.S. Spain has high unemployment rates for both men and women, but gender-role beliefs are quite egalitarian and are similar to those in the U.S. The U.S. has low unemployment but, like Spain, poor infrastructure in terms of parental leave and public expenditures on families. Sweden has a high degree of gender equality and generous benefits for families.

These features of the four countries constitute important elements of the context within which young partnered adults form their fertility intentions. Japan clearly has the greatest gender inequality and Sweden the least. Spain does not necessarily fit the dominant characterization of very low-fertility societies in the gender equity literature, as Spanish gender-role beliefs are more egalitarian than would be predicted (although structural conditions make work-family balance difficult). The U.S. is also a "mixed" case, with gender-role beliefs that are quite non-gender

essentialist but nevertheless prioritize mothers' care of children, and with no paid family leave system.

We turn now to our interview data to explore the correspondence between the fertility ideals and intentions of young highly-educated adults in each country and the underlying reasoning individuals offer.

### ***Data and methods***

Our data consist of over 200 in-depth interviews with highly-educated, urban, heterosexual, native-born adults age 24-35 years in Japan, Spain, the U.S., and Sweden who are in stable partnerships (marriages or long-term cohabitations) with no or at most one child. We define higher education as having completed post-secondary education (with either a vocational or university degree). We chose the age range 24-35 years to capture the life-cycle stage when fertility planning is highly salient. Our research design represents a departure from the individual case-based (person-centered) methodology implicit in survey data analysis, where the effects of individual- and contextual-level characteristics on individual intentions and behaviors in one or a small number of countries are assessed in a multiple regression framework. Instead, we ask interviewees in countries in each of four distinct cultural settings (Northern Europe, North America, Southern Europe, and East Asia) about their fertility ideals and intentions and follow each question with an open-ended prompt to elicit individuals' reasoning for their answers. This approach generates responses that reflect interviewees' location within the context of couplehood and within the larger social, cultural, economic, and policy context.

We conducted approximately 50 structured in-depth interviews in each country in 2012, resulting in 207 interviews in total. Each country sample is stratified by sex (equally distributed) and life-course stage (individuals in a union and childless, and individuals in a union with one child). While we did not specify an age range for first child, nearly all are under 5 years old. We measured

union status based on the prevailing patterns in each country. For Spain and Sweden, we considered both cohabitators and married individuals to be eligible for the sample, given that stable long-term cohabitation is prevalent in each country and childbearing is not necessarily dependent on marriage (Dominguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martin 2013; Oláh and Bernhardt 2008). In our sampling of cohabitants, we only included those who defined their partnership as stable. The vast majority of these interviewees have been in their current cohabitation for at least 2 years.

Among highly-educated young people in the U.S., serial cohabitation is common and cohabitation is generally viewed as a “trial stage” before deciding to marry (Sassler and Miller 2011). Childbearing within the context of cohabitation is quite rare among highly-educated young Americans (Wilcox et al. 2015). Cohabitation has gradually increased in Japan but remains much less common than in most Western countries, and non-marital childbearing constitutes less than 5 percent of all Japanese births (Hertog 2009; Rindfuss et al. 2004). For these reasons, stable partnership status was defined as marriage for the purposes of sampling in Japan and the U.S. In all four countries, male and female samples were collected separately, and none of the interviewees are in unions with each other.

Interviewees were recruited through an indirect snowball sampling procedure using independently selected initial contacts (White et al. 2012), each of whom could refer up to two potential interviewees. Snowball sampling is an effective method for recruiting respondents for in-depth interviews when the research design calls for a homogenous sample of people with similar characteristics, as ours does (Coast et al. 2009). It does, however, put the burden on the researcher to check for obvious sources of bias. Accordingly, we conducted a number of checks to assess whether our samples are skewed in any unexpected way.

First, we used quantitatively coded responses to ten World Values Survey questions in the interview to perform cluster analysis (using both single- and median-link methods) to test for potential clusters in each country sample. The absence of a hierarchical structure in any of the

samples indicated that individuals did not cluster into distinct groups. Second, we compared mean fertility ideals and intentions between each country sample and a sample we constructed from nationally representative data for that country after controlling for as many of the relevant demographic characteristics as possible (age, sex, education, union status, urban residence, etc.). These comparisons reassured us that the fertility ideals and intentions of individuals in our data set are generally in line with country-level data.<sup>3</sup> We also compared attitudes on the World Values Survey questions we embedded in the interview protocol to results from nationally representative data. Finally, we compared the economic arrangement of the couples to which our interviewees belong with the economic arrangement of partnered adults in the same demographic group in each country.

While these comparisons of our interviewees with nationally representative samples in each country suggest that our data are not skewed in any identifiable way, it is nevertheless important to remember that the goal of qualitative demography is not to draw population-level inferences from relatively small samples. Rather, the strength of qualitative in-depth interviews in demography lies in the greater leverage they provide for understanding “perceptions, processes, constraints, dilemmas and uncertainties,” all of which are more difficult to grasp using survey research methods (Coast et al. 2009: 9).

#### *Interview protocol and procedures*

The interview covered five principal topics: characteristics of the interviewee’s and partner’s current (or most recent) job and workplace, fertility ideals and intentions, household and childcare division of labor (actual and anticipated), gender-role attitudes and ideology, and knowledge and attitudes concerning work-family policies. This paper draws mainly on three sets of questions: 1) “How many children in total would you ideally like to have? Why?” (fertility ideals and reasoning); 2) “How many do you think you will actually have? Why?” (fertility intentions and reasoning); and 3) “If there is a discrepancy between your ideal number and what you think will happen, could you

explain the reason?” (perceived conditions or obstacles). By simultaneously asking about individuals’ ideal and intended number of children and their reasoning for both, we are able to capture their thinking about these dimensions of fertility plans at one point in time. Because all interviewees are currently in heterosexual unions and are either married or in a cohabitation they define as stable and long-term, intentions are expressed in the context of the couple. Interviewees’ age range and, in the case of those with one child, the age range of the child (between less than one year to five years old) also means that their fertility intentions are for the near-term. An additional question in the interview asked about the interviewee’s goals in general over the next three years, followed by a question asking about any obstacles or conditions he or she perceived in reaching those goals. These questions naturally elicited interviewees’ further reflections on fertility plans.

The interview protocol was written in English and translated into Japanese, Spanish, and Swedish by a native speaker of each respective language. We back-translated question wordings to check for accuracy. We also inserted the same interviewer prompts in each country’s interview protocol. After conducting pilot interviews in each country, we finalized the interview protocol through extensive discussions among the research team members.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted by a small number of native speakers in each country whom we trained as interviewers for the project. All were highly-educated and in a similar age range as the interviewees. Interviews were carried out in individuals’ homes or workplaces or in public spaces such as cafés or restaurants, with no other family or household members present. Interviews typically lasted 40 minutes to 1.5 hours. All interviews were voice-recorded with the consent of the interviewee and were later transcribed by a native speaker. Interviewees also filled out a socio-demographic background sheet and current personal and household income information.

### *Coding and analysis*

We constructed structural codes to demarcate sections of the interview. After coding the numeric answers for fertility ideals and intentions, we inductively coded the reasons interviewees



offered for their ideals, intentions, and the ideals-intentions gap (if any). Coding was done using the qualitative software packages *Dedoose* and *Nvivo*. We also wrote detailed memos during the coding process. The richness of our data with regard to many aspects of individuals' circumstances such as their employment situation, their views on the "best" work-family arrangement for raising small children, their current and desired household division of labor and childcare, and their expectations of their partner allowed us to situate individuals' fertility reasoning within the couple context.

## ***Findings***

### *Fertility ideals and intentions*

While the central focus of our paper is on the reasoning individuals offer, we first look briefly at the magnitude of ideals and intentions and the prevalence of an ideals-intentions gap among interviewees in each country.

Fertility ideals in all of the country samples center on two children, consistent with the "two-child norm" reported by Sobotka and Beaujouan (2014). To examine intentions we grouped interviewees into: 1) those who reported wanting less than two children ('0 or 1', '1', or '1 or 2'; no interviewees indicated they definitely intended to have no children); and 2) those whose intention is two or more children. While we emphasize caution in interpretation due to the small sample sizes of an in-depth interview study such as this, we also take the opportunity to explore differences in intentions by sex and parity of interviewees. While some studies have analyzed fertility intentions across different life course stages and parities, few have compared men's and women's intentions. An exception is Liefbroer (2009). Using panel data from the Netherlands, Liefbroer found that men's fertility intentions are slightly lower than women's, a difference that disappeared once he restricted the comparison to married individuals. He also found fertility intentions to be significantly higher for individuals age 30 and 35 with one child rather than no children, controlling for age, sex, marital status, education, and working hours. Consistent with this, Harknett and Hartnett (2014)

found that controlling for women's age, those with children were more likely than those without children to state the definite intention to have a child in the next three years.

Figure 2 shows the pattern of fertility intentions for each of our country samples and, within each sample, the patterns by sex and parity. Given Japan's and Spain's very low total fertility rates, we could expect more interviewees in these countries than in the U.S. and Sweden to have fertility intentions below two children. This is true for the Japanese sample but not for the Spanish (Panel A). Panel B shows the pattern by interviewee sex. In all four country samples, more men than women express the intention to have less than two children. Finally, Panel C shows the pattern by parity of the interviewee. Here too we see a consistent pattern across the countries: interviewees with one child are less likely to express the intention to stop at one child. This mirrors Liefbroer's (2009) and Harknett and Hartnett's (2014) findings.

----- Figure 2 about here -----

Figure 3 shows the proportion of male and female interviewees in each country with a fertility ideals-intentions gap. We define a gap as a higher ideal than intended number of children, suggesting unmet fertility goals.<sup>4</sup> We would expect the number of interviewees with an ideals-intentions gap to be larger in the two very low-fertility countries than in the U.S. and Sweden. Our interviewees' reports only partially support this expectation. More than half of Japanese and Spanish interviewees express a gap, but this is also the case in the U.S. There is less evidence of an unmet fertility demand among Swedish interviewees.

----- Figure 3 about here -----

Exploration of gender patterns in interviewees' ideals-intentions gap shows that more women than men in the Spanish, American, and Swedish samples express a gap, but not so in Japan. Japanese male interviewees stand out (Figure 2, Panel B) as being the most likely among all the groups to have sub-replacement fertility intentions. Japanese female interviewees have particularly low ideals compared to those in the other three countries (not shown here), and this combination of

low ideals and intentions translates into fewer of them expressing a gap. Spanish interviewees tend to have both higher ideals and higher intentions than the Japanese. Comparison of nationally representative data on fertility intentions in the two countries is consistent with our sample data (for Japan, see National Survey on Family and Economic Conditions; for Spain, Fertility and Values Survey). Reflecting this, it was common for Spanish interviewees to say “two will be okay” in response to the fertility intentions question, indicating that they would be happy enough with two children even if they preferred three. A much more common expression among Japanese interviewees was “I think we will manage to have two,” implying that two children was their *upper* limit. In fact, 15 Spanish interviewees expressed an intention to have *more* than 2 children (2-3, 3, or 3+); this was true only for four Japanese interviewees.

To summarize, our exploration of interviewees’ fertility ideals, intentions, and the ideals-intentions gap is consistent with much of the survey-based literature but also yields some surprises. As in quantitative research, interviewees’ fertility ideals in all four countries center on two children. Fewer interviewees overall in the U.S. and Sweden have an ideals-intentions gap. But we did not expect to find that American and Swedish female interviewees would be as likely to voice an ideals-intentions gap as female interviewees in the two very low-fertility societies, Japan and Spain (Figure 3). On the face of it, this seems inconsistent with gender equity theory, unless American and Swedish women have unusually high fertility ideals (which is not the case in our samples). Female interviewees in Japan, the most gender-unequal society in our research, are the least likely among women in the four countries to express an ideals-intentions gap, partly due to the fact that they hold particularly low ideals to begin with.

We turn now to the paper’s central focus: comparing how interviewees in the four countries explain the reasoning behind their ideals, intentions, and the gap. We first briefly examine the similarities and differences in patterns of reasoning we discern across the four settings. We then consider whether discussions of work-family conflict and gender inequality are more evident in

interviewees' reasoning in the very low-fertility societies, which we would expect based on gender equity theory.

*Reasoning for ideals and intentions: country similarities and differences*

We find broad consistency in interviewees' explanations of their fertility ideals, both across country samples and across male and female interviewees. The most common reason interviewees gave for their ideals was the desire to replicate their own or their partner's natal family experience. However, among interviewees who were only children, the desire to have two children often surfaced. This was accompanied by their descriptions of the two-child ideal as "normal" or "standard," corresponding to many demographers' interpretation of the two-child ideal as a social norm. Another frequently mentioned reason for wanting more than one child was the belief that an only child would be lonely. A third type of reasoning for ideal family size was the preference for a certain gender combination. In most cases this reflected the desire to have a boy and a girl, in line with findings from quantitative research (see e.g. Andersson et al. 2006).

There were also many common themes in the reasoning expressed by interviewees across the four countries when they discussed situations and constraints underlying their fertility intentions. Financial considerations were dominant in every country, despite the fact that all of our interviewees are highly-educated and the large majority have middle- or upper-middle class incomes for their age group (except in Spain, where close to forty per cent of our interviewees are either unemployed or have an unemployed partner). Interviewees' concern with the cost of raising children is consistent with other studies' findings (Schoen et al. 1997; Werding 2014) and with demographers' emphasis on parents' interest in postindustrial countries in "child quality" (Becker and Lewis 1973; Easterlin 1976). In Spain and Sweden, financial concerns were generally expressed in terms of the importance of securing a stable job. This mirrors literature on the two countries that mentions the norm of achieving a stable income before having children (Ahn and Mira 2001; Andersson 2002). In Sweden, wage replacement during parental leave is currently set at 80% but only permanent workers are

guaranteed the right to return to the same or a similar job (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008). This constitutes a strong incentive to secure a stable, well-paying job before moving to the parenthood stage.

Housing (Kulu and Vikat 2007; Vignoli et al. 2013), education (De la Croix and Doepke 2004), and childcare costs are all mentioned in the fertility literature, and we found some country patterning with regard to the prevalence of these themes in interviewees' comments. On balance, the mix of specific child-associated costs raised by interviewees was not unexpected given country-level conditions. For instance, educational costs were raised exclusively by Japanese and American interviewees. This is not surprising, given that in Spain and Sweden free primary and secondary education is guaranteed and college education is very affordable. The cost of childcare was voiced as one of the main worries by Japanese, Spanish, and American interviewees in relation to plans for a second child, especially if they anticipated that both members of the couple would be in the labor force. The absence of this concern in Swedish interviewees' discourse likely reflects the fact that Sweden offers high-quality state-subsidized childcare and paid childcare leave (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008), whereas the U.S. and Spain lack such policies. Many Japanese interviewees expressed worry over the long waiting lists in urban areas for public childcare, anticipating that this might make it necessary to pay a substantial amount for private childcare or to rely on grandparents.

*Fertility intentions and the ideals-intentions gap: the role of gender inequality*

What is the role of gender inequality and work-family conflict in shaping interviewees' reasoning for fertility intentions in the two very low-fertility countries and the two low-fertility ones? Our most general observation is that gender inequality concerns per se were barely evident in the reasoning offered by male and female interviewees in any of the countries. This led us to "dig deeper" into why this is the case, and to examine whether and how gender relations are reflected in interviewees' discourse. As the most gender-unequal society among our four country cases, Japan is a particularly important case to examine.

Notably, virtually no Japanese female interviewees mentioned heavy housework or childcare responsibilities as limiting their fertility intentions. Yet almost all of them reported elsewhere in the interview that they did a very large share of household work (about 80% on average), consistent with quantitative research on the household division of labor in Japan (Brinton 2017; Nagase and Brinton 2017; Tsuya and Bumpass 2004). To understand the role of gender relations in shaping Japanese fertility intentions, we looked more closely at the economic arrangement of couples; this proved helpful in understanding gendered concerns in the other three countries as well.

Table 2 shows that among Japanese female interviewees, fewer were working full-time and more were working part-time at the time of the interview than in the other countries. While not shown here, more Japanese interviewees (of both sexes) in full-time dual-earner couples had sub-replacement fertility intentions (under two children) than other Japanese interviewees. Among the male interviewees in such couples, many stressed that their own long work hours forestall their ability to contribute to housework and childcare. As some men put it, “it [housework and childcare] all falls on her.” These men generally held more gender-egalitarian attitudes than the Japanese men in our sample whose wives worked part-time or had left the labor market. Some of the Japanese men in full-time dual-earner couples mentioned that they wanted to be supportive of their wife’s desire to work, saying that she enjoyed developing a career and they did not expect her to be a stay-at-home wife. But the possible positive effect on fertility intentions from these men’s more egalitarian attitudes was generally negated by the impact of their long work hours on reducing their household labor share (see Nagase and Brinton 2017 for a quantitative analysis). Similarly, Japanese women who expressed their commitment to full-time work often had higher ideals than intentions, saying that they simply would not be able to “have it all.” This reflected their perception of the likely impossibility of combining full-time employment and childrearing, especially for more than one child.

----- Table 2 about here -----

In sum, we found that instead of explicitly questioning the highly gender-unequal household division of labor or citing it as a reason for lower fertility intentions, nearly all Japanese female interviewees took gender specialization in the household as a “given.” This tended to translate into lower fertility intentions in couples where the wife worked full-time. The remaining majority of Japanese women were adapting their employment situation to their fertility intentions, either leaving the labor force or cutting back to part-time employment. Nevertheless, these women’s intention to work less or not at all often exacerbated the couple’s concern with the cost of raising children, given that they would be relying only on men’s income. Thus despite the anticipation of having more time for childrearing, their fertility intentions were also low. This analysis of the interplay between wives’ employment and fertility intentions illustrates the dynamics behind the higher number of interviewees in Japan than in the other countries who expressed sub-replacement fertility intentions (Figure 2, Panel A).

Our analysis of the interviews suggests that gender considerations in Spain, the other very low-fertility country in our study, take quite a different form. While many Spanish interviewees with low fertility intentions discussed women’s employment, they framed it in a distinctly different way than the Japanese interviewees. Most Spanish interviewees expressed the belief that women as well as men should invest in their careers and strive to accumulate job experience in order to avoid future unemployment and economic instability. Spanish interviewees stressed that both partners in the couple would need to be employed in order to provide economic support for the family. While self-fulfillment through work was mentioned by a number of Spanish women, this was in addition to—not in place of—the economic responsibility they felt towards the household.

Table 2 shows that more Spanish than Japanese interviewees are indeed in couples where both partners work full-time. Moreover, the employment situation for the remainder of interviewees is quite different in the two country samples. While all wives in our Japanese sample who are not full-time workers are either in part-time work or are non-employed, more Spanish female

interviewees are unemployed than working part-time. None of the women in the Spanish sample are stay-at-home partners, nor did any express the desire to be non-employed over the long term (in contrast to some Japanese female interviewees). Similarly, all of the Japanese men in our sample work full-time whereas the Spanish sample includes men who work part-time or are unemployed.

The interpretations offered by our Spanish interviewees for their fertility intentions and the ideals-intentions gap, together with their actual employment situation as shown in Table 2, vividly illustrate the high level of labor market uncertainty in Spain. Characteristics of our Spanish sample are consistent with quantitative data showing that economic insecurity is a major phenomenon even among highly-educated young adults (OECD 2017). For most couples, the idea that women will not work once they become mothers is simply not realistic, nor is it considered desirable. In contrast, our Japanese interviews reflect the fact that highly-educated men and women in that country are well-positioned in the labor market and have a much lower risk of unemployment or precarious employment than their Spanish counterparts.<sup>5</sup> The effect of labor market conditions on the fertility goals of highly-educated Japanese interviewees asserts itself instead through long working hours as shown in Table 1, which limit men's availability for housework and childcare and pose an either-or decision between employment and babies for many married women (Schoppa 2006; Takahashi et al. 2014).

Coupled with the rapid changes in gender-role ideology in Spain discussed earlier in the paper, the Spanish economic context pushes couples strongly towards a dual earner-dual carer model. We suspect that the embrace of this model is one reason for the higher fertility intentions of our Spanish than Japanese interviewees. Another line of reasoning that we heard from some Spanish male interviewees but no Japanese was that the couple might consider having more children if he commits more time to household labor and childcare. Some Spanish female interviewees indeed express their desire for this, in contrast to Japanese female interviewees' general implicit acceptance of a highly skewed household division of labor.



Turning to the U.S. and Sweden, gender equity theory would suggest that fertility intentions will more closely match ideals, especially for women. In cases where they do not, we would expect that interviewees would not express gender inequality considerations to the same extent as in very low-fertility societies. Our analysis of the interviews in these two countries reveals some unexpected insights into this.

As Table 1 showed, gender-role attitudes measured for nationally representative samples in the World Values Survey suggest that Americans feel more ambivalence on average toward married women's employment than Spanish or Swedish respondents. Within our own data, most American male and female interviewees state their assumption that women will be the primary caregivers. Many American female interviewees say they do not expect their husbands to equally share childrearing or to adapt their employment to parenthood. Interviewees stressed that high-quality childcare is difficult to find and, when available, very costly. This leads some of the American wives in full-time dual-earner couples (Table 2) to anticipate leaving the labor force to become stay-at-home mothers for at least some period of time. Among wives who plan to continue working full-time, many expressed worry about potential work-family conflict and the risk of incurring a motherhood wage penalty (Budig and Hodges 2010; Budig et al. 2015; Waldfogel 1997).

While the work-family dilemma is not as stark as for Japanese women, American female interviewees expressed their active engagement and anxiety over it to a much greater extent than Japanese female interviewees did. Our findings from the U.S. sample echo the American gender inequality literature's discussion of a "stalled revolution" in gender roles (England 2010). The work-family conflict expressed by American female interviewees is consistent with the emphasis of gender equity theory on not only the importance of gender egalitarianism in the household division of labor but on the support of social institutions and policies for combining work and family (McDonald 2000a, 2006, 2013). The lack of such institutional support for American dual-earner families is

painfully reflected in interviewees' (especially women's) perceptions of how difficult and expensive the work-family balancing act is likely to be.

Sweden is the case where gender equity theory would predict the least discussion by interviewees about work-family conflict. Our interviewees' employment situations (shown in Table 2) are consistent with the common image of Sweden as having a predominance of dual-earner couples. Swedish social norms prescribe that both men and women should engage in paid employment (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008), and many of the Swedish interviewees mentioned that neither they nor their partners could imagine staying home. Similar to Spanish interviewees' reasoning, Swedish interviewees often raised concerns about not having stable full-time jobs, although in the Swedish context this was mentioned by many more women than men (contrasting with concern among both sexes in Spain). As mentioned earlier, this may reflect Sweden's generous parental leave scheme, which incentivizes women to secure a well-paying job prior to becoming pregnant. Importantly, job security after leave (i.e. the right to return to the same or an equivalent job with the same employer) is only guaranteed for workers with a permanent contract.

The majority of Swedish male interviewees had permanent job contracts, and the rest were either self-employed or in a temporary contract but working full-time. In contrast, fewer than half of Swedish female interviewees were in jobs with a permanent contract; almost as many had temporary contracts, and the remainder were self-employed or unemployed. A number of Swedish female interviewees also expressed worries about the negative attitude some employers have towards women with care responsibilities and voiced fears of becoming caught in the "part-time [employment] trap." Some also voiced concern over whether it would take so long to acquire a stable job that their fecundity might be affected and they would "run out of time" to become pregnant.

## *Discussion and implications*

Demographers have established that the two-child fertility ideal persists even in postindustrial countries where total fertility has fallen well below population replacement level. Drawing on over 200 structured in-depth interviews with purposive samples of highly-educated young partnered adults in two societies with very low fertility (Japan and Spain) and two with more moderate fertility (the U.S. and Sweden), we examine the reasoning individuals offer for the gap between their fertility ideals and intentions. Our endeavor differs from survey-based research, as we elicit individuals' own perceptions about what they feel is facilitating or hindering the fulfillment of their near-term fertility goals.

Gender equity theory posits that very low-fertility countries are characterized by a relative lack of support for women's dual roles in the household and labor market. Our qualitative interviews allow us to examine the expectation that highly-educated women in such societies will have particularly low fertility intentions and will be likely to explain these intentions with reference to the lack of social policy and household support for work-family balance.

Japan and Sweden, when viewed at the macro-level, would seem to be textbook cases for gender equity theory. On the one hand, Japan is characterized by very low fertility, a high degree of gender inequality in the labor market, strong gender-essentialist beliefs that prioritize women's role as wives and mothers, and unusually long work hours for full-time workers. Sweden, on the other hand, is characterized by relatively higher fertility, less gender inequality and less gender essentialism, more moderate work hours, and family policies and state expenditures that facilitate a dual earner-dual carer model. Spain and the U.S are intermediate cases, with the macro-level picture mixed with regard to which country is more gender-egalitarian.

Our analysis produces both expected and unexpected findings with regard to how gender inequality seems to shape fertility plans. As expected, more interviewees in Japan and Spain have an ideals-intentions gap than in the U.S. and Sweden. But on the other hand, female interviewees in the

U.S. and Sweden are as likely to have a gap as those in Spain, and even fewer Japanese women have a gap. Our in-depth interview data are instrumental in illuminating this unexpected finding.

We found that more female interviewees in the American and Swedish samples than in the Japanese and Spanish samples explained their fertility intentions with reference to existing or anticipated work-family conflict. On the face of it, this contradicts gender equity theory's assumption that such reasoning would be more apparent in the two very low-fertility societies. But ironically, the conflict expressed by female interviewees in the U.S. and Sweden seems to be due precisely to the fact that they expect to participate as continuously as possible in the labor market and to develop their careers.

In the U.S., many female interviewees voice hope but uncertainty as to whether they will be able to "have it all" (combining work and family). Their expectations are tempered by the ideology of intensive motherhood (Blair-Loy 2005), which surfaces in the commonly-voiced assertion of American male and female interviewees that women will play the primary role in childrearing. Without high-quality, reasonably priced childcare or paid childcare leave, highly-educated American couples face expensive market-based childcare options or women's exit, temporary or otherwise, from the labor force (Stone and Lovejoy 2004). These limited options seem to lie behind the frustrated fertility ideals of many American female interviewees.

In Sweden, the strong social norm that men and women should both engage in paid employment appears to put pressure on women to develop a career that will ensure their ability to secure a permanent contract. Perceived difficulties in obtaining a permanent job temper some Swedish female interviewees' fertility intentions, as they foresee delaying their first or second birth in order to become established in a career. This leads to our first general conclusion: Our interviews suggest that the Swedish and American environments generate a different type of work-family conflict for highly-educated women than in gender-unequal countries such as Japan.

Turning to our interview data from Japan and Spain, the two very low-fertility countries in our study, we see different underlying gender dynamics from the U.S. and Sweden and also from each other. Our interviews with Japanese women strongly suggest the taken-for-grantedness of a highly skewed household division of labor. Only in a minority of Japanese couples does the wife plan to continue full-time employment, and in those couples fertility intentions are particularly low. Most Japanese male interviewees whose wives work full-time express doubt that they themselves would be able to strike a better work-family balance in order to help their wives if the couple proceeds to have a second child. In this sense, the pressure that working conditions exert on Japanese men clearly exacerbates work-family conflict.

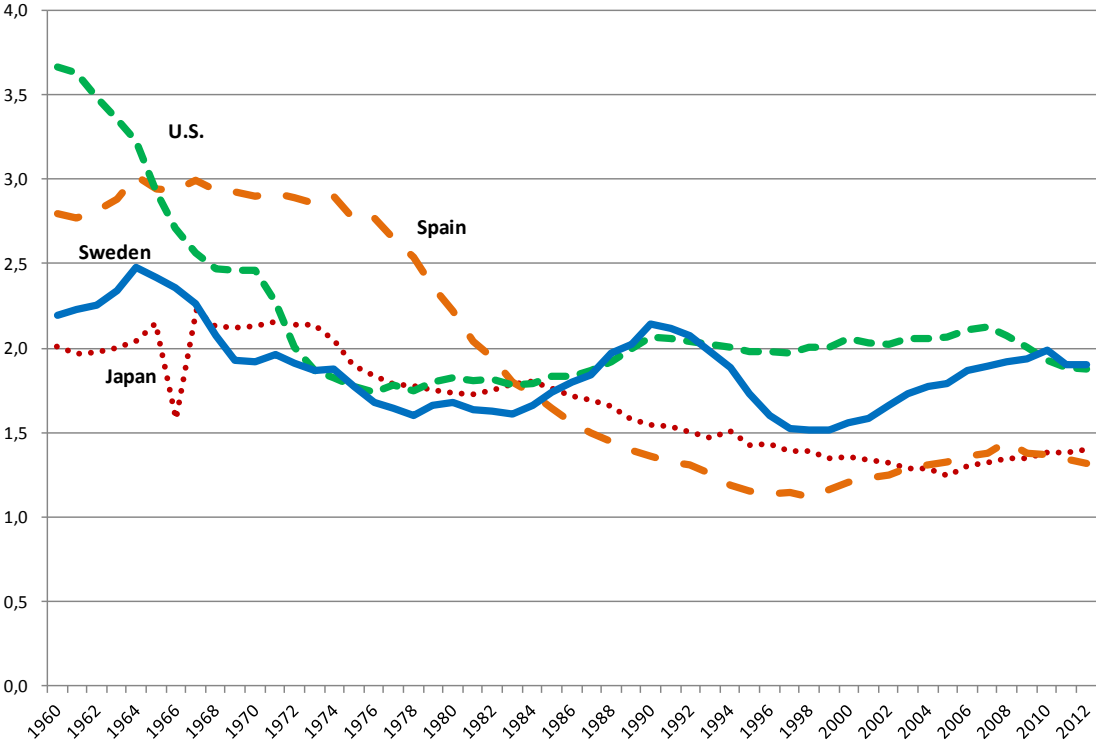
In contrast, women's employment in the other very low-fertility case (Spain) is generally supported by progressive gender-role norms. Some male interviewees state that in order to have two or three children they need to contribute more to household labor. Both male and female interviewees express the view that women's employment is necessary for the household given the poor macro-economic environment. Thus, work-family conflict does not surface among Spanish interviewees to the extent that gender equity theory would predict. This leads to our second general conclusion: Our interviews suggest that the dynamics of gender inequality may be more important in generating lower fertility intentions among the highly-educated in Japan than in Spain. This conclusion suggests distinctiveness among very low-fertility countries.

Our analysis simultaneously demonstrates the limitations and the possibilities of using in-depth interviews to study fertility decision-making. On the one hand, critics of interview data point out that researchers should exercise caution in drawing a direct link between what people *say* during an interview and what they subsequently *do* (Jerolmack and Kahn 2014). Only by re-interviewing people at a later time can one determine whether intentions have translated into action. But in this respect, survey data on intentions do not necessarily represent an advantage over interview data unless they too involve a follow-up.

On the other hand, in-depth structured interviews offer the opportunity to hear individuals' interpretations of their own situation and the conditions they think will help or hinder the ability to reach their goals. When analyzed carefully, such interviews can also reveal the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life. The Japanese interviews we conducted are particularly illustrative in this regard. Our realization that Japanese female interviewees do not explicitly trace their low fertility intentions to issues related to gender inequality in the home or in the broader society led us to revisit the interviews in their entirety.<sup>6</sup> Only by doing this could we see that the majority of these interviewees were triangulating between their husbands' long work hours, their own choice of leaving the labor force or continuing to work, fertility intentions, and housework and childcare responsibilities. It is doubtful that survey data could have led to this analysis of the mechanisms through which the gendered nature of employment conditions and the implicit acceptance of highly gendered household roles conditions fertility goals. Similarly, our data reveal the very different nature of the concerns motivating low fertility among highly-educated Japanese and Spanish interviewees.

This study's findings suggest that the influence of gender inequality is more complicated in postindustrial settings than existing theory would suppose. We hope that future studies will continue to explore innovative ways to compare the formation of fertility intentions across low- and very low-fertility settings and also across the large number of very low-fertility countries.

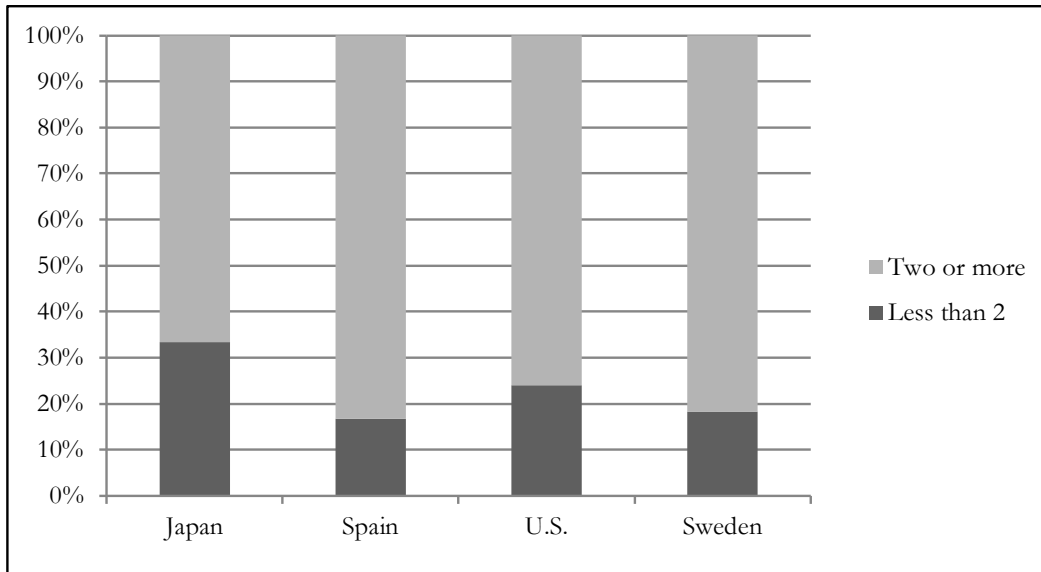
Figure 1. Total Fertility Rate in Four Countries: 1960-2012



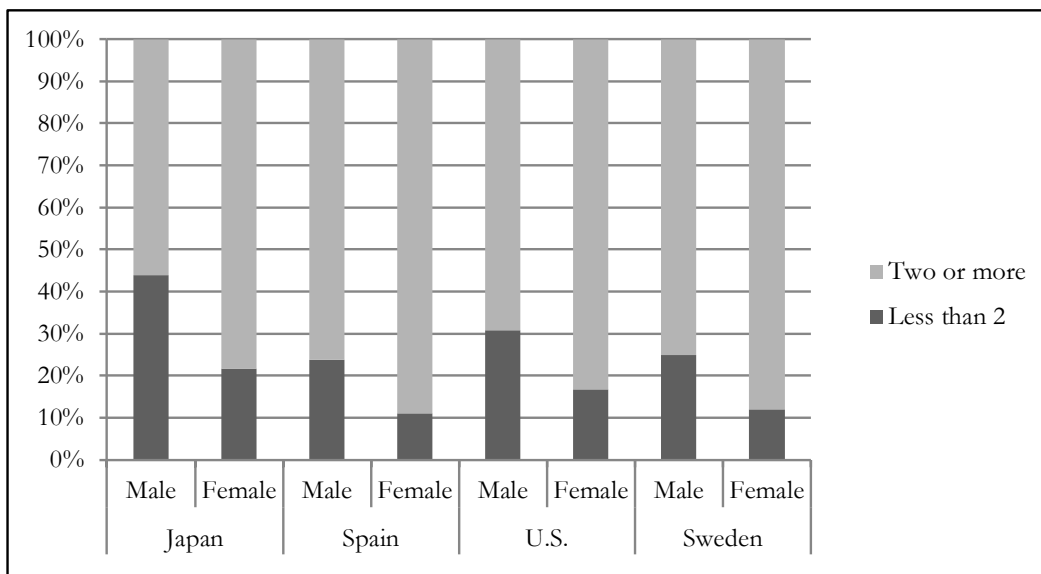
Source: Human Fertility Database.

Figure 2. Proportion of Interviewees with Sub-Replacement Fertility Intentions:  
Japan, Spain, U.S., and Sweden

Panel A Country comparisons

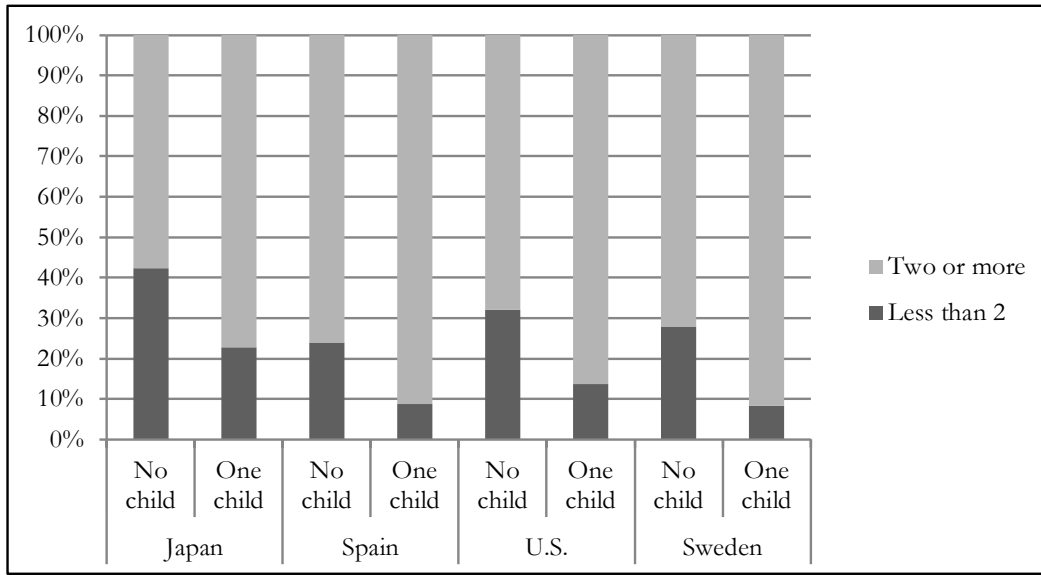


Panel B Comparisons by interviewee sex





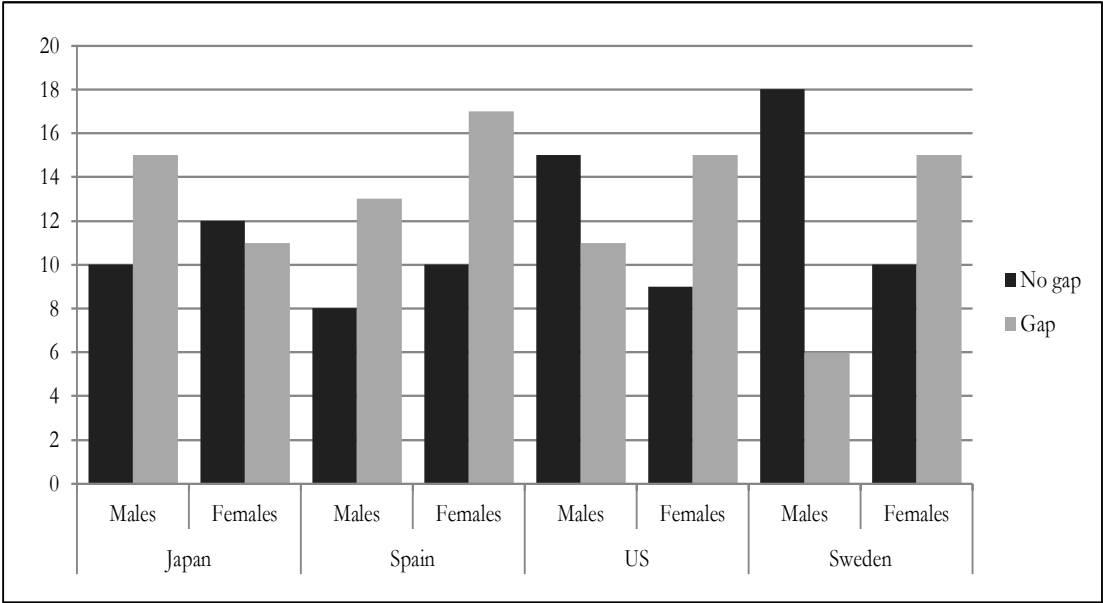
Panel C Comparisons by interviewee parity



Source: Project interviews.

Note: Seven interviewees did not express intentions and are therefore excluded from this figure.

Figure 3. Number of Interviewees with a Fertility Ideals-Intentions Gap, by Sex: Japan, Spain, U.S., and Sweden



Source: Project interviews.

Note: Seven interviewees did not express intentions and five did not express ideals; they are therefore excluded from this figure.

Table 1. Four Country-Level Contexts for Fertility: Japan, Spain, U.S., and Sweden

		Japan	Spain	U.S.	Sweden
Gender inequality and attitudes	Country ranking (1-135) on Gender Gap Index (GGI) [1]	101	26	22	4
	Median gender wage gap for full-time employees (median female wages/median male wages) <sup>i</sup>	73.5	91.3	80.9	84.9
	Share of all employees age 25-54 working part-time who are female	83.5	80.3	75.2	69.0
	Percent disagreeing with the statement: “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do” [2]	42.7	81.7	86.6	89.7
	Percent disagreeing with the statement: “Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay” [2]	7.5	45.1	24.2	48.4
Work hours and economic conditions	Percent of male employees working more than 50 hours/week, 2013	38.8	8.9	15.5	1.9
	Unemployment rate, men and women age 25-34 <sup>ii</sup>	5.4	27.6	8.4	8.0
Family policies and expenditures	Percent of children aged 0-2 enrolled in formal childcare and pre-school, 2010	25.9	37.9	25.8	46.7
	Childcare leave (in weeks) with partial or full wage replacement	52	0	0	52
	Public expenditure on families as % of GDP	1.7	1.5	1.2	3.6

Source: All data except as otherwise indicated are for 2011 or 2012 and are from the 2013 OECD database <http://stats.oecd.org/>. [1] World Economic Forum. The GGI is a composite measure of gender inequality based on economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. [2] World Values Survey (WVS), Wave 6. [3] For Japan and Sweden: Human Fertility Database; for the U.S. and Spain: National Vital Statistics. [4] OECD Social Protection and Well-Being: Better Life Index table.

<sup>i</sup> The gender wage gap is unadjusted and is defined as the ratio of the median earnings of women divided by the median earnings of men. Data refer to full-time employees and the self-employed. For explanation of Spain’s low gender wage gap, see text and also Olivetti and Petrongolo (2008).

<sup>ii</sup> Male and female unemployment rates for this age group are very similar; we report the total unemployment rate.

Table 2. Couples' Employment Situation: Japan, Spain, U.S., and Sweden

	Japan	Spain	U.S.	Sweden
Dual-earner couple (both partners working)	45	36	47	42
Both employed full-time	20	29	41	30
Both employed part-time	0	1	0	4
Male works part-time	1	3	1	2
Female works part-time	24	3	5	6
Dual-earner couple (unemployed female)	0	11	4	2
Dual-earner couple (unemployed male)	0	5	0	2
Single-earner couple (employed male)	6	0	2	1
Single-earner couple (employed female)	0	0	0	0
Both partners unemployed	0	1	0	0
Unknown employment status for one partner	0	0	0	3
Number of interviews	51	53	53	50

Source: Project interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> An additional reason to focus on the highly-educated is that some demographers point to this group as the usual forerunners of fertility behaviors in a country (Skirbekk 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Given its relationship with tempo effects (Bongaarts 2001; Bongaarts and Feeney 1998), the TFR is not without problems as a measure of country-level fertility. Nevertheless, it is the most widely available indicator and is generally used for cross-country comparisons.

<sup>3</sup> These comparisons are available upon request from the first author.

<sup>4</sup> The few cases of a "reverse" gap (intentions higher than ideals) are merged into the "no gap" category.

<sup>5</sup> Unemployment and precarious employment among Japanese young adults are heavily concentrated among graduates of high schools and specialized two-year training schools (Brinton 2011).

<sup>6</sup> We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to do this.