

# Postindustrial Fertility Ideals, Intentions, and Gender Inequality: A Comparative Qualitative Analysis

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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 large literature addresses the causes of postindustrial fertility decline and the possible reasons for cross-national variation. Although all European and East Asian societies now have sub-replacement fertility, some countries have witnessed a decline to much lower birth rates than others. A lingering 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).

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, Lutz, and Testa 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 article contributes to an understanding of this puzzle by analyzing the reasoning that highly educated young 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 translating their aspirations into action.

We focus 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 United States and Sweden). Our goals are three-fold. First, we compare the prevalence of a gap between interviewees' family size ideals and intentions. Asking young partnered individuals about the fertility ideals they hold for themselves "anchors the respondent to his or her specific family situation" (Philipov and Bernardi 2011: 500). Second, we compare interviewees' reasoning for fertility ideals versus intentions, thereby identifying 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, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 2015; McDonald 2000a, b; 2006), we investigate how country-level gender inequality may generate 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). We draw on more than 200 structured in-depth interviews with purposively selected samples of partnered young adults in four 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, Klärner, and von der Lippe 2008; Miller and Carlson 2016; Miller and Sassler 2012; Randall and Koppenhaver 2004; White, Judd, and Poliandri 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 the research design reflects underlying theoretical purposes. We selected independent samples of men and women in an equivalent demographic group in each country: highly educated native-born individuals aged 24–35 in marriages or stable cohabitations, all of whom 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 in 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 behaviour 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 are 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 answers about personal ideals (Goldstein, Lutz, and Testa 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 can analyze how they compare these as distinct constructs. By eliciting their underlying reasoning, we recorded 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 Khan 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 engage in a certain behavior may have greater predictive validity than questions that ask an interviewee to estimate the likelihood of engaging in a behavior (DiMaggio 2014). Our interview protocol is consistent with both of these views on what interview questions can reveal.

## Fertility ideals and intentions

### 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, Lutz, and Testa 2003; Philipov and Bernardi 2011). Research in Europe (Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014) and the US (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 have reported 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, Skirbekk, and Testa 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. They did not find support for either assertion. Instead, they concluded, “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” (Sobotka and Beaujouan 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. Our article aims to address these issues.

### 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—for example, 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 experience a birth than those in Italy. Based on this finding, 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 three years, an average of 61 percent did so. This proportion 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, Arpino, and Baizán 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 more moderate fertility (Belgium, France, and Norway), using the Gender and Generations Survey (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 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, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 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 a more important factor. 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 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, Esping-Andersen, and Güell 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 progressing to a second birth. Studies have found mixed support for this expectation. This may be because the influence of the macro-level normative, institutional, and policy context of gender relations on micro-level dynamics is not consistently articulated 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, Arpino, and Baizán 2013; Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 2015; Mills 2010).

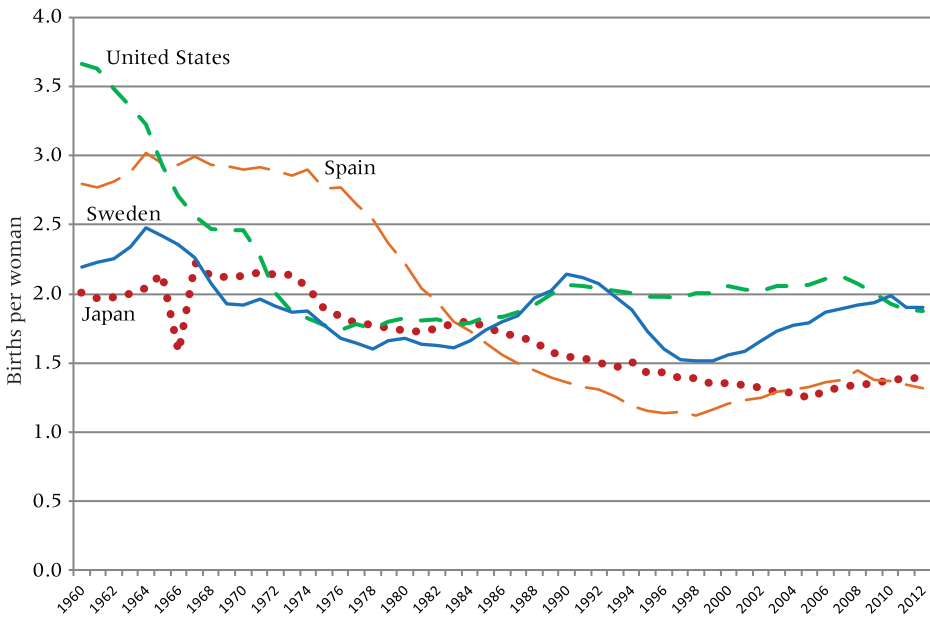
Our empirical examination of fertility ideals and intentions in four societies—two with very low fertility and two with slightly more moderate fertility—aims to bring the macro-level gender context into the analysis of fertility ideals and intentions and the gap between them. In particular, we examine whether individuals' reasoning for fertility intentions is more reflective of issues regarding women's labor force participation and work/family conflict in very-low-fertility than in low-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 US, and Sweden

Figure 1 shows the total fertility rate for each of our target countries over the period 1960–2012.<sup>2</sup> Japan's fertility decline began in the late 1960s and has been gradual compared to the rapid decline in Spain, which commenced a decade later. The two countries' patterns contrast with fluctuations in the US and Sweden that resulted in fertility rates closer to replacement level by 2012, the year we conducted our interviews.

Table 1 summarizes key characteristics of each country 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 US 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's is the share of all prime-age part-time employees who are female.

**FIGURE 1 Total fertility rate in Japan, Spain, United States, and Sweden: 1960–2012**



SOURCE: Human Fertility Database.

**TABLE 1 Four country-level contexts for fertility: Japan, Spain, United States, and Sweden**

	Japan	Spain	US	Sweden
<b>Gender inequality and attitudes</b>				
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>a</sup>	73.5	91.3	80.9	84.9
Percent of all employees aged 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
<b>Work hours and economic conditions</b>				
Percent of male employees working more than 50 hours per week, 2013 [3]	38.8	8.9	15.5	1.9
Unemployment rate, men and women aged 25–34 <sup>b</sup>	5.4	27.6	8.4	8.0
<b>Family policies and expenditures</b>				
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 percent of GDP	1.7	1.5	1.2	3.6

<sup>a</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 Olivetti and Petrongolo (2008).

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

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] OECD Social Protection and Well-Being, 2013: Better Life Index table.

Here again, Japan has the highest proportion, followed by Spain, the US, and Sweden.

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 fraction of people (42.7 percent) 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 than in the US, 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 US over whether women can be fulfilled as housewives suggests heterogeneity in Americans' attitudes toward married women's work.

In short, despite the fact that Japan and Spain have much lower fertility rates than the US 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, Esping-Andersen, and Pessin 2015; Esping-Andersen, Arpino, and Baizán 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 research 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 married Japanese 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 aged 25–34 in 2012) is five times higher than Japan's and more than three times higher than in the US 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 approaching 50 percent in Sweden. Japan and Sweden offer a substantial number of weeks of paid childcare leave, but Spain offers only unpaid childcare leave (although paid maternity leave) and the US has no mandated paid childcare leave. Public spending on families as a percentage of GDP is 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 US. Spain has high unemployment rates for both men and women, but gender-role beliefs are quite egalitarian and are similar to those in the US. The US has low unemployment but, like Spain, poor structural conditions 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 are critical elements of the context in which young partnered adults form their fertility intentions. Japan clearly has the greatest gender inequality, 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 US is also a mixed case, with gender-role beliefs that are clearly not 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 highly educated young adults in each of these countries and the underlying reasoning individuals offer.

## Data and methods

Our data consist of over 200 in-depth interviews with highly educated, urban, native-born adults aged 24–35 years who are in stable heterosexual partnerships (marriages or long-term cohabitations) with no children or at most one child. We define higher education as the completion of post-secondary education (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). In all four countries, male and female samples were collected separately, and none of the interviewees are in unions with each other. While we did not specify an age range for the first child, nearly all are under five 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 both countries and childbearing is not necessarily

dependent on marriage (Dominguez-Folgueras and Castro-Martin 2013; Oláh and Bernhardt 2008). In our sampling of cohabitants, we included only those who defined their partnership as stable. The vast majority of these interviewees have been in their current cohabitation for at least two years.

Among highly educated young people in the US, serial cohabitation is common and cohabitation is generally viewed as a trial stage before deciding to marry (Sassler and Miller 2011). Childbearing during cohabitation is quite rare among highly educated young Americans (Wilcox, Wolfinger, and Stokes 2015). Cohabitation has gradually increased in Japan but remains much less common than in most Western countries, and non-marital childbearing accounts for 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 US.

Interviewees were recruited through an indirect snowball sampling procedure using independently selected initial contacts (White, Judd, and Poliandri 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 homogeneous sample of people with similar characteristics, as ours does (Coast, Mondain, and Rossier 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 way.

First, we used quantitatively coded responses to ten World Values Survey (WVS) 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 WVS questions we embedded in the interview protocol to results from nationally representative data. Finally, we compared the economic arrangement of couples 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, Mondain, and Rossier 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 article 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. An additional question asked about the interviewee’s life goals for the next three years, followed by a question 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 language. We back-translated questions to check for accuracy. We also inserted identical interviewer prompts in each country’s interview protocol. After conducting pilot interviews in each country, we finalized the protocol through extensive discussions among research team members.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted by a small number of native speakers in each country whom we trained 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 between 40 and 90 minutes. 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

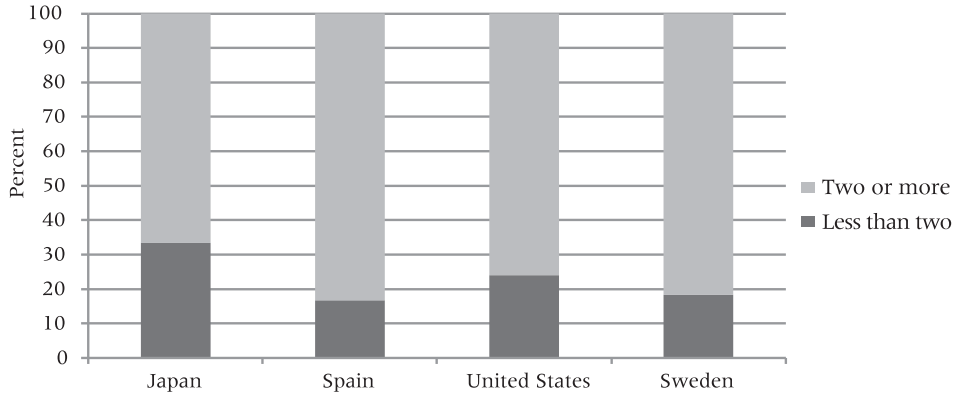
While our central focus is on the reasoning individuals offer, we first look briefly at the magnitude of ideals and intentions and the prevalence of an ideals/intentions gap among interviewees in each country.

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 our in-depth interview study, we 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 in their early 30s with one child rather than no children, controlling for sex, marital status, education, and working hours. Consistent with this, Harknett and Harknett (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.

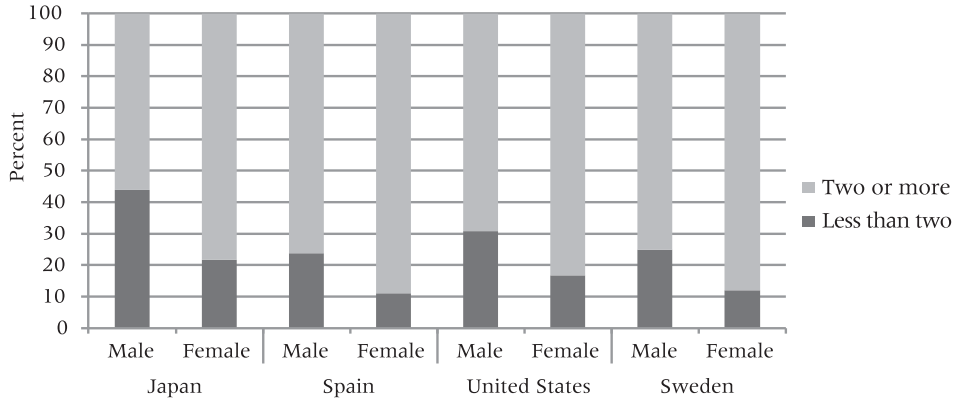
Figure 2 shows the pattern of fertility intentions for each of our country samples and, within each sample, the patterns by sex and parity. Given Japan's and Spain's very low total fertility rates, we could expect more

**FIGURE 2 Proportion of interviewees with intentions for two or more vs. less than two children: Japan, Spain, United States, and Sweden**

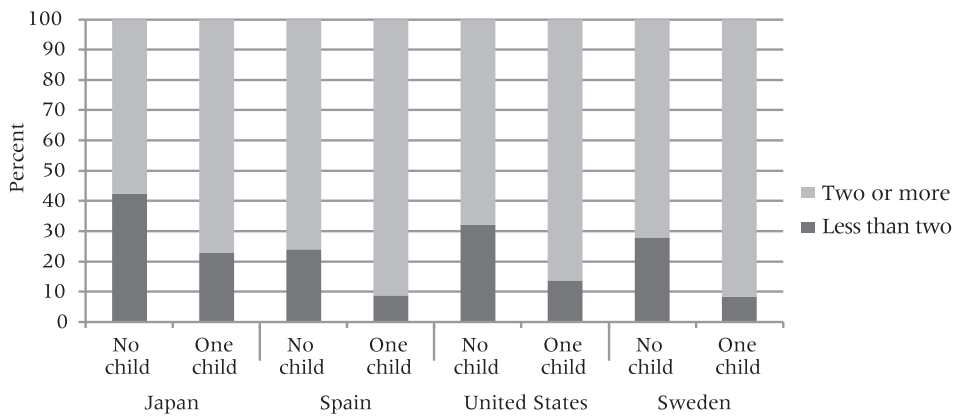
Panel A. Country comparisons



Panel B. Comparisons by interviewee sex

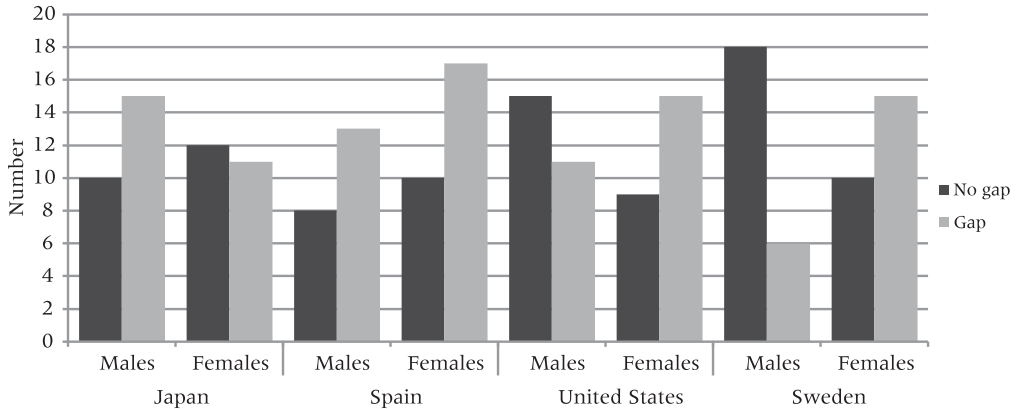


Panel C. Comparisons by interviewee parity



NOTE: Seven interviewees did not express intentions and are therefore excluded from these figures.  
SOURCE: Project interviews

**FIGURE 3** Number of interviewees with or without a fertility ideals/intentions gap, by sex: Japan, Spain, United States, and Sweden



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

SOURCE: Project interviews

interviewees in these countries than in the US 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 countries, more men than women express the intention to have less than two children. Finally, Panel C shows the pattern by interviewee parity. 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 the findings of Liefbroer (2009) and Harknett and Hartnett (2014).

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 such a gap to be larger in the two very-low-fertility countries than in the US 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 US. There is less evidence of an unmet fertility demand among Swedish interviewees.

Exploration of gender patterns in interviewees' ideals/intentions gap shows that more women than men in Spain, the US, and Sweden express a gap, but not so in Japan. Japanese female interviewees have particularly low ideals compared to those in the other three countries (not shown), and this combination of low ideals and low intentions translates into fewer of them expressing a gap. Furthermore, Japanese male interviewees stand out (Figure 2, Panel B) as being the most likely among all the groups to have sub-replacement fertility intentions. 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 content 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 two children (2–3, 3, or 3+), while this was the case for only 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 US 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 finding seems inconsistent with gender equity theory, unless American and Swedish women have unusually high fertility ideals (which is not the case in our samples). And 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 our 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 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 (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 circumstances 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 40 percent of our interviewees are either unemployed or have an unemployed partner). Interviewees’ concern with the cost of raising children is consistent with the findings of other studies (Schoen et al. 1997; Werding 2014) and with demographers’ emphasis on parents’ interest 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 research 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 percent, but only permanent workers are guaranteed the right to return to the same or a similar job (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008). This factor constitutes a strong incentive to secure a stable, well-paying job before having a child.

Housing (Kulu and Vikat 2007; Vignoli, Rinesi, and Mussino 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. 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 among Swedish interviewees likely reflects the fact that Sweden offers high-quality state-subsidized childcare and paid childcare leave (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008), whereas the US 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 countries, 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 percent 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

**TABLE 2 Couples' employment status: Japan, Spain, United States, and Sweden**

	Japan	Spain	US	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) <sup>a</sup>	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

<sup>a</sup>Even in the case of unemployment, a couple is considered to be dual-earner if the interviewee explains that the unemployed partner is typically in the labor force.

SOURCE: Project interviews.

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 prevent them from contributing 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 of 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 fertility 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.

In sum, 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, women’s fertility intentions were low. This analysis of the interplay between women’s employment and fertility intentions illustrates the dynamics behind the higher proportion 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 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 toward the household.

Table 2 shows that more Spanish than Japanese interviewees are 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 not to be in the labor force over the long term (in contrast to some Japanese females). 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, 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 young couples in Spain, the idea that women will not work once they become mothers is 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 childbearing for many married women (Schoppa 2006; Takahashi et al. 2014).

Coupled with the rapid changes in gender-role ideology in Spain discussed earlier, the Spanish economic context pushes couples strongly toward 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 males but no Japanese males 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 outcome, in contrast to Japanese female interviewees' implicit acceptance of a highly skewed household division of labor.

Turning to the US 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 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 WVS suggest that Americans feel more ambivalence on average toward married women's employment than Spanish or Swedish respondents. In 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 share childrearing equally 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 women 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 women 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, Misra, and Boeckmann 2015; Waldfogel 1997).

While the work/family dilemma is not as stark as for Japanese women, American female interviewees expressed their anxiety over it to a much greater extent than Japanese female interviewees. Our findings from the US sample echo the discussion in the American gender inequality literature 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 not only on the importance of gender egalitarianism in the household division of labor but also 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 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 a stable full-time job, although in Sweden this was mentioned by many more women than men (in contrast with concern among both sexes in Spain). As mentioned earlier, this may reflect Sweden's generous parental leave scheme, which provides an incentive for women to secure a well-paying job before becoming pregnant.

As we mentioned earlier, job security after leave (i.e., the right to return to the same or an equivalent job with the same employer) is guaranteed only 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 toward 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 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 US 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, shorter work hours, and family policies and state expenditures that facilitate a dual-earner–dual-carer model. Spain and the US 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 US and Sweden. But on the other hand, female interviewees in the US 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.

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 US 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 US, 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 both men and women should 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. Our first general conclusion from our interviews is 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. Ironically, work/family conflict in the former two societies, both of which have somewhat more moderate fertility, is more pronounced in individuals' narratives because of the greater taken-for-grantedness of mothers' employment.

Turning to our interview data from Japan and Spain, the two very-low-fertility countries, we see different underlying gender dynamics from the US and Sweden and also from each other. Our interviews with Japanese women strongly suggest that a highly skewed household division of labor is taken for granted. Only in a minority of Japanese couples does the woman plan to continue full-time employment, and fertility intentions among those

couples 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 were 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 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 unfavorable 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 Khan 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 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 weighing the consequences of their husbands' long work hours, their own choice between leaving the labor force and continuing to work, fertility intentions, and housework and childcare responsibilities. It is doubtful whether 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 influence fertility goals. Similarly, our data reveal the very different nature of the concerns motivating low fertility among highly educated Japanese vs. 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.

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1 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).

2 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.

3 These comparisons are available upon request from the first author.

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

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

6 We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to do this.

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