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POSTINDUSTRIAL FERTILITY IDEALS, INTENTIONS, AND GENDER INEQUALITY

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Abstract

Fertility ideals remain centered on two children in most postindustrial societies, representing a puzzle for demographers interested in very low fertility. This paper draws on detailed qualitative data to compare fertility ideals, intentions, and reasoning in two very low-fertility countries (Japan and Spain) and two countries with slightly higher fertility (the U.S. and Sweden). By doing so, we are able to examine the conditions that produce a gap between fertility ideals and intentions in different postindustrial contexts. Consistent with gender equity theory, we find that a fertility ideals-intentions gap is more common in the very low-fertility countries. But paradoxically, work-family conflict is at least as likely to surface as a reason for the ideals-intentions gap in the U.S. and Sweden as in Japan and Spain. This shows the complexity of how gender inequality operates in the postindustrial context.

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POSTINDUSTRIAL FERTILITY IDEALS, INTENTIONS, AND GENDER INEQUALITY

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 societies in Europe or East Asia 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 continues to persist, even in countries such as Austria, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Switzerland that experienced an early decline to sub-replacement fertility (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research [Japan] 2016; Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014).

This paper contributes to the understanding of this puzzle by comparing individuals’ family size ideals to their concurrent fertility intentions and examining the reasoning individuals offer for the ideals-intentions gap, if it exists. Fertility intentions lie in-between family size ideals and completed fertility, as intentions more closely reflect the constraints or obstacles people face in reaching their ideals (Bachrach and Morgan 2013; Brinton 2016; Philipov and Bernardi 2011). Analysis of the ideals-intentions link sheds light on whether individuals anticipate being able to translate their aspirations into action. This focuses attention on the underlying societal circumstances that may be creating the gap between fertility ideals and fertility behavior (completed fertility).

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 question motivating these studies is the extent to which ideal and completed fertility diverge—in short, why ideals often appear to be unrealistically high. This line of research has generated debate about

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whether ideal family size is a normative construct to which most individuals subscribe or whether ideals more accurately reflect actual underlying aspirations, even though such aspirations may remain unfulfilled (Philipov and Bernardi 2011). Our paper adopts a different approach, analyzing whether individuals simultaneously express an ideals-intentions gap and, if so, how they articulate the reasons behind this gap.

We focus on 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 examine the prevalence of a gap between individuals' own family size ideals and intentions. In asking 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 individuals' reasoning for fertility ideals vs. intentions. In doing so, we contribute to an understanding of how macro-level constraints condition the translation of individuals' ideals into intentions. Third, given the theorized importance of gender inequality in explaining country-level variation in fertility in 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 gender inequality may be of particular importance in generating a gap between women's fertility ideals and their intentions. In this way 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 most research on fertility ideals and intentions. Existing research is based on the analysis of survey questions directed towards a large number of respondents, and is typically oriented towards comparing ideal or intended family size with completed fertility (either at the individual or national level). Instead, we employ an

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approach that queries individuals about their ideal and intended fertility as well as their underlying reasoning for both. We elicit individuals' reasoning using an open-ended format. In order to gain an understanding of the couple-level context and the macro-level economic and social environment in which individuals are situated, we query individuals about their reasoning by using structured in-depth interviews carried out in parallel fashion across the four targeted countries. A principal strength of this approach is that we are able to elicit interviewees' own articulation of their reasoning with respect to fertility ideals and intentions. This provides a window into both what they view as *desirable* and what they view as *possible* for themselves. The disadvantage is that the collection of in-depth interviews is necessarily a labor- and time-intensive endeavor. Accordingly, our interviews are limited to approximately 50 in each of the four countries. For this reason, we pay particular attention to the comparison of quantifiable data from the interviews (ideal and intended fertility as well as a number of interviewee characteristics such as labor market status and attitudes on several standard gender-role questions) with data from national-level surveys. This establishes the validity of each sample.

In addition to using data collected explicitly for the purpose of analyzing the relationship between ideals and intentions, our research design offers several additional advantages. In each society we queried equivalent numbers of coupled men and women. Attention to men's role in fertility decision-making has been underemphasized in much fertility research, even though studies report that men's intentions have as great an impact on couples' subsequent childbearing as wives' (Schoen et al. 1999; Thomson 1997). By including men as well as women, we are able to examine possible gender differences in the ideals-intentions gap and in the reasoning underlying it in each of the target countries.

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Second, to facilitate meaningful cross-country comparisons, 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 stable cohabitations or marriages who are members of the majority ethnic group and reside in large urban areas. We focus on the highly-educated for two reasons, one empirical and one theoretical. Empirical research has suggested that the fertility intentions of highly-educated individuals tend to be more predictive of actual fertility than intentions among other groups (Toulemon and Testa 2005). On a theoretical level, our interest in McDonald's gender equity theory also directs us to the highly-educated, as women in this group 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). Additionally, some demographers point to the highly-educated as forerunners of fertility behaviors (Skirbekk 2008).

By carefully designing our sample selection, we are able to make country-level comparisons that "control" for demographic variation; such variation could otherwise easily render cross-cultural comparisons of in-depth interview responses unsystematic. Moreover, we specifically chose individuals who are in the family formation stage and who have already established a stable partnership with an individual of the opposite sex. This makes questions concerning ideal and intended family size highly relevant for all of our interviewees.

Third, our interviews asked specifically about individuals' fertility ideals for *themselves*, not about the number of children the ideal family should have. Many previous studies have analyzed survey data on the latter question alone, which is more likely to reflect societal norms than a question that asks about individual desires (Goldstein et al. 2003; Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014).

Fourth, by asking individuals about their fertility ideals and intentions at the same point in time, we

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are able to analyze how they think about each of these as distinct constructs that differ from each other. This spurs individuals to simultaneously think about the fertility goals they *hope* to achieve and the fertility goals they think they actually *will* achieve. Querying their underlying reasoning reveals their perception of the conditions they feel will make it feasible or infeasible to reach their family size ideal. Finally, we carefully controlled question wording and interviewer prompts across countries. This eliminates the occurrence of country differences that may emerge due to variation in the way that questions were asked and probes were made.

Fertility ideals and intentions

Fertility ideals

The study of fertility ideals has a long history in demography (Blake 1974). But in recent years, demographers have 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). Notably, research in Europe (Sobotka and Beaujouan 2014) and the U.S. (Hagewen and Morgan 2005) has shown the persistence of a two-child fertility ideal, even though postindustrial countries are uniformly experiencing sub-replacement fertility (Morgan and Taylor 2006; Wilson 2004). This point is reinforced by Sobotka and Beaujouan's investigation (2014) into the persistence of a two-child family size ideal in Europe. The authors compiled data across a large number of European countries on changes since 1979 in the family size ideals held by women of reproductive age. Despite some differences in question wording across surveys, the focus was on the number of children women view as appropriate for the ideal family (not specifically for themselves). Sobotka and Beaujouan found remarkable convergence across Europe to a two-child norm, driven mainly by the declining proportions of women expressing an ideal of more than two children. Moreover, they

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found considerable stability in the two-child ideal since the late 1980s. Over 60 percent of women in much of Europe expressed a two-child ideal in 2005-12, the most recent period included.

Sobotka and Beaujouan also examined two claims made by proponents of the “low-fertility trap” (Lutz et al. 2006): countries that were forerunners in experiencing below-replacement fertility should be more likely to see ideal family size drop below two children; and the lower a country’s fertility level, the more probable it will be that ideal family size is below-replacement level. They did not find support for either of these assertions. Instead, they concluded that “There appears to be no systematic relation between the early spread of low fertility and recent ideal family size” and even in countries with completed cohort fertility below 1.6, “ideal family size remains very close to the replacement threshold” (2014: 406).

In sum, Sobotka and Beaujouan’s analysis demonstrated a divergence between family size ideals and actual fertility levels in most European countries. This leaves open the question of why such divergence has emerged and, at least at present, is being maintained. Moreover, very little comparative research has been conducted to investigate if this divergence between fertility ideals and behaviors in low-fertility societies in Europe is also occurring 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. The predictive power of intentions is enhanced if the question is addressed to partnered individuals (Schoen et al. 1999; Westoff and Ryder 1977) and is worded so as to capture individuals’ short-term intentions, e.g. in the subsequent three years (Liefbroer 2005; Miller and Pasta 1995; Philipov 2009; Quesnel-Vallée

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and Morgan 2003; Toulemon and Testa 2005). While most research has focused on women's fertility intentions, some studies have also analyzed men's intentions (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) used longitudinal data from the French and Italian Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS) to compare fertility intentions for the subsequent three years with whether a birth occurred during that time period or not. They found that certainty of intentions was important in both countries. Among couples with positive fertility intentions, those in France were more likely to have a birth than those in Italy. As a possible explanation, Régnier-Lollier and Vignoli suggested the role of French social policies in encouraging fertility. The influence of women's employment status also varied across the two countries, with public vs. private sector employment increasing French but not Italian women's probability of having a birth. The educational level of both a woman and her partner had a positive effect on the realization of fertility intentions in Italy but not in France.

Harknett and Hartnett (2014) compared women's short-term (three-year) fertility intentions to realized fertility using data from the European Social Survey for 22 countries. They found that compared to the number of women intending to have a birth within a three-year period in each country, the average proportion who did so was 61 percent. This rate was substantially lower in Southern European countries, supporting claims of an "inhospitable childbearing environment" in these countries (Harknett and Hartnett 2014: 271), including low gender equity in households

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(Esping-Andersen et al. 2013; McDonald 2000a). They also found that fertility intentions were more closely related to fertility outcomes for mothers than for childless women.

Brinton (2016) posited that individuals in European countries characterized by extremely low fertility would place greater weight than individuals in other low-fertility countries on the conditions necessary for fulfilling their 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). To do so, she used 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 question in the GGS was followed by a list of seven conditions for which respondents indicated level of importance. She found that almost without exception, respondents in countries with the lowest fertility rates (Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Italy) reported feeling greater constraints related to all seven conditions compared to respondents in Belgium, France, and Norway. The certainty of fertility intentions (whether positive or negative) was also much greater in the latter three countries.

Brinton's study is one of the few that has attempted to examine possible gender differences in the constraints people perceive in fulfilling their fertility intentions; she posited that men in very low-fertility countries would be more attuned to constraints in their fertility intentions than women, due to the former's perception of their role as breadwinners. She did not find support for this hypothesis. In fact, men's and women's level of perceived constraints was equivalent in four of the seven countries under study. Only in Germany did men perceive a higher level of constraints for their fertility intentions than women. In Italy and France, two countries with quite different total fertility rates, women perceived greater constraints.

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Explaining unmet fertility goals: the role of gender inequality

The gap between ideals or intentions and completed fertility is often discussed in the demographic literature in terms of the “unmet demand” for children (Bongaarts 2002; Chesnais 2000; Harknett and Hartnett 2014). Gender inequality has received considerable attention as an explanation for why couple’s fertility intentions may remain unmet (McDonald 2000a, b; Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider et al. 2015). As the opportunity costs of focusing entirely on the home and children 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. Most households have not “adjusted” to the revolution in women’s lives through a substantial rebalancing of 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 targeted by many social demographers as a possible reason for very low fertility. In particular, McDonald’s gender equity theory postulates that very low-fertility countries are ones where fertility aspirations are likely to remain unfulfilled due to a high level of gender inequality, especially in the home. This draws attention to how gender relations may generate a gap between fertility desires and intentions.

Micro-level empirical research on the relationship between gender inequality and fertility in specific countries has focused on how the intended or actual transition to second birth is affected by various individual-level factors such as husbands’ and/or wives’ gender-role ideology, husbands’ share of housework, wives’ labor force participation, and husbands’ and wives’ type of employment (e.g. permanent or temporary contract, full- or part-time work; see Adserà 2011; Brodmann et al.

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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). The prediction is that couples who experience a higher degree of gender inequality, especially in their household roles, will have a lower probability of transitioning to a second birth. But how the macro-level normative and institutional context of gender relations affects the micro-level is not always clear.

Operating at the macro-level are the dominant gender-role ideology of a society and the institutions that support or subvert it, such as family policies and labor market structure. Macro-level theoretical and empirical work 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). But empirical analysis at the micro-level of the couple rarely explicitly incorporates this macro-level variation.

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 individuals' reasoning for fertility intentions to see whether such reasoning 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

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Figure 1 shows the total fertility rate (TFR) for the four countries over the period 1960-2012. While the TFR is not without problems as a measure of country-level fertility, given its reliance on tempo effects (Bongaarts 2001; Bongaarts and Feeney 1998), it is the most widely available indicator and is the one generally used for cross-country comparisons. The figure demonstrates the decline to very low fertility in Japan and Spain. Japan's fertility decline began in the late 1960s and has been the most gradual among the four countries under study. Spain's fertility decline commenced a decade later and was more rapid. Spain's fertility rate experienced some recovery after 2000 but remained very low at the end of the period under consideration, consistent with Japan's. The two countries' patterns contrast with fluctuations in the U.S. and Sweden that eventuated in fertility rates closer to replacement level in both countries as of 2012.

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

Table 1 summarizes key characteristics of each country context with respect to gender inequality and attitudes, work norms and economic conditions, and family policies and expenditures. Japan has by far the lowest gender equality ranking, ranking 101 out of the 135 countries included in the World Economic Forum's composite measure of gender inequality (the Gender Gap Index). 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. This can be attributed to a high degree of selectivity for women into the Spanish labor market (Olivetti and Petrongolo 2008). 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.

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To measure the strength of gender essentialism (the belief that men and women are suited to different tasks and social roles; Charles and Grusky 2004; Ridgeway 2009), 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, where more than 80 percent of people disagree. 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. 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 or not suggests some heterogeneity in Americans' attitudes towards married women's work.

It bears remarking that despite the fact that Japan and Spain have much lower fertility than the U.S. and Sweden, the former two countries are sharply different in terms of the level of gender inequality and the extent of gender-essentialist attitudes. Spanish gender-role norms are much closer to the U.S. than to Japan; Japan and Sweden represent the extremes among the four countries. This is consistent with research showing that Spain has undergone rapid liberalization in gender-role attitudes over the past two decades (Arpino et al. 2015; Esping-Andersen et al. 2013). As our qualitative interview data will show, highly-educated Spanish men's and women's assumption that men will be the sole breadwinners in the family is now quite weak.

In terms of work norms and economic conditions, Japan stands apart by the fact that nearly 40 percent of male employees work over 50 hours per week, a percentage far higher than in the

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other countries. This renders work-family balance for Japanese men very difficult, consistent with what the literature has shown (Nagase and Brinton 2017; Takahashi et al. 2014; Tsuya et al. 2013). Studies consistently show that married women in Japan shoulder around 80 percent of the housework and childcare burden on average (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) 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, and the figure is nearly 50 percent in Sweden. Japan and Sweden offer a substantial number of weeks of paid childcare leave, but Spain and the U.S. offer none. Public spending on families as percent of GDP is higher in Sweden than in the other three countries.

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, which compares favorably to the situation in Spain and the U.S. Spain stands out among the four countries as having high unemployment for 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. Sweden has a high degree of employment protection, generous benefits for families, and a high degree of gender equality that is reflected in non-gender-essentialist beliefs.

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These features of the four countries constitute important elements of the context within which young partnered adults form their fertility intentions. Among the four, Japan clearly has the greatest gender inequality and Sweden the least. Spain does not necessarily fit the conception of low-fertility societies portrayed in the gender equity literature, as 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 interviewee data to examine the correspondence between the fertility ideals and intentions of young highly-educated adults in each country and the reasoning that informs them.

Data and methods

Our data consist of over 200 in-depth interviews with highly-educated, urban, heterosexual, native-born young adults in stable partnerships (marriages or long-term cohabitations) in Japan, Spain, the U.S., and Sweden. The age range (24-35 years) of our sample is purposely chosen so that individuals are in 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 are measured in a multiple regression framework. Instead, we ask closed-ended questions to a similar sample of partnered individuals in each of the four distinct cultural settings (one in Northern Europe, one in North America, one in Southern Europe, and one in East Asia), then follow these questions with open-ended prompts that elicit individuals' reasoning for their answers. This approach generates responses that naturally reflect how individuals' fertility

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intentions are shaped within the context of couplehood and within the larger social, cultural, economic, and policy context. Our focus on partnered young adults is consistent with a shift in family research from individuals to couples (Moen and Sweet 2004).

Approximately 50 structured in-depth interviews were carried out 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). We measured union status based on the prevailing patterns in each country. For Spain and Sweden, we considered both cohabitators and married individuals as 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). 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, we restricted the definition of union status for the Japanese and American samples to marriage. In all four countries, male and female samples were collected separately, and none of the interviewees are in unions with each other.

We applied the following sampling criteria: 1) in the age group 24-35, 2) completion of post-secondary education (either a vocational or university degree), 3) residence in a major metropolitan area, 4) native-born and in the majority ethnic group of the country, 5) not a full-time student, 6) heterosexual, 7) not pregnant at the time of the interview (nor in a union with a pregnant partner), 8)

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having no children from a previous relationship, and 9) not separated, divorced, or widowed. The same criteria were applied in each country to achieve a high degree of comparability.

Since our samples are not random, we are particularly attuned to whether they are skewed in any unexpected way. For that reason, we compared mean fertility ideals and intentions between each country sample and a sample we constructed from nationally representative data for each 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 in line with country-level data (comparisons are available from the authors upon request). We also compared attitudes on World Values Survey (WVS) questions we embedded in the interviews, using the exact wording in each language as in WVS. 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. All of these comparisons suggested that our samples are broadly representative of individuals in the relevant demographic group who are in the family formation stage.

Interview protocol

The interview covered five principal topics: employment situation and characteristics of the current (or most recent) job, fertility ideals and intentions, household and childcare division of labor (actual and anticipated), gender-role attitudes and ideology, knowledge and attitudes concerning work-family policies, and (for Japan and Spain) policies oriented towards raising the low fertility rate. 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

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your ideal number and what you think will happen, could you explain the reason?" (perceived conditions or obstacles). By simultaneously asking questions about an individual's ideal and intended number of children as well as their reasoning for both ideals and intentions, we are able to capture their thinking about all of these dimensions of fertility plans at one point in time. Because we include only individuals who are already in stable heterosexual unions (either marriage or long-term cohabitation), intentions are expressed in the context of the couple.

Data collection

The interview protocol was written in English and translated into Japanese, Spanish, and Swedish by a native speaker of each of the respective languages. Pilot interviews were carried out in each country to test the interview guide and to identify potential cross-country incompatibilities or misunderstandings due to question wording. The interview protocol was finalized through extensive discussions among the research team. Respondents were recruited via snowball sampling, with each respondent allowed to refer up to two additional interviewees. Using quantitatively coded responses to the ten World Values Survey questions included in the interview, we subsequently performed cluster analysis (using both single- and median-link methods) to identify potential clusters in each completed sample. The absence of a hierarchical structure in each sample showed that individuals did not cluster into distinct groups.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in each country by a small number of trained interviewers who are native speakers, with interviews typically lasting for 40 minutes to 1.5 hours. Interviews were carried out either in respondents' homes, workplaces, or public spaces such as cafés or restaurants with no other family or household members present. All interviews were voice-recorded with the consent of the interviewee, and were later transcribed by a native speaker.

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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 and to act as signposts for organizing the interview material into general topics. From the interview section on fertility ideals, intentions, and conditions/obstacles, we coded the numeric answers for fertility ideals and intentions. We then 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*. This coding, along with the socio-demographic characteristics of interviewees collected in the biographical and financial information sheets and the detailed memos written during the coding process, facilitated analysis of interviewees' reasoning for fertility ideals, intentions, and the gap between them. 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 context of the couple.

Findings

Fertility ideals and intentions

We first discuss the level of fertility ideals and intentions among sampled individuals in the four countries and then turn to the central focus of our paper: men's and women's reasoning behind ideals, intentions, and (when it exists) the gap between them.

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We classified interviewees into three categories: 1) those who reported an intention of “less than two children” (including ‘0’, ‘0 or 1’, ‘1’, or ‘1 or 2’); 2) those whose intention is two children; and 3) those who specified an intention of “more than two children” (including ‘2 or 3’, ‘3’, or ‘3 or 4’). As Table 2 shows, even though our sample sizes are limited due to the qualitative nature of our study, the fertility ideals of our interviewees conform to the “two-child norm” that Sobotka and Beaujouan (2014) report for European countries. This also holds for male and female samples, respectively.

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

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of fertility intentions for men and women in each country. Given Japan’s and Spain’s low total fertility rates, we expect more individuals in these two countries than in the U.S. and Sweden to have intentions below two children. This is indeed the case for the Japanese sample, but it is not the case for Spain. Japan is followed by the U.S., Sweden, and Spain, respectively, in individuals’ proclivity to intend to have fewer than two children. More importantly, in examining the makeup of the “below two” category in detail, over half of the Japanese interviewees in this group intend to have 0-1 or 1 child, representing more modest fertility goals than in the other three countries. Surprisingly, Spanish respondents (women as well as men) are the least likely among the four countries to have fertility intentions below two children. Indeed, interviewees from Spain (again, women as well as men) are the most likely to state a fertility intention of more than two. A common gender pattern across all countries is that more male than female respondents state an intention to have less than two children.

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

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Figure 3 shows the proportion of individuals in each country who have a fertility ideals-intentions gap and who do not. We define an ideals-intentions gap as a higher ideal than intended number of children, suggesting unmet fertility goals. The few cases of a “reverse” gap (intentions higher than ideals) are merged into the “no gap” category. We expect that in the low-fertility countries the number of respondents with an ideals-intentions gap will be larger than in the U.S. and Sweden, indicating a greater unmet demand for children. This expectation receives only partial support from our data. More than half of the interviewees in Japan and Spain have an ideals-intentions gap but this is also the case in the U.S. There is less evidence of an unmet fertility demand among Swedish respondents. Figure 3 suggests an interesting gender pattern. While the majority of female respondents in Spain, the U.S, and Sweden express an ideals-intentions gap, in Japan nearly equivalent numbers of females respectively report a gap or no gap. Instead, it is among Japanese male interviewees that we observe a larger number of individuals reporting a fertility ideals-intentions gap. This is contrary to gender equity theory’s assertion that women in gender-inegalitarian settings are more likely to hold unfulfilled fertility goals. Instead, our data show that Japanese women are *less* likely than women in the other three countries to have an ideals-intentions gap. Spanish men and women are very similar to each other in the level of their ideals and intentions and in the occurrence of an ideals-intentions gap. In contrast, the presence of an ideals-intentions gap is much more common among women than men in the U.S. and in Sweden, the two more moderate-fertility countries; this contrasts with the Japanese pattern, where men more often express a gap.

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

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Of course, the presence or absence of a gap conveys no information about individuals' *absolute* ideals or intentions. That is, if fertility ideals are low to begin with (e.g. one child) and intentions match ideals, this does not bode well for population replacement, despite the fact that there is no ideals-intentions gap. It is therefore important to reconsider the *level* of ideals and intentions. Here, Japanese respondents stand out in terms of showing exceptionally low fertility ideals as well as intentions, especially among women. At the same time, while Japanese male respondents do not have particularly low *ideals*, their *intentions* are the lowest of any group in the four countries, regardless of sex. Thus while the extent of a fertility ideals-intentions gap is similar in the Japanese and Spanish samples, this obscures the fact that Spanish interviewees have both higher ideals and higher intentions than the Japanese. Reflecting this, Spanish interviewees often said that "two will be okay" when asked about their intentions, indicating that they will be happy enough with two children even if they prefer three. Japanese interviewees, on the other hand, were more likely to indicate that "I think we will manage to have two." This implies that two children is the *upper* limit of what they feel they can manage, contrasting with the implication in the Spanish interviews that two is the *lower* limit with which they will be satisfied. In fact, 15 Spanish interviewees expressed an intention to have *more* than 2 children (2-3, 3, or 3+) compared to only four Japanese interviewees.

To summarize, respondents' fertility ideals in all four country samples are over two children, consistent with our expectation and with previous literature. Also as expected, fertility intentions are two children for the majority of respondents in the more moderate-fertility countries (the U.S. and Sweden). But they also center on two children in Spain, a very low-fertility country. It is much more likely to find fertility intentions lower than two children in Japan, the country among our four cases that demonstrates the clearest combination of low aggregate fertility and high gender inequality.

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The proportion of individuals with an ideals-intentions gap is greater in the two low-fertility country samples than in the samples for the U.S. and Sweden. This is what we anticipated. However, this pattern in Japan is driven more by men than by women. Gender equity theory would predict that more women in low-fertility countries will have an ideals-intentions gap than women in moderate-fertility countries, especially if the institutions supporting working mothers are weaker and household gender inequality is higher in the low-fertility settings. But instead, our data suggest that female respondents in more moderate-fertility societies are as likely to express a gap as women in very low-fertility countries. In fact, female respondents from the most gender-unequal society (Japan) in our research have the *lowest* occurrence of an ideals-intentions gap. Moreover, the fact that Japanese male respondents more often have an ideals-intentions gap suggests that there are conditions in their lives rendering it difficult for them to fulfill their fertility ideals. These emergent findings point to particularities in the case of Japan, the case with the greatest degree of gender inequality and the strongest gender-essentialist beliefs.

These patterns of fertility ideals and intentions in the four countries give rise to questions that bear further investigation as we turn to individuals' reasoning: 1) Why do Spanish respondents have much higher ideals and intentions than Japanese respondents, given that both live in very-low fertility countries? and 2) Why do more Swedish and American female than male respondents express an ideals-intentions gap, while the opposite gender pattern appears in Japan? While it must be borne in mind that our numeric figures are based on small sample sizes, the comparison of mean fertility ideals and intentions in our samples with nationally representative data for the equivalent demographic group in each country (discussed earlier) suggests that our findings are not unusual. Most important for the goals of this paper is the analysis of how individuals explain their ideals,

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intentions, and the gap; this is the greatest strength of the large number of detailed interviews we conducted.

We first analyze the common patterns of reasoning we discern in our data, then turn particular attention to examining whether the expectations of gender equity theory are borne out: that there is more evidence of work-family conflict in the reasoning for fertility intentions offered by individuals, especially women, in very low- vs. more moderate-fertility countries.

Reasoning for ideals and intentions: country similarities and differences

Interviewees' explanations of their fertility ideals showed broad consistency across the four countries as well as consistency across our male and female interviewees. Regardless of being in a low- or moderate-fertility country, natal family considerations were very often the first thing that respondents mentioned; it was very common for people to express a desire to replicate their childhood experience (or the experience of their partner) by taking their natal family as a model. In instances where this was not the case, this was generally related to the two-child ideal. That is, if the interviewee was an only child, it was often the case that he or she expressed the wish to have two children; similarly, many interviewees who came from large families wanted to have fewer children than in their sibset. Many respondents mentioned the ideal of two children as the "normal," "standard," "tradition," or "rule" for a family. This is consistent with many researchers' interpretation of the two-child ideal as a social norm.

The second most frequently mentioned reason for fertility ideals of over one child was the belief that an only child would be lonely since he or she would be without siblings. These two reasons—a desire to replicate one's natal family and a belief that only children will not be in the best situation—are related to each other in the sense that they concern what is appropriate for the well-

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being of children, with a strong value placed on the importance of sibling bonds. A third type of reasoning for ideal family size was the preference for a certain gender combination, which in most cases consisted of wanting to have a boy and a girl, in line with findings from quantitative research (see e.g. Andersson et al. 2006).

In asking interviewees about their fertility ideals, we found that some respondents naturally began to discuss possible obstacles and constraints to their ability to fulfill their ideals. The reasoning they offered was then repeated when we asked about their intentions. Many common themes emerged in the reasoning for fertility intentions across the four countries. Financial considerations were dominant in every country. Interviewees highlighted the overall cost of raising a child as a reason that limited their intended number of children or as a reason they did not expect to be able to meet their fertility ideals. Despite the fact that individuals in our country samples are all 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 the individuals in our sample are either unemployed or have an unemployed partner), many had concerns about the amount of money necessary for raising children. In Spain and Sweden, this was expressed in terms of the importance of securing a stable job. This mirrors prior findings for Spain and Sweden suggesting 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 parental leave is available only to permanent workers. This constitutes a very strong incentive for securing a stable, well-paying job before moving to the stage of parenthood.

Respondents in all four countries considered the cost of raising a child to be high, and based their thinking on the number of children they felt they could afford according to their perceived

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economic situation. Concern with childraising costs reflects the findings of other studies (Schoen et al. 1997; Werding 2014) and the strong parental interest in postindustrial countries in “child quality” (Becker and Lewis 1963; Easterlin 1976).

Despite the common concern across countries over the general cost of raising children, there was some country patterning with regard to the specific costs that interviewees mentioned. Housing (Kulu and Vikat 2007; Vignoli et al. 2013), education (De la Croix and Doepke 2004), and childcare costs are all mentioned in the literature on low fertility, and our interviewees’ concerns reflected these worries as well. The cost of housing and/or the need for additional space arose in some of the Spanish, American, and Swedish interviews but almost never among Japanese interviewees. This is despite the fact that the mean percentage of gross household income spent on housing is no lower in Japan than in the other three countries (OECD 2013). The cost of housing arose particularly when our interviewees discussed the possibility of having a second child, as this often led them to feel that they would need additional space, necessitating greater housing expenses. Real estate markets are particularly expensive in large metropolitan areas in the U.S. and Sweden. Spain has a strong culture of home ownership, and in 2011-12 (when the interviews were conducted), respondents were still suffering the consequences of the strong and lasting economic crisis caused by the bursting of the housing bubble in 2008. We also note that fully one-quarter of our Japanese sample was living in a house or apartment owned by their parents or their employer, so that housing did not represent a significant expense to them; this is likely a reason why few Japanese interviewees voiced concern about housing costs.

The second type of variation we observed across the four countries in interviewees’ discussion of the cost of children is the frequency with which the cost of education was mentioned.

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This was raised exclusively by Japanese and American interviewees. In these two non-European countries, many respondents had in mind the long-term costs of raising children when they discussed their intentions, with education mentioned as one such cost. Japanese men were particularly likely to mention the cost of education as a factor limiting their own fertility intentions. This may reflect their feeling of financial responsibility for the family due to the persistence of the male-breadwinner model, and may also reflect their keen awareness of the severe educational competition in the country and the private educational costs highly-educated parents bear in order to provide private tutoring and exam preparation classes for their children (Anderson and Kohler 2013). In the U.S., interviewees mentioned the cost of education not only for their future children but also as a factor affecting the couple's current financial situation for having children. Many of these young highly-educated interviewees are still paying off college loans themselves. Among interviewees in this situation, most stated that paying off these loans is a condition for moving forward to have children. Not surprisingly, the cost of education was not mentioned by any of our Spanish or Swedish interviewees. Both countries have a welfare state that guarantees free primary and secondary education and offers very affordable access to college education.

A third child-related expense mentioned by interviewees as an influence on fertility intentions was the cost of childcare. This was raised by interviewees in all countries but Sweden. While Sweden offers high-quality state-subsidized childcare and paid childcare leave (Oláh and Bernhard 2008), the lack of such policies in the U.S. and Spain or, in the case of childcare leave, the long waiting lists in urban areas (as in Japan) make it necessary for some young couples to pay a substantial amount of money for childcare or to rely on their family network, with grandparents typically regarded as the ideal caregivers. The cost of childcare arose as one of the main worries

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when couples considered having a second child, especially if they planned that both parents would be in the labor force. Along with childcare costs, some American respondents also mentioned health-related costs (such as visits to the pediatrician and dentist) and costs associated with pregnancy itself. These concerns reflect the high cost of health care as well as the high cost of health insurance coverage in the U.S.

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

What then is the role of gender inequality and work-family conflict in shaping fertility intentions in these four societies? It is here that the cross-country analysis of reasoning for intentions and the ideals-intentions gap yields the most surprising results.

We described previously that both Japanese men and women in our sample have quite low fertility ideals and intentions. Despite Japan's clear status as the most gender-unequal society among the four country cases in our research, it was nevertheless nearly universal that Japanese female interviewees did not mention housework or childcare as limiting their fertility intentions. This is in spite of the fact that almost all of them did a very large share of household work, consistent with prior research. Similarly, given greater adherence to a male-breadwinner ideology in Japan than in the other countries, one might expect Japanese men's low fertility intentions to be related to the economic responsibilities they feel. As mentioned, their reasoning was indeed sometimes couched in these terms, especially with regard to the cost of education.

But gender considerations emerged in a largely unexpected way in the Japanese interviews. Table 3 shows the economic arrangement of the couples to whom our interviewees belong in each country. In only one-third of the Japanese marriages represented in our sample are wives working full-time and planning to continue doing so. We found that fertility intentions are lower in this

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group than in the other two-thirds of couples where the wife plans to cut back to part-time work or quit working. Among Japanese men whose wives are committed to full-time employment, many stressed that their own long work hours forestalled their ability to contribute to housework and childcare. This was summarized in the statement that "it [housework and childcare] all falls on her." These men generally held more gender-egalitarian attitudes than Japanese men in our sample whose wives had quit working or intended to do so. Some of the men in 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 full-time stay-at-home wife. But the possible positive effect on fertility intentions of men's egalitarian attitudes was generally negated by the dampening impact of Japanese long work-hour norms on men's housework and childcare share (see also Nagase and Brinton 2017).

----- Table 3 about here -----

Similarly, Japanese female respondents committed to full-time work often had higher ideals than intentions, and expressed the view that they simply would not be able to "have it all." This reflected their feeling that it would be impossible to combine full-time employment and childrearing, especially if it involved having more than one child. Rather than questioning the highly gender-unequal household division of labor, Japanese female interviewees took gender specialization in the household as a "given." This led the minority of women who wanted to continue working full-time to have lower fertility intentions. The other two-thirds of interviewed women also accepted gender specialization as given and planned to adapt their employment to their fertility intentions by either quitting or cutting back to part-time employment. Interestingly, these Japanese women's intention to leave the labor force upon childbirth often had the effect of heightening a couple's concern with the

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cost of raising children, as they would then be relying only on men's income. Thus despite the anticipation of having more time for childrearing, their fertility intentions were low.

Gender considerations in the Spanish sample, the other low-fertility country, take quite a different form. While many Spanish interviewees with low fertility intentions discussed women's employment, they did so for distinctly different reasons than in Japan. Many Spanish women mentioned wanting to develop a career, and some men mentioned the desire to help their partners do this. Such cases resembled the minority of cases in Japan where women were career-oriented. But in contrast to Japanese interviewees, many Spanish men and women expressed the belief that women as well as men should invest in their careers and strive to accumulate job experience in order to avoid unemployment and economic instability in the future. In voicing this motivation for women's employment, Spanish interviewees assumed that both partners would need to work 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. The Spanish interviewees thus portrayed a different conception and purpose for married or cohabiting women's employment than was evident among Japanese interviewees.

As Table 3 shows, a greater number of Spanish than Japanese interviewees are indeed in couples where both partners work full-time. Moreover, the employment situation for the remainder of couples is quite different in the two country samples. While all wives in our Japanese sample who are not employed full-time either work part-time or are non-employed, Spanish female respondents are more likely to be unemployed than to be working part-time. None of the women in the Spanish sample are stay-at-home partners, nor did they express the desire to be non-employed over the long

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term. Similarly, all of the Japanese men in our sample work full-time whereas the Spanish sample includes men working part-time or unemployed. Our Spanish interviewees thus vividly demonstrate the high level of economic insecurity in the Spanish labor market, even for the highly-educated. For these couples, the idea that women will not work once they become mothers is simply not realistic, nor is it considered desirable. In contrast, highly-educated men and women in Japan are better-positioned in the labor market, and the risk of unemployment or precarious employment is heavily concentrated instead among graduates of high schools and specialized two-year training schools (*senmon gakkō*; Brinton 2011). The effect of labor market structure and work norms on the fertility goals of the highly-educated in Japan asserts itself through long working hours and inflexible work organizations that require many women to choose between employment or babies (Schoppa 2006; Takahashi et al. 2014).

Coupled with the rapid change 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. The embrace of this model appears to lie behind Spanish interviewees' higher fertility ideals and intentions. Another pattern that we observe among Spanish but not Japanese interviewees is the recognition among some Spanish men that they could be contributing more time to household labor in order to make it feasible to have more children. Some Spanish female interviewees indeed express the wish for this, whereas Japanese female interviewees generally take the highly skewed division of labor as a given.

Given that our analysis of the reasoning behind fertility intentions among highly-educated partnered individuals in the two very low-fertility countries does not fully support the expectations of gender equity theory, how well does the theory fit the American and Swedish contexts? Gender

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equity theory would predict that in these more moderate-fertility societies, fertility ideals will be more easily realized and, even in cases where they are not, gender inequality considerations will not be a strong driver of intentions. Here again, our qualitative data reveal some unexpected findings.

As Table 1 showed, gender-role attitudes in the U.S. suggest some ambivalence toward married women's employment, with a much smaller proportion of respondents than in Spain or Sweden disagreeing that "the role of housewife is fulfilling." While Americans strongly agree that women have the ability to be business executives, this does not necessarily translate into disapproval of women who are full-time housewives and mothers. At the same time, the fertility intentions of American women are lower than among women in our Spanish sample. Analysis of American female respondents' reasoning reveals a strong push-and-pull between working in jobs they find satisfying and, at the same time, holding an ideal of at least two children. Most American interviewees—both men and women—assume that women will be the primary caregivers and will make career sacrifices. In addition, many of the American women in our sample say that they cannot expect that their husbands will equally share childrearing or will adapt their employment to parenthood in any way.

Table 3 shows that while most of the couples represented in our American sample are dual-earner couples where each partner works full-time, the remainder are ones where the wife is working part-time, is not employed, or is unemployed. Our interviews reveal that behind American men's and women's assumption that women will be in charge of childrearing is the recognition that high-quality childcare is difficult to find and, when available, is very costly. The American interviewees describe various strategies for finding reliable and affordable childcare. Some wives have already quit or plan to quit their jobs to become stay-at-home mothers for at least some period of time. Another

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group of American female interviewees are employed full-time and plan to continue in this mode, while also expecting to face work-family conflict and a motherhood wage penalty (Budig and Hodges 2010; Budig et al. 2015; Waldfogel 1997). Others who do not yet have children are in the process of debating the pros and cons of trying to be a working mother. While the work-family dilemma may not be as stark as in Japan, our findings from the American sample echo the American gender inequality literature's discussion of a "stalled revolution" in gender roles (England 2010). Thus the U.S., as a more moderate-fertility country, does not necessarily fit McDonald's assumption that work-family conflict will be less evident than in low-fertility countries.

Sweden is the case where gender equity theory would predict the least work-family conflict. The majority of Swedish interviewees are in dual-earner couples where both partners work full-time (Table 2). In the remaining couples, one partner (generally the woman) or both partners work part-time. 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 the concern among both sexes in Spain). As mentioned earlier, this could well be related to Sweden's generous parental leave scheme that provides salary replacement at the 80% level; this is an incentive for women planning to take long childcare leave to secure a well-paying job prior to becoming pregnant. A number of Swedish interviewees reported feeling that more jobs than before are short-term and temporary (Edin et al. 2000; Chung et al. 2012). Swedish social norms prescribe that both women and men should engage in paid employment (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008), and many of the Swedish interviewees in our sample also mentioned that they (or in the case of men, their partner) could not imagine staying at home because it would be socially isolating and they would lack the stimulation of employment. The majority of

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Swedish male interviewees had permanent job contracts, and the rest were either self-employed or in a temporary contract but working full-time. Female interviewees were generally in weaker job situations, with fewer than half in jobs with a permanent contract. Almost as many were temporary workers, and a few were self-employed or unemployed. A number of Swedish female interviewees expressed the fear of becoming caught in a “part-time [employment] trap” and were worried about the negative attitude of some employers towards women with care responsibilities. Swedish women 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. This desire for a stable job reflects the Swedish parental leave scheme, guaranteeing job security after leave (i.e. the right to return to the same or an equivalent job with the same employer) only for workers in a permanent contract (Oláh and Bernhardt 2008).

Discussion and conclusion

Demographers have established the persistence of a two-child norm for fertility ideals in postindustrial Europe, even among countries where total fertility has fallen well below population replacement level. Our research uses qualitative interviews with demographically equivalent samples of highly-educated young partnered adults in four postindustrial societies, two with very low fertility and two with more moderate fertility, to examine the correspondence between ideals and intentions. Even more importantly, our questions to young adults probe the reasoning behind their fertility ideals and intentions. By simultaneously asking individuals about their ideals and intentions, our methodology allows us to discern the constraints individuals perceive to fulfilling their fertility ideals. In addition, our analysis goes beyond the analysis of European cases to include one North American case (the U.S.) and one East Asian case (Japan). The U.S. represents a country with a total fertility

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rate similar to Sweden's, whereas Japan represents a region of the world (East Asia) experiencing fertility levels as low or lower than the very low-fertility cases in Europe. To control for heterogeneity across our country-level samples, we selected interviewees from the same demographic group (age, urban residence, sex, education level, nativity, partnership status) in each country. Our focus on the highly-educated allows us to particularly examine the assumptions of gender equity theory (McDonald 2000a, b; 2013) that highly-educated women in societies with low gender equity will have particularly low fertility intentions due to the difficult work-family balancing act they face.

Consistent with prior research, we find the strong presence of a two-child ideal in all four countries in which we conducted interviews. The reasoning our interviewees offer for their two-child ideal is also in line with prior research. Many interviewees, both men and women, express the view that an only child will be lonely. The desire to replicate one's own sibling set and the desire to have one child of each sex are also abundantly evident in the interviews.

Our analysis of the fertility ideals and intentions concurrently held by highly-educated adults in the family formation stage across four different postindustrial contexts offers new findings, some of which are consistent with the assumptions of gender equity theory and some of which pose a challenge to it. Gender equity theory is based on the premise that low-fertility countries are characterized by a relative lack of support for women's dual roles in the household and labor market. Our research design examines this assumption at the macro-level by focusing on two very low-fertility societies and two more moderate-fertility ones. Japan and Sweden, when viewed at the macro-level, would seem to be textbook cases for gender equity theory. Japan has a high degree of gender inequality in the labor market, strong gender-essentialist beliefs that prioritize women's role

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as wives and mothers, and labor market conditions that entail unusually long work hours. Sweden, on the other hand, is characterized by 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 egalitarian.

Our analysis based on comparable interviews with young highly-educated partnered adults in Japan, Spain, the U.S., and Sweden examines whether the predictions of gender equity theory are borne out at the micro-level. Gender equity theory would predict that due to insufficient support for women's dual roles in the labor market and the home in low-fertility societies, the gap between fertility ideals and intentions is more frequent, especially among women. Our analyses offer only partial support for this. On the one hand, interviewees in Japan and Spain are somewhat more likely to have a fertility ideals-intentions gap than in the U.S. and Sweden, as predicted. But in terms of gender, female respondents are more likely than males to have an ideals-intentions gap in the more moderate-fertility settings of the U.S. and Sweden. This was not expected. The rich material offered by our in-depth interview data is instrumental in illuminating the reasons for this surprising finding.

When we examined the reasoning individuals articulated for their fertility intentions and the ideals-intentions gap, more female interviewees in our American and Swedish samples than in the Japanese and Spanish samples explained their fertility intentions with reference to existing or anticipated work-family conflict. This contradicts gender equity theory's assumption that such reasoning would be more apparent in the two low-fertility societies. 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

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Sweden, this reflects the dual worker-dual carer ideology that women as well as men should participate in the labor market. In the U.S., it is likely that women's reasoning reflects the fact that highly-educated women's labor force participation and marriage rates have now surpassed those of less-educated women (Shang and Weinberg 2013). This generates an expectation on the part of our female American interviewees that they may be able to "have it all" (combining work and family). But such expectations are tempered by an ideology of intensive motherhood (Blair-Loy 2005), reflected in the assumptions of American male and female interviewees that women will play the primary role in childrearing. In the absence of high-quality public childcare, highly-educated American couples are faced with high-priced childcare options in the market or with the option of the mother cutting back her work commitments or temporarily leaving the labor force (Stone and Lovejoy 2004).

In sum, both the Swedish and American environment for highly-educated couples generates a different type of work-family conflict for women than in countries such as Japan that are highly gender-unequal. In Sweden, the strong social norm, underpinned by family and labor market policies, 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. This may lead them to delay childbearing and to endeavor to "catch up" later. This pressure is exacerbated by Sweden's increasingly bifurcated labor market, with "good" jobs consisting of those involving a permanent contract. Perceived difficulties in obtaining a permanent job temper some Swedish women's fertility intentions, as they foresee delaying their first or second birth in order to become established in a career. American couples face a different set of considerations and constraints. Their

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fertility intentions are tempered instead by the cost of childcare, the lack of guaranteed paid parental leave, and the career commitment many women feel.

The level of fertility ideals and intentions as well as the correspondence between them in Japan and Spain, the two very low-fertility countries in our study, reflect distinctly different gender dynamics from the U.S. and Sweden and also from each other. Japanese women generally take the household division of labor as given and adapt their employment situation to it. Only in a minority of Japanese couples is the wife planning to continue full-time employment, and in those couples fertility intentions are particularly low. Most Japanese men in our sample whose wives work full-time express doubt that they themselves would be at all 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 appears to exacerbate work-family conflict. In contrast to Japan, women's employment in the other very low-fertility case (Spain) is supported by progressive gender-role norms. Among couples who subscribe to these norms, some men express the recognition that in order to have two or three children they need to contribute more to household labor. Even among couples who may not fully subscribe to these norms, both men and women generally regard women's employment as necessary for the household and for supporting a family due to the poor macro-economic environment. Thus, work-family conflict does not surface among Spanish interviewees to the extent that gender equity theory would predict based on Spain's profile as a very low-fertility country.

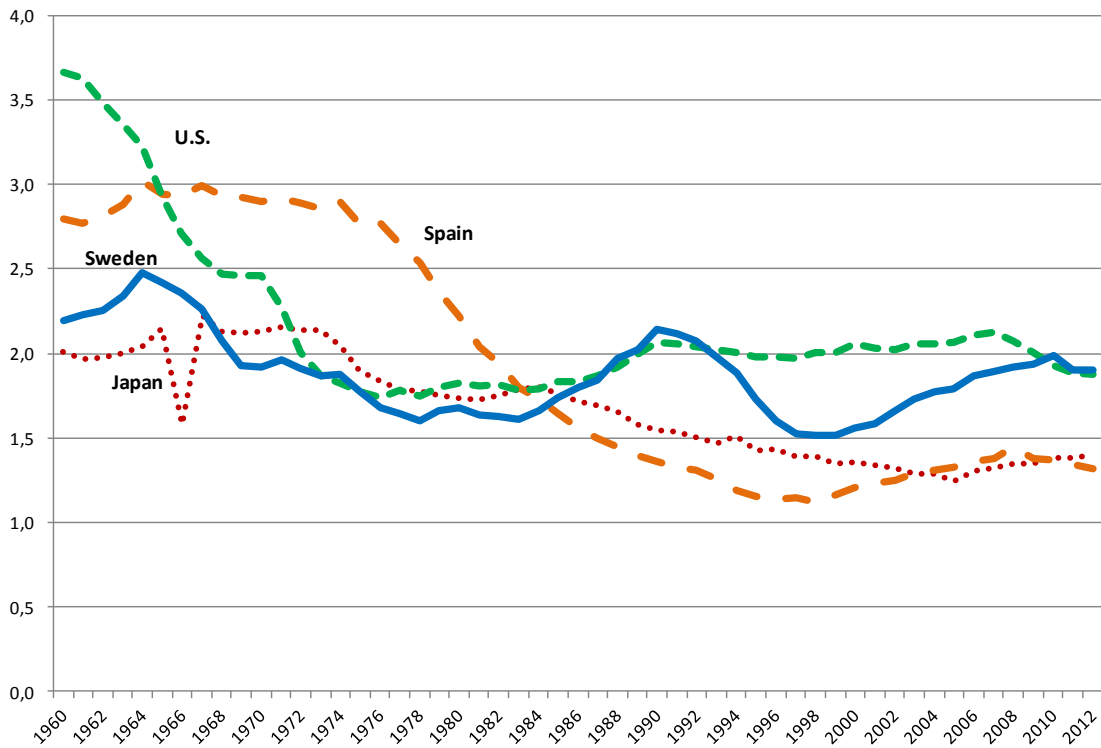
While the use of qualitative data in research on low fertility remains rare, our study offers a view of how men and women in four postindustrial settings construct their reasoning for the number of children they intend to have. Having established the consistency between the fertility

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ideals held by our interviewees and larger representative samples from survey data, our inquiry goes beyond numerical fertility goals to examine the concerns and constraints people feel. In particular, the findings from these qualitative data suggest that the influence of gender is more complicated in very low- and more moderate-fertility postindustrial settings than conventional theory may suggest. We anticipate that future studies will continue to explore innovative ways to examine how fertility intentions are formed in varied postindustrial contexts and how this process reflects macro-level conditions such as gender-role ideology and labor market conditions and policies.

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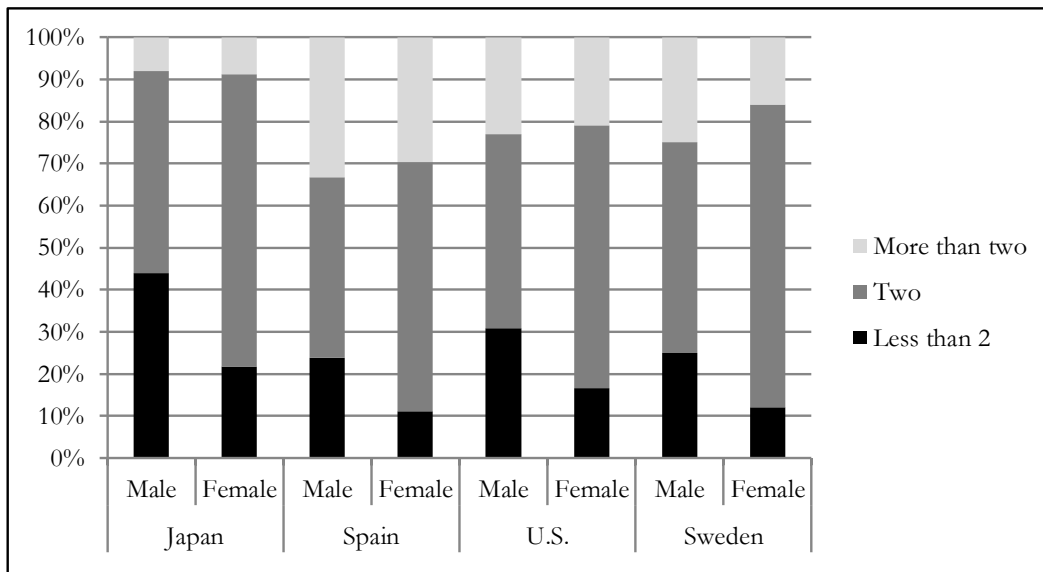
Figure 1. Total Fertility Rate in Four Countries: 1960-2012



Source: Human Fertility Database.

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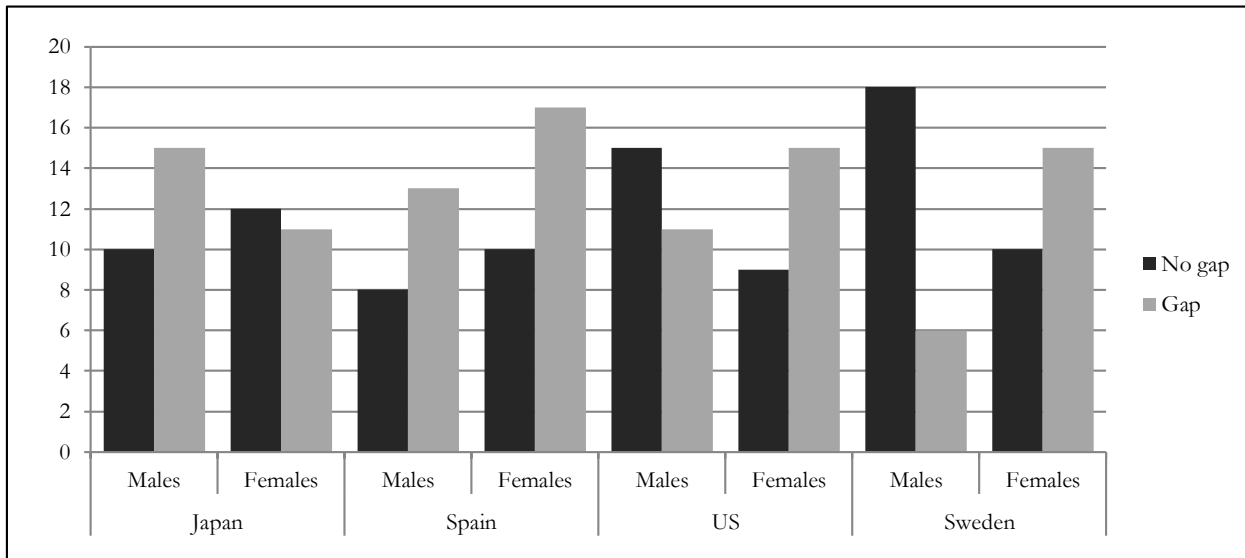
Figure 2. Interviewees' Intended Number of Children, by Sex: Japan, Spain, U.S. and Sweden



Source: Project interviews.

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



Source: Project interviews.

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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) ⁱ	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 ⁱⁱ	38.8	8.9	15.5	1.9
	Unemployment rate, men and women age 25-34 ⁱⁱⁱ	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.

ⁱ 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).

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

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Table 2. Mean Fertility Ideals: Japan, Spain, U.S., and Sweden

	Japan	Spain	U.S.	Sweden
Total	2.3	2.6	2.4	2.3
Women	2.2	2.6	2.6	2.4
Men	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.2

Source: Project interviews.

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Table 3. Couples' Labor Market Participation: Japan, Spain, the U.S., and Sweden

	Japan	Spain	U.S.	Sweden
N	51	53	53	50
Dual-earner couple (both working)				
Both partners employed full-time	20	29	41	30
Both partners employed part-time	0	1	0	4
Male works part-time	1	3	1	2
Female works part-time	17	3	5	6
Total	38	36	47	42
Dual-earner couple (unemployed female)	0	11	4	2
Dual-earner couple (unemployed male)	0	5	0	2
Single-earner couple (employed male)	13	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

Source: Project interviews.

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