9

Individual life stories: voices of Japanese women

9.1 Introduction

In the previous three chapters, mostly quantitative evidence was provided for the integrated explanation presented in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, single-state life table techniques were used, in Chapter 7, multi-state life table techniques, and in Chapter 8, the pathway approach. It was found that in both Japan and the Netherlands, marriage and motherhood are increasingly postponed and experienced less across birth cohorts. Where marriage and fertility are still closely connected in Japan, this is much less so in the Netherlands. In Japan, both marriage and first-birth behaviour are more concentrated around certain ages (mid-20s) than in the Netherlands. And there is also less diversity in terms of pathways in Japan than there is in the Netherlands. All in all change across cohorts has taken the form of an evolution from standard to choice biographies in the Netherlands (Liefbroer and de Jong-Gierveld, 1994), while in Japan it has taken the form of a continuation of the standard biography as well as its increasing rejection.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 were of a quantitative nature and focused on objective terms, i.e. on the 'life history': age at events, and union formation and fertility behaviour of two different cohorts. This chapter will take a qualitative approach and focus on subjective terms, i.e. on the 'life story' behind the 'life history' mapped in the previous three chapters: the meaning given to events and their interpretation in a broader context. Our main purpose in this chapter is to find out why Japanese women postpone having their first child by making use of the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2. We trace how the respondents’ cognitive schemes develop and how this affects the formulation of instrumental goals to reach Maslowian higher-order needs. As we have argued in Chapter 2, at any point in time, the individual's cognitive schemes capture the individual's past life course. Through his/her age and process of human development, the individual has passed through various historical contexts ('location in time and place') during which through institutions and other individuals ('linked lives', such as parents, partners, cohort) rules and norms are communicated to him/her. We present and analyse the views of 51 married and never-married, but all childless, Japanese women as they were presented during focus group discussions.

In Chapters 6, 7 and 8 consistent use was made of two different cohorts, a cohort of women born before 1960 and one of women born in 1960 and after, to track changes across time in union formation and fertility behaviour. In this chapter a roughly corresponding
distinction will be made between the cohort of the respondents themselves and the cohort of the respondents' mothers. That explains the rationale behind the first two sections of this chapter. Section 9.2 provides a description of the world of the respondents’ mothers as it is perceived by the respondents themselves: 'My perception of mom's world'. This is a world firmly grounded in the ‘industrial household’, but with remnants of the 'agricultural household', both of which were discussed in Chapter 5. In line with the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2, we will argue that the respondents’ perception of their mothers’ ‘industrial’ life course, as well as their interpretation of their mothers’ reflections on their life course, have shaped to a large extent the respondents’ cognitive schemes. Section 9.3 provides a description of the world of the respondents themselves: ‘My world’. It explains in detail how it is not only the respondents’ perception of their mothers’ life course or even their interpretation of their mothers’ reflections on their life course that influence later fertility choices. The particular child rearing choices that mothers make are also important. These start developing according to a certain logic of their own and further shape their cognitive schemes. This also happens in interaction with the context: the rules and norms communicated by institutions and individuals through different historical contexts. Section 9.4 is entitled ‘My choice’. In this section, we try to show how women on the basis of a variety of factors, which can be classified according to context or personal background, arrive at choices related to motherhood. We identify minorities of ‘traditionalists’ and ‘rejecters’ and find that the largest group is made up of ‘postponers’ and ‘failed postponers’.

9.2 My perception of mom's world

Parents play an important role in shaping the 'cognitive schemes' (d'Andrade, 1992) of their children. The role of parents in shaping their children’s cognitive schemes is clear from our discussion in Chapter 2. On the basis of Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (1988) we argued there that a cohort's cognitive schemes are shaped by the socio-economic circumstances during its transition from youth to adulthood and by peers, as well as by the parents. With regard to the latter Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (1988) argue that "increased insecurity with their own ideas and value systems creates more latitude for the children in working out their universes of meaning" (p. 17).

The world of each respondent's mother is a world firmly grounded in the 'industrial household' (see our discussion in Chapter 5 on the changes in the post-war period in Japanese 'family systems' in the Blossfeld (1995) and broader SDT sense). In that world, the respondent’s mother experiences a certain life course. A number of things about the mother’s life course are important in influencing and developing her daughter’s cognitive schemes. First, the life course that the respondent's mother actually lives. This relates to the notion of role models. Second, what the respondent’s mother thinks and communicates about her life course to her daughter. Third, the daughter's perception of her mother’s life course. And
finally the child rearing choices the respondent’s mother makes on the basis of her own life course and thinking about that life course. An example of the latter could be that the respondent's mother would have liked to have had a better education and therefore supports her daughter in obtaining the education she herself never had.

The influence of the child rearing choices made by the respondent’s mother on the remainder of the daughter's life course is of course very direct. This will be discussed under 'My world' (section 9.3). But the impact of the daughter's perception of the life course lived by her mother and what her mother tells her about that life course is more indirect. It will remain an important input in the daughter's cognitive schemes throughout her life course but its influence will always be 'mediated' through accumulated life experience and contextual change. What is meant by this will become clear shortly.

The life course that the respondent’s mother lives and what she communicates about it to her daughter is itself of course the result of a certain youth, accumulated life experience and contextual change. During her youth, the respondent’s mother is exposed to various parental and societal pressures and expectations characteristic of the world of the 'agricultural household'. This immediately shows how a clear continuity exists between the world of the ‘agricultural household’ and that of the ‘industrial household’ and how, as noted in Chapter 5, ultimately all division into historical periods is artificial. These parental and societal pressures and expectations relate to, for instance, the **ie** responsibilities of continuing the family line and taking care of the elderly. As discussed in Chapter 5, under the 'agricultural household' or **ie** system, upon his father's retirement or death, the eldest son is expected to take over the household with all its assets and continue it into the next generation. And as also discussed in the same chapter, Japan has a long history of three-generation families and the government plays a rather limited role in the provision of care for the elderly. Therefore, the elderly in Japan hold high expectations of being taken care of in their old age. During her youth, the respondent’s mother absorbs these parental and societal pressures into her cognitive schemes. But during her adulthood, because of accumulated life experience and contextual change, she either reacts negatively to that upbringing or embraces it. And she communicates this reaction to her daughter. But it is interesting to observe that this communication from the mother does not fully control the daughter’s behaviour later on. That is again dependent on the daughter’s accumulated life experience and on contextual change. The daughter can again react either positively or negatively to her mother’s communication.

Let us look at some examples. The following two quotes show the respondent’s parents reacting during their adulthood to parental and societal pressures and expectations absorbed into their cognitive schemes during their youth. In the first quote, a respondent’s mother reacts negatively to this upbringing because of accumulated life experience and contextual change (which we are not privy to) and communicates that reaction to her daughter. She did not like taking care of her own parents when they grew old and she will not bother her daughter with that either. By not adhering to this custom the respondent's mother probably
feels that she is doing her daughter a great favour and providing her with greater freedom. But that does not mean that by doing this the mother immediately creates scope for new patterns of behaviour for the respondent herself, that the daughter will follow suit and reject those parental and societal pressures. It is not that the daughter is very happy about the increased freedom. Quite the contrary, because of remnant societal pressures, she feels uncomfortable. The respondent cannot fully escape from societal expectations still communicated to her by the context. When the respondent's mother says that she will not 'bother' the respondent, the respondent 'feels somewhat uncomfortable'. This means that we have to nuance what Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (1988) argue, namely that the parents have an immediate impact on the respondents' "latitude…in working out their universes of meaning" (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 1988, p.17). This shows how parents do not have unlimited flexibility in creating more scope for innovative behaviour for their children. It also shows how the individual is always confronted with conflicting signals, in this case the parents versus societal traditions and expectations:

Voice 1:
My mom had one brother. So he was the first son and she was the first daughter. They were brought up by their mother under enormous pressure, who always reminded them, ‘You are the first son, you are the first daughter’. That is why she did not want to raise us in the same way, wanted to raise us in a completely different way. Furthermore, she says that when she grows old she will not depend on us or bother us (meiwaku o kakeru). So she says 'please do not worry about me', but when I hear her saying that I feel somewhat uncomfortable. 

(22 Years Old – Never married - Student)

In the following quote a father has, because of accumulated life experience and context (which we do not know of but which seems to accord with that of the ‘agricultural household’), embraced his upbringing and the parental and societal pressures and expectations of continuing the family line absorbed during his youth and communicates these values to his daughter. He expects her to do the same by marrying. While the original ie tradition only concerned sons, in the modern era, since children are few and often there is only one daughter, this tradition is applied to daughters. This illustrates at the same time the strength and adaptability of traditions, and how in a new form they continue to limit the scope for innovative behaviour. But it is not that by imposing these pressures and expectations the father immediately limits the scope for innovative behaviour by his daughter. Once more the impact of this communication by the father will be ‘mediated’ by accumulated life experiences and contextual change, as is clear from the respondent’s contention, ‘I am not sure whether I am able to do that’:

Voice 2:
My father is very, very traditional. Do I really have to talk about this? (laughter). He thinks that he is

(To be continued)
Another example of 'agricultural household' parental and societal pressures and expectations communicated from the respondent's grandparents via the respondent’s parents to the respondent herself in an unpredictable, always ‘mediated’, way concerns age norms, something repeatedly discussed in the previous chapters. In the worlds of both the 'agricultural household' and the 'industrial household', women are expected to marry by a certain age and give birth soon afterwards. In the world of the 'industrial household' the ideal age to get married is age 25 (see in this regard also the earlier mentioned comparison with a Christmas delicacy that rapidly loses its value after 25 December and the quantitative results of Chapter 7, which showed that the probability of a 25-year-old woman of the pre-1960 birth cohort with a partner getting engaged within a year is 35 percent and getting married within a year is 28 percent).

All three of the above-mentioned parental and societal pressures and expectations concerning continuing the family line, taking care of the elderly and marrying by a certain age, constitute good examples of what de Bruijn (1999) calls behaviour-guiding rules. And these behaviour-guiding rules are backed up by meaning-giving myths and constructed images. On the male side these are rooted in the constructed images or schemes on what it means to be a good ‘eldest son’. On the female side these are rooted in the constructed image on ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’, discussed in Chapter 5. These constructed images and rules are communicated to the respondent through institutions ('location in time and place') and other individuals around ('linked lives').

Certain 'agricultural household' parental and societal pressures and expectations then constitute important inputs into the cognitive schemes of the respondent's parents and of the respondent herself, either as something to embrace or to reject, or even to postpone, depending on the accumulated life experience and contextual change. A next important input into the daughter’s cognitive schemes is the life actually lived by her mother (as well as what she thinks and communicates about it to her daughter). This relates to the notion of role models. And then it has to be noted that in spite of the ‘unstable’ inter-generational transmission of a number of parental and societal pressures and expectations between the worlds of the 'agricultural household' and the 'industrial household', the 'agricultural' and the 'industrial' life course differ substantially from each other. As discussed in Chapter 5, in the world of the 'agricultural household', the life of women is about survival (Maslowian lower-order needs) through childbearing and agricultural production within the context of marriage. In the world of the 'industrial household', however, life clearly is no longer about survival. It goes beyond that.
As is evident from the following quote, the female 'industrial' life course, at least in its early stages, is about dependency and a standardised sequence of some education and some work, and thereafter marriage and motherhood as a full-time housewife. The following quote provides some real information on this standardised life course. It also shows how, as mentioned above, the perception by the daughter of her mother’s life course is mediated and coloured by accumulated life experience (through advanced education she has become an independent-minded woman) and contextual change (women are now expected to work) and becomes an input into the daughter’s decision-making process.

**Voice 3:**
My mother comes from a well-to-do family. She was born in that kind of family and had a good life, without any difficulties. She first worked a bit and then, at age 26, she got married. Ever since, she has been a housewife (shufu). She is out of touch with the world. She has become a little bit more in touch with reality now, but before she was really like a (overprotected) little girl. I asked my father to convince her to go out into the world a bit more. She always relied on my father for everything. And, therefore, I did not want to become like my mother. I really want to work.

(22 Years Old - Never married - Student)

As just mentioned and also discussed earlier, the female 'industrial' life course includes some education, but not too much. In Chapter 5, we described how in the period 1955-1973 the focus of educational attainment was mainly on closing the gender gap in terms of secondary education, while in the period 1973-1991 post-secondary enrolment increased, but only at the junior (2-year) college level. Educational pursuit was limited first of all because too many years of study would cause one to miss the above-mentioned age norm on marrying by the age of 25. But also, education is not really something intended to be put into use. Women's education usually consists of highly gender-specific, not very practical education, which is intended more as a sign of good upbringing and a way to attract a good marriage partner during the few years when women are 'allowed' to work between the completion of education and marriage than to be really made use of. This approach to female education is extensively derived from the constructed image of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’(Uno, 1993). But it is also backed up by the economic or ‘structural’ reality. As pointed out in Chapters 4 and 5, because of demobilisation and decolonisation surplus male labour first had to be reintegrated into the economy and there was little scope for long-term female formal employment. Both factors explain one of our findings in Chapter 6, namely the limited impact of educational attainment on marriage and motherhood in the earlier cohort in Japan:

**Voice 4:**
My sister is 7 years older than me and therefore my mother is somewhat older [than my friends' mothers]. When she grew up it was not an era in which women went to university, so she went to a women's school (jyogakkou), and that is why now she is a housewife (shufu). She worked for 2 or 3 years, got married, and then got a child.

(34 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)
In the world of the 'industrial household', high levels of educational attainment would not only cause a woman to overshoot the age norm and lead to frustration. As the following quote shows, a high education level would also seriously reduce a woman's chances to get married, by effectively pricing her out of the market. Literature abounds with accounts of how Japanese men in this period and even later preferred to marry women not only younger than them but also with lower levels of educational attainment (Uno, 1993).

The following quote also clearly shows how in the world of the 'industrial household' the highway to happiness is perceived to run through marriage. It shows, in other words, how in the world of the 'industrial household' marriage serves as the main 'instrumental goal', to use vocabulary introduced by de Bruijn (1999), and how education and work are secondary to that. In other words, on the basis of the constructed image of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ the different instrumental goals are ranked in a particular way, it being understood, as discussed in Chapter 2, that it is through ranking that the individual brings order into instances where there is a conflict between goals and careers.

But it also shows how the individual, upon experiencing a fundamental change in her life, such as a divorce, can reassess her situation, reverse the ranking of those goals and careers during so-called transitional periods, and start engaging in 'deviant behaviour' (working full-time when this is not a common thing to do).

Finally, the quote below shows once more how the impact of events during one's youth is not mechanical or predetermined but how it is mediated by accumulated life experiences and contextual change. In line with the life course approach, we take the view that earlier events impact upon later events but that this influence is not of a deterministic nature. In this case, the respondent's mother's divorce causes the respondent to hold negative views on marriage ever since her youth. But even so in the end she does get married, her earlier views effectively being overruled by unforeseen circumstances:

**Voice 5:**

My mother was a housewife (shufu). She thought that going to a university [4 year degree] would prevent her from getting married. She was convinced that by only going to junior college [2 year degree] she would be able to become a bride and that that would provide her with the ultimate happiness. So she did not even try to take the university entrance examination. She went to junior college and afterwards worked at a big Japanese book store. She worked there for 3 years, and then got married, and then worked for another 3 years, at which time she got pregnant. Then she became a housewife (shufu). She divorced when I was a first year high school student. … After the divorce, with an introduction from a friend, she was able to work again. Later on, together with another friend, she started her own company, which deals with foreign books. This venture was successful, because of her prior experience at a big book store, and until age 65 she managed the company. Even before the divorce, she always thought that women should be working and financially independent. Because the divorce happened at a difficult time for me [adolescence], I did not think that I would ever get married, but in fact when I was working I met a wonderful person and got married very quickly (laughter).

(To be continued)
And after marriage, I was very satisfied and I thought that I would be happy with this person and to me it did not matter whether we would have children or not. Although at times I thought that it would be nice to have children, but then I did not have children.

(42 Years Old – Married – Full-Time Worker)

As already indicated by voices 4 and 5, after some education, the typical 'industrial' life course includes a few years of work. This is backed up by the constructed image of wifehood and motherhood: an important purpose of working for a few years is to find a marriage partner. But it is also supported by the structural dimension. Employers want to make intensive use of rather cheap low-educated labour for a few years (Uno, 1993). The following quote shows that this work was not of a purely decorative nature. Even though women did not participate for long in the labour market, they played a critical role in realising the Japanese economic miracle. They were real 'company soldiers'. But even for those company soldiers, the time came to 'go into the house', meaning to get married, bear children and end all professional activity and become a full-time housewife. At least some women did not seem to mind:

My mother was a career woman, a so-called company soldier (kigyou senshi), working until 11 or 12 at night. Then she ‘went into the house’. When I was an elementary school student, I asked her, ‘given that you were working for a long time before marriage, aren't you bored?’ But she said that she had no regrets [about quitting her job upon marriage] because she was doing her best at home.

(32 Years Old - Married - Worker (Unclear whether part-time or full-time))

A fundamental characteristic of the industrial household was the gender-based division of roles (Tsuya and Mason, 1995). Marriage and fatherhood did not affect men's life course very much. Their life course continued in pretty much the same way as before those important events. As discussed in Chapter 5, they continued working and serving as the main breadwinner of the family in their role of 'salary man', devoting their life to their company within the context of lifetime employment. Women's life, however, was completely transformed by marriage and motherhood. Women resigned from full-time employment to concentrate on childbearing and child rearing. In the early stages of the 'industrial household', a professional career after marriage was almost completely absent. In other words, there was no 're-entry' into the labour market once the children had grown up, i.e. at a somewhat higher age, reinforced by the cultural and structural dimensions. Men’s wages were intended to be high enough to support a family.

There were of course important exceptions. Some women had to keep working or had to return to the labour market whether they wanted or not. This group included wives of low-income partners, as well as widows and divorcees. Rising divorce rates caused especially the latter group to increase in size. Divorce settlements in Japan usually include financial support
by the ex-husband, but even up to this day the country is well known for the unenforceability of these arrangements through the legal system. Voice 5 already provided an example of a divorcee who had to go out to work to maintain the family.

But in the later stages of the industrial household, at least some employment was pursued by all women, not only divorcees, since it gave some satisfaction and contributed to the household budget. But it had to be combinable with child rearing. This phenomenon of non-career-oriented re-entry into the labour market at a somewhat higher age then gave rise to the so-called M-curve of age-specific labour force participation rates. This was backed up by the structural dimension. There was a tremendous demand for labour from the late 1960s onwards and male labour did not suffice anymore. Once again, the cultural dimension sanctioned female labour force participation. The constructed image of wifehood and motherhood was consciously redefined. Such re-entry could first of all take the form of piecework, for instance sewing or simple assembly work, at home:

Voice 7:
My dad was the main breadwinner. So that is why my mom worked at home (naishoku) and raised the children. At that time, I really thought that there was no work outside home and that all the work at home is mom's work. But my mom told me that women can also have a job and work outside.

(39 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

The above quote also shows how what the mother says, and the respondent's perception of that, ‘creates’ and expands in size the world of the respondent thus shaping her cognitive schemes.

Once the children were somewhat older, re-entry into the labour market could take the form of part-time labour outside the house. Part-time work constituted in fact the most important kind of re-entry into the labour market. An important condition was, however, that day care should be available in some form or other. As discussed in Chapter 5, throughout the post-war period the availability of government-organised day care has been limited in Japan, forcing families to rely on other support mechanisms. One of those alternative mechanisms consisted of relying on family members for the care of children, e.g. grandmothers:

Voice 8:
Until I got to elementary school, we had my grandmother (obaachan) with us at home, so there was my grandmother and my mother. At first, only my dad was working. So at that time mom was working at home (naishoku). But later on she went for a part-time job at a nearby food factory. At one time, she was away for the whole day, but to me that was not a problem, because grandma was there. And because she was there I did not feel lonely. On the contrary, being an elementary school student, I even enjoyed it [my mom not being there]. But my brother, he was not in elementary school yet, he started searching for her, while to me it really did not matter. But then my mother said "well, considering everything, get a skill".... Therefore I got a skill, so therefore whatever happens I will be fine.

(35 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)
Once their children entered post-secondary education, Japanese women of the industrial era were in a better position to fundamentally reassess their situation and make more dramatic changes in their lifestyle. They could pursue the education they themselves never enjoyed when they were young (Voice 9) or return to the labour market on a full-time basis. Once more it has to be emphasised that certain groups of women – in low-income families, widows, divorcees (Voice 5) – always continued working:

**Voice 9:**
When I started going to university, my mom went back to school to get a degree in the health care sector. She is in Fukuoka [southern part of Japan]. Well, there is this shortage of personnel in the health care sector, and this enabled her to work full-time again. So although she had stayed at home for such a long time, the reason why she was able to work again probably was that she had been working long enough before getting married. So my mother's life gives some hints [about how to organize my own life].

(32 Years Old - Married - Worker (Unclear whether part-time or full-time))

Voices 7, 8 and 9 then illustrate the well-known phenomenon of the M-curve of age-specific female labour force participation rates, in which women completely withdrew from the labour market at the time of marriage and motherhood and then gradually, as the children grew up, increased their labour force participation. From all of the above case-studies it is clear that the respondents believe that their mothers through their labour force participation impacted heavily upon their personal development, either by merely pointing out and demonstrating that also for women it is acceptable to work (Voice 7), or by urging their daughters to acquire useful skills (Voice 8), or still by acting as a positive role model of working women (Voice 10).

Mothers, in some way or another, then to an important extent, determined the views on life held by their daughters. But the daughters’ view on and interpretation of their mothers’ life course, on the other hand, is coloured by subsequent life experiences (pathways) and changes in society (context, location in time and place) at large. As it has become much more acceptable for women to work outside the home, the past is judged by this standard, and mothers who in the past did not return to the labour market at all are now negatively perceived or pitied. The following respondent reflects upon her mother sacrificing her whole life for others:

**Voice 10:**
My mom was a housewife (shufu). She really enjoyed doing the work of a housewife. But she only sees her life achievements in terms of child rearing, that is how she values her own life. I saw her sacrificing herself for her children and her husband, and attaching so much importance to that. I felt very sorry for her. So, I really feel that it is important to work. … I want my mother to have different values. She has many skills. It would have been better if she had been able to nurture those. She is good at gardening - my grandfather was an agronomist. She wanted to go and study that subject but she was told not to by her own parents, who asked 'what would you do

(To be continued)
Voice 10 (end):

with gardening?' Therefore she did not pursue that. But now she is doing some design gardening. And this shows that probably, should she have pursued it, she could have made a living out of it. Now she is surrounded by a loveable husband and wonderful children. So she is probably happy. Now she does some painting, every day she is busily painting, and she is also doing some volunteer work. But then, when I see that, I think that is nice. When you work you cannot live like my mom and that is a pity.

(32 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

As mentioned above in Chapter 5, day care was and is limited in post-war Japan. A small minority of mothers had access to the few day care places available, however, and was determined to keep on working full-time throughout or very soon after childbearing. At the height of the ‘industrial household’ this constituted a kind of deviant behaviour as women were supposed to withdraw completely from the labour market at the time of marriage and motherhood and only later gradually increase their labour force participation. The following respondent, voice 11, shows how when she was very young, she observed other families and perceived her mother’s behaviour as deviant. Significant in this regard is that the respondent does not say ‘I always wondered, why don’t I have that kind of mother’ (implying a mother who always stays at home), but says ‘I always wondered why don’t I have a mother’, as if she felt that her mother’s behaviour did not quite meet the standards of what it meant at that time to be a mother. This then constitutes a good illustration of the importance of ‘meaning-giving’ and ‘behaviour-guiding’ rules related to the constructed image of how ‘mom’ should be. At the height of the ‘industrial household’ there prevailed a certain definition of motherhood and certain patterns of behaviour connected to it. Anything which differed from the norm constituted deviant behaviour.

Voice 11:

My mom was a teacher. Therefore, ever since I was a child, both my parents were working. … But actually, at that time, there were very few cases in which both parents were working at the same time. I was sent to a day care centre (gakudouhoiku) and I was a ‘key-child’ (kagikko). I always thought by myself, why don’t I have a mother. My parents also never came to see my school sports activities. Therefore I was determined to become a housewife after growing up. But around the time of high-school my perception of my mother changed. I thought ‘she is great, working full-time’. And I think I also became more mature and was better able to put life in perspective. So that mom, working full-time, doing all the household work, raising the children, in other words doing really everything, I thought she was super-good (sugoi) – even though before that time I did not like her that much. … And I thought ‘a life like my mom's is not that bad’. And this mom said ‘when there’s a recession it's better to get a skill’ (laughter).

(29 Years Old – Married – Full-Time Worker)

On the other hand it is interesting to see how, as the respondent grew up and also societal values changed, the respondent’s perception of her mother completely reversed and her mother started functioning as a powerful role model for the respondent. Largely identical observations can be made as far as voice 12 is concerned:
Voice 12:
My mom has been working ever since my younger brother entered kindergarten. So when I was a child, whenever I saw my friends' mothers, who were housewives, I was terribly jealous of them. When they came home they had homemade snacks. But now I myself am working and I think it was good to grow up watching my mother work. There were a lot of difficulties, but it was good to see my mother struggling that much. If I were to have a child, I will work. Perhaps there will be a short time that I will not work. But I would like to be the kind of woman who works while raising her child.

(34 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

Working part-time or full-time or not, in line with the predefined gender roles connected to the constructed image of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’, mothers had their household responsibilities to take care of as well. This entailed pampering their husbands and also their children and to such an extent that when the children grew up they felt that they were not in a position to function independently. It is a well-known fact that in Japan, especially contemporary Japan, parents leave their children rather free and education is rather lax. Inculcating a sense of discipline is left to the school and later to the company. Many commentators regard such spoiling of children as the source of all kinds of perceived social ills. One of these is the phenomenon of the 'parasitic singles' (Yamada, 1999). As discussed in Chapter 5, ‘parasitic singles’ are young women and men working full-time, earning a good income, but living with their parents and able to spend their income on luxury goods, consumptive behaviour and travel. The following quotes provide an indication of how the daughters themselves, having made the transition into a new life stage, a period of ‘early adult era’ (Levinson, 1978, 1996), now realise how protected their youth has been:

Voice 13:
Before leaving the parental home, I was happily living with my parents, being very much protected. When I started living in the school dorm, I did not even know how to do my laundry. … I really thought about getting more advice from my parents.

(24 Years Old – Never married - Full-Time Worker)

Voice 14:
I come from outside the Tokyo area. So during my schooling, I lived in a dorm. And when I got this job I started living alone. So once in a while when I’m back at my parents' home, it is very strange to meet someone else in the house, have food and a hot bath prepared for you. You only have to clean your own room, and you don’t have to pay anything.

(24 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

Another major household responsibility of the mothers was to take care of the parents-in-law, in the best tradition of the ie. This has already been pointed out in Chapter 5 and by Voice 1. The following quote illustrates an extreme case in which the respondent's mother had to take care of both her own mother and her mother-in-law. This once more exerts an influence on the respondent’s thinking:
Voice 15:
At one point in time, both my grandmothers were staying with us, and my mom was taking care of both of them from early in the morning until late in the evening. For a year or two, I watched her doing that, and it was too much. I do not want to do that. I think that it is cruel to expect one to take that kind of responsibility. I wonder whether there is not another way in which it can be arranged so that the family does not have to take responsibility.

(35 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

9.3 My world

In the previous section, the emphasis was on the world of the respondents' mothers as perceived by the respondents themselves. It was very much the world of the ‘industrial household’. But it was a world still full of ‘agricultural household' remnants and expectations regarding the continuation of the family line, taking care of one’s parents and parents-in-law, and adhering to a fixed sequence of marriage and motherhood and its concomitant norms concerning age and duration. At the same time, the ‘industrial’ life course differed quite substantially from the ‘agricultural’ one. Where instrumental goals are concerned, marriage was no longer about survival (lower-order needs) but about dependency. The life course consisted of some education, some short-term but intensive work, resigning from full-time employment at the time of marriage, taking care of the household, children and elderly, and then slowly increasing one's labour force participation via work at home, part-time work outside the home, and eventually full-time work outside the home.

In this section, the focus of attention shifts to the respondents' own world. This will allow us to provide a better insight into how the cognitive schemes on life develop and mature not only through interaction with the parents but also through many other 'contextual' components in, for instance, the structural and cultural sense, and ultimately determine the union formation and fertility choices undertaken by the respondents.

9.3.1 I am increasingly well-educated

As discussed in Chapter 5, a major component of the structural SDT dimension consists of increased female educational attainment in the post-war period. While the respondents’ mothers close the gender gap as far as secondary education is concerned and more of them enrol in post-secondary education of the 2-year college type, the respondents themselves to a much larger extent than previous generations start going to university. This is important for the postponement of union formation and fertility because of the increasing length of education and also because, as will be discussed in the next section, these higher levels of educational attainment increase their participation in the labour market leading to further postponement. The impact of educational attainment on union formation and fertility was demonstrated in Chapter 6, which showed that high-educated women of the later Japanese
cohort (born in and after 1960) give birth later and to a lesser extent than low- and medium-educated women.

Mothers play an important role in influencing the cognitive schemes of their children through how they live, what they say and think, as well as through the child rearing choices they make on the basis of their reflections on their own life. Answering to our list of questions, many respondents felt that their mothers played an important part in encouraging them to aim for higher levels of educational attainment. As discussed in Chapter 2 and above, youth and early adulthood or ‘initial’ instrumental goals shape to a large extent the expectations and value patterns impacting upon the rest of the life course. The respondents' mothers had substantial impact on the formulation of these ‘initial’ instrumental goals of the respondents centreing on education. This shows, to some extent, the intergenerational nature of 'personal background' in the life-course sense. This also means that a mother's personal background is somewhat responsible for the first postponement.

The respondents’ mothers influence the ‘initial’ instrumental goals of their children, the respondents, but for these education mamas (kyouiku mama) of the industrial household the education of their children also constituted an important instrumental goal. The respondents’ mothers invested substantial time and effort, and derived great satisfaction from guiding and helping to successfully complete their children’s educational careers. Some mothers, as perceived by their own daughters, valued education because of the unrealised potential in their own life course, something they wanted to spare their daughters from. Other women, perhaps because of working part- or full-time in the labour market, were aware of the rapidly changing socio-economic context (structural dimension) of post-war industrialising Japan, in which a growing premium was put on education, not only at the secondary, but also at the post-secondary level, i.e. junior college and university. Voice 8 (above) is an example of a respondent who feels that her mother, because of working part-time in a low-skilled job and being aware of the rapidly changing socio-economic context and the need to obtain a better education and higher skill level, has encouraged her into that direction. The following respondent feels that she has been encouraged into further education because of her mothers' unrealised instrumental goals. Her mother, according to the daughter, felt that she was not able to do all the things she wanted to do and wanted to provide her children and daughter in this case with that opportunity, which resulted in a better education for her:

Voice 16:
After university, my mom worked, and then got married. She lost her father at age 18. She has many brothers and sisters, and she was responsible for doing the household work. Her body was not that strong, however, so she was told not to work full-time. So when she was young she herself could not do all the things she wanted to do. She is a housewife (shufu), and really good at it. But at the bottom of her heart she thinks that her children should do what they really want to do. I do not like that. My name means ‘stem’ (of a plant), which refers to strength. But actually, I am not that strong. And I do not want to become like my mom. But when I really think

(To be continued)
Whatever the reasons why mothers encourage their children to achieve higher levels of educational attainment, it entailed making sacrifices. This could take the form, for instance, of not allowing the children to help in housework, as in the case of the following respondent:

Voice 17:
In the past, my mom never let me do the household chores, always saying that those things, I could do them anytime [while, as for studying, you can only do it now]. But when you're married you realise that that is not entirely true [she would have liked to learn those things better during her youth]. So I want to be able to do those things well too. On the other hand, I also understand my mother wanting me to be different from her, a person who can only do household work.

(32 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

But encouraging their daughters to pursue higher education also involved making serious financial sacrifices, as already mentioned several times in Chapter 5, in view of the extremely high educational costs in Japan (see Chapter 5, EOI). Especially in the rural areas of Japan, sending daughters for higher education also entailed engaging in 'deviant behaviour' – deviating from the norm that women should not get too much education and that they quickly move into marriage and motherhood, while contributing to the family business – and facing disapproval of the surrounding community ('surrounding eyes') and 'sekensama' (see Chapter 5). This links back to a number of issues discussed before. In Chapter 2, we described how the context communicates itself to the individual via institutions and other individuals around through rules, norms and sanctions. And in Chapter 5, we pointed out how norms seem to guide behaviour to a larger extent in Japan than elsewhere. Behavioural patterns diffuse rapidly and behaviour is standardised because of, among other things, enforcement of norms not by particular institutions but by everyone around. Given all of this then it is interesting to observe how there still seems to be scope for 'deviant' behaviour. And, initially at least, this deviant behaviour is by the respondent’s parents, not by the respondent herself.

Both the financial and deviant behaviour issues are reflected in the following quote:

Voice 18:
Because I come from a rural area, the neighbours think that, well, I am a girl, and I take some years to go to university, and my parents spend a lot of money on me, but if eventually I do not get married and have children, what a pity. And my parents also receive comments such as 'so you still don't have a grandchild?' But my parents think that if I can really realise my own potential then they are happy. … That is also because of their personal background: they themselves did not have enough money to go to university. I think that they will do anything to provide their children with that kind of opportunity. I think that financially it is really hard on them. My family is

(To be continued)
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Voice 18 (end):
not that rich. And I think they are really doing their best, I feel that very much, and I also appreciate that very much. … In a rural area, the moment a girl goes to university, the neighbours start commenting and saying that that girl is stuck-up. I feel sorry that my parents have to put up with that kind of old-fashioned way of thinking.

(26 Years Old - Never married - Student)

While the respondents’ mothers perhaps only provide the initial push towards more education, in doing so they exert a considerable impact on their daughters’ lives. As the respondents grow older, the search for additional education becomes more and more self-sustaining. Respondents enrol in further education not because they are encouraged by their parents but because they start seeing education as an important instrumental goal to reach other self-defined goals:

Voice 19:
(On the planned life course) I would really like to know myself. I just don't know. I am still thinking (about my goals in life). How to get rich, how to invest, and career, financial management. I am doing an M.B.A. So I feel that I have to study. When I think about what I want to be in the future, well, big companies will disappear. The time has come for individuals. Every individual will become an investor.

(35 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

9.3.2 I work more and more, in increasingly attractive and demanding jobs

Within a context of rapid economic development and a quickly evolving labour market, the respondents’ higher levels of educational attainment give rise to higher levels of formal labour force participation. Their 'education mamas', as their daughters call them, encourage them to get more education not for the sake of that education itself. The respondents’ mothers expect their daughters to go out and work (as borne out by the ever more shallow M-curve of female labour force participation) as they did. In Chapter 5, we already discussed how female labour force participation rates indeed rose over time in the post-war period and how women increasingly had access to better jobs (for reference see Table 5.4).

While in the case of education as an instrumental goal the role of the parents is decisive, this is no longer the case for work. There is an issue of role model and what the mothers say. There is also the context (higher female labour force participation): everyone does it. As discussed before, in the industrial household, there is never much discussion in Japan about the transition from education into work after completing one’s education. The issue under discussion is whether women should be able to continue working throughout marriage and motherhood. In other words, in the post-war period, it was increasingly 'expected' that one goes out and works, at least for a few years, upon completion of one's education and not doing so would constitute deviant behaviour. This shows the cumulative nature of postponement. After completion of one’s education, which causes postponement, it is kind of expected to work at least for a few years, causing additional postponement. This
shows once again how the individual exerts some control over the direction of the life course and also how there is a certain limitation as to the range of available options because of prior choices made by the individual or by the individual's parents and because of societal expectations. In other words, there are elements of path or state dependency. Past life experiences condition future ones. This is of course fully in line with the life-course approach. The following quote gives some indication of how going to work after completing one's education has become 'expected' and normal indicating that the transition from education to work is more natural than the transition to marriage:

**Voice 20:**
I would like to work for two years or so and build up some savings. At least once I would like to live on my own. In that way, I pay for everything by myself and take responsibility. Obviously, that is quite different from being dependent on your parents.

(22 Years Old - Never married - Student)

Once one has made a kind of 'expected' transition into another state, new options, possibilities and attributes come into play. Jobs are more interesting than in the past. The individual reassesses. This links to what we have argued in Chapter 2 on transition periods, during which the individual "summarises, evaluates and terminates the past and starts the future" (paraphrasing Willekens, 1991, p. 18). More and more women actually have access to rewarding jobs that give them satisfaction, and by satisfaction we mean the whole range of Maslowian higher-order needs (esteem, belonging and self-actualisation) that we referred to in Chapter 2. Work starts functioning not as an instrumental goal, which is complementary to marriage and motherhood, as it is in the M-curve model, but as a fully dominant one. The quote below then clearly shows how work has become perfectly acceptable as an instrumental goal to meet the higher-order needs outlined earlier:

**Voice 21:**
Through my work, I meet lots of people, and I also learn lots of new things. And even without being married, and studying many things, and meeting a lot of people, I receive a lot of stimuli, and in this way I want to continue to raise my satisfaction [with life]. My work is about human relations, and I feel that if I am not happy with myself I cannot do my work well. That is my position, and therefore I am not thinking about marriage, and I do not have a partner either.

(26 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

And once work starts competing full-scale with marriage and motherhood as instrumental goals one has to start assessing the combinatoriality between work and family.
9.3.3 I think I cannot combine work with marriage and motherhood

So moving from education to work is a kind of 'expected' transition. But once the individual has arrived in this new state it becomes clear that work puts money in your pocket, and it creates independence or the possibility to live independently, it yields satisfaction, self-realisation and belonging, the so-called higher order needs. This point was made emphatically during the focus group discussions, namely that women consider work as an important instrumental goal to achieve ultimate goals. On the other hand, it is also clear from our description of the Japanese context (Chapter 5) and the voices of these women that it is (perceived to be) difficult to combine increasingly attractive work with marriage and motherhood. Voice 21 is representative of such views. She is not thinking about marriage because she wants to maximise the satisfaction derived from her work, implying that one cannot have both.

Marriage means quitting: the expectation to resign

A primary reason why it is almost impossible to combine work and family in Japan is the certain 'expectation of resignation' at the time of marriage and motherhood. This stems from the myth of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’. In other words, a rather strong norm exists about the fact that work should not be combined with marriage and motherhood. That means that if one wants to continue working one should not get married or have children, which was already discussed in detail in Chapter 5. This expectation was especially pronounced at the height of the industrial household, as is reflected in, for instance, the above voices 3, 5 and 6, but it remains rather strong even today:

Voice 22:
If I would get pregnant and I would say to my employer that I would quit, they would just say ‘fine’, go ahead.

(24 Years Old - Never married - Student)

My job is demanding

But even without such a rather strong norm concerning the need to resign at the time of marriage and motherhood it would be difficult to combine work with marriage and motherhood, due to purely practical reasons. Work is first of all demanding in Japan. This relates to Japan's economic development. The ongoing shift into ever-higher value-added industries and the arrival of the information society have increased the work pressure (see reference on this on Chapter 5 Table 5.4):
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Voice 23:
The pace of life, cellular phones, internet, there are lots of things which make society move faster and faster. So if I consider these past 6 years that I am in advertising, well, the speed of work is now completely different. And if you tell a client that you are not able to do the job by the required deadline, then the relationship with that client is over. Over these past 5 or 6 years, things have been changing, everything is about speed now. On the other hand, childbearing and child rearing slow you down. And so does having a nice time with your family. So if you want to take it easier then you have to change jobs, because the speed at which the company functions will not change.

(35 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

While the above is commonplace in most industrialised countries, work in Japan always seems to be still a bit more demanding than elsewhere. A core element there is the extremely long working hours already discussed in Chapter 5. The following quote shows, within this context, how difficult it is to find a job with standardised working hours, meaning from 9 to 5, which would allow mothers to leave on time to take care of household responsibilities and children. A respondent speaks about the experiences of a close friend:

Voice 24:
Two days ago, my friend called me. Because she has a child she said ‘my life is over’ (laughter)...My friend is a temporary worker (haken-san), and is divorced. And for her child, she leaves work at 5, so she does not work overtime…. It was really difficult to find that kind of job.

(24 Years Old - Never married - Student)

At the same time, it is not the practice to focus on output, and work extra hard so as to be able to get the work done and leave early. Performance at work is judged on the basis of hours present in the office while supervisors are present, rather than on the basis of productivity. The following respondent quotes the experience of her friend (cohort members) and adds that it is better to put your career first and only later have children, already providing an indication of the kinds of postponement choices that young Japanese women are increasingly making because of the perceived difficulty in combining work and family:

Voice 25:
One person I know got married, and she continued working at her company. It was extremely demanding to work long hours. She always tried to go home in time to pick up her child from the day care centre. She was also able to produce good work. But in a Japanese company, it is more appreciated that you stay long in the office than if you had a high output. So in her case, it is not about productivity and then being able to leave on time. Just because she is not at her desk she already gets comments from her supervisor. As far as combining a job with children is concerned, I think you must first build up your career, otherwise it is mentally too demanding.

(25 Years Old – Never married - Student)


**Household work is demanding**

Then there are the gender roles connected to the constructed images of wifehood and motherhood. While work is demanding this is no less the case as far as household responsibilities are concerned. These entail household chores, childcare, child rearing, and care for the elderly. In Japan, it is still only women who are expected to assume these responsibilities.

**Household chores and child care**

The following quote clearly shows how difficult it is to go on working while at the same time having to take care of household chores and children:

**Voice 26:**
I think that it is a fact that the number of people combining work and motherhood is increasing. But they all have this really murderous schedule. I feel like 'how can you raise a child'? Waking up very early, making breakfast, taking your child to the day care centre, and in the evening, these people try to finish their job by 7, running, while other people take until 10 or 11. They run to the day care centre to pick up the child, and afterwards they do household stuff and washing. If you are just working [without a child] you do not have to do those things everyday, but [when you have child] you have to do those things everyday, you have to prepare food everyday, and therefore I think there is a point where combining work and motherhood gets tough both mentally and financially.

(32 Years Old - Married - Full-time Worker)

But in Japan the care for children goes much further than merely minding and feeding them. There are strong norms on what a good mother is, how to raise children, as reflected in Chapter 5 by Jolivet's (1997) 10 commandments of child rearing (Table 5.7) and the experts’ discussion of the ‘myth of the three years’ (the mother has to stay with the child until the child is three years old) (*sansaiji shinwa*) (see discussion, Oohinata, 2002a and 2002b). This once more constitutes a good example of ‘meaning-giving’ and ‘behaviour-guiding’ rules. One of the principal norms is the one on dedicating at least a few years full-time to the raising of the child:

**Voice 27:**
Well, I think that a child needs attention when it is small, and that the mother should be with the child. I think it is definitely better that at least somebody, preferably a family member, stays with the child. Often, there are mothers who work and make use of day care, and I understand that that is necessary, and perhaps I will also end up doing that. However, I think it is good if one can stay at home all the time, and be able to make that decision to quit one's job and make that sacrifice (of quitting one's job). I think it is quite inevitable that when I do have a child I will leave my job for some time.

(26 Years Old - Never married - Student)
The above norm by itself has a number of rather negative consequences for Japanese women. Women have to resign from work, but also become very isolated, especially in the urban areas, where women are alone with the child for most of the day and alternative possibilities to interact with others are limited. The nature of the nuclear family in the urban area is such that interaction with other people is less self-evident than in inter-generational families in small-scale rural communities. This loneliness is extra hard because modern Japanese women, themselves often being the only child, do not know enough about how to raise children and feel very insecure, and they are also restrained by Japanese culture and norms on ‘keeping up’ (ganbaru) from asking for outside help (Jolivet, 1997). The dilemma of these full-time housewives contrasts starkly with the satisfaction of diverse interaction with colleagues and customers within the context of an interesting job:

Voice 28:
Is this discussion only about working women? If not, all my friends are housewives (shufu). There are lots of people who raise their children by themselves. Those people are also having a difficult time. Having a job is tough, but when you are at home you have to deal with neighbours. I think it is easier to put the child in day care. But day care cannot be used if you are not working. At home you are all alone, there is not even a mother-in-law or an acquaintance. Your husband comes home late, and you are very lonely, and you have so much stress. I heard many stories like that and decided not to have a child. Of course it is demanding when you work, but if you are a housewife it is also demanding in the urban area. I do not know about the rural areas but, when you are in Tokyo, then if life is like this, they say that it is tough.

(42 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

But the great demands on mothers continue, even when the children start going to school. As one of the interviewees says: “There are many social norms on how to be a mother”, once more pointing out the strength in Japan of ‘meaning-giving’ and ‘behaviour-guiding’ rules. Parent-teacher association meetings (so-called P.T.A.s), for instance, are somehow deliberately held during the day, at times convenient for the school but inconvenient for working women, and each parent in turn is required to take responsibility for various school activities, working or not.

In addition to confirming the importance and strength in Japan of ‘meaning-giving’ and ‘behaviour-guiding’ rules, the quote below also shows how this respondent is faced with a dilemma. Her story shows that she is torn between the demands of work and the demands of child rearing, in other words torn between 'structural' and 'cultural' demands. This clearly shows how the ‘context’ can give women conflicting signals and incentives because of the intergenerational nature of each characteristic, and how even in this situation women still have to make choices. In other words, it becomes clear here that women's choices cannot and are not solely determined by the coherent context. Obviously one needs a more comprehensive theory of individual choices, which is exactly what, starting from our theoretical framework in Chapter 2, we have been trying to accomplish in this study.
It is also useful to point out here once more the rigidity of the sex-specificity of the division of labour. It is only women who, on the basis of the myth of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother', are expected to be involved in child rearing, not the fathers. This concurs with what Hayashi (1996) argues, namely that due to new labour regimes under industrialisation the traditional patriarch has disappeared and is absent from the family and this has negative consequences for the family:

Voice 29:
In Japan, taking responsibility is important. There are many social norms on how to be a mother. Therefore, I think that being a mother is much tougher than being a working woman. So, these social norms and fixed concepts relating to motherhood are extremely strong, from a societal point of view. You have to meet those expectations. … As far as school is concerned, there are certain things that mothers are expected to do, such as making by hand a napkin for their child (implying that you cannot buy a ready-made product). You hear that mothers have to make that, but I never heard that fathers have to make that, and the school asks for that. According to my friend, kindergarten is still okay … but when the child enters elementary school, you are being assigned various tasks and activities and you are criticised if you do not carry them out. [I heard my friends saying that they are told by the school or other mothers] 'What could be more important than your child?' That is really scary, and at such a moment, I wonder whether I will be able to go against that and say 'it is my work'. … That really requires (mental) preparation and physical and mental health.

(32 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

Quite aside from the need to spend exclusive time with your child, and assume other responsibilities, there is also the fact that raising children in Japan is terribly expensive, as already discussed in Chapter 5:

Voice 30:
Well, educational costs are very high in Japan. By the time that a child graduates from university it has cost at least ¥10,000,000 (€77,741.741). And if a child goes to private schools, it will have cost twice as much. And if you do not have a child you are able to use that ¥20,000,000 (€155,463.12) for other things. And you are able to have a good quality of life. This is the kind of conversation I had with my mother. The decision to have a child or not is an individual one, and people are able to make that choice.

(22 Years Old - Never married - Student)

Women must take care of the elderly

The final component of household work, in addition to household chores, child care and child rearing, is taking care of the elderly. Taking care of the elderly, especially one’s parents-in-law, is part of the Confucian and ie traditions, as well as the package of tasks connected to the myth of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’. As discussed above, government-organised care for the elderly is limited (and also perceived to be limited) and because of budgetary reasons the government is expected to shift this burden still more to families. There is a strong expectation from the parents’ side that they will be taken care of. However, such a development is becoming increasingly unpopular. This is confirmed by a study by Atoh
(2001b), who cites a survey by the Population Problems Research Council, Mainichi Newspapers (2000) and finds that attitudes towards caring for aged parents have changed lately. The share of respondents agreeing with the statement 'care is a child’s duty as a matter of course' has dramatically decreased, while the share of respondents agreeing with the statement 'there is no other choice than taking care of parents because of the lack of facilities and institutions' has increased in the period from the late 1980s to early 1990s:

Voice 31:
When I got married, at first my parents-in-law lived far away. Then they got ill and we moved to live closer to them. But when they got better, they started visiting us too often. So I imposed some distance. And that affected our relationship. Therefore we moved back [to Tokyo]. But then they started getting really old, getting a lot of physical problems. Any time they would come and stay with us. Of course I told them that they could come and that we would take care of them. But then they wanted to stay in their own house, which they were used to. But for me it was easier for them to come over since if they stay in their own house, and something happens, that is too far.

(39 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

Voice 32:
As a matter of fact, since last February, I am living with my own mother. At first, I hated, hated, really hated this. … I gave up on having children, so there was no merit in it for us (living with my mother). Before, we lived in an apartment in central Tokyo. It was very convenient, and I never wanted to move. We had our own world. It was difficult to change this lifestyle because living with an old person, it was too much. My mom was alone and her house was becoming decrepit. She was over 70 years old and she felt very insecure and my brother, the first son, was adopted into another family, where there were only two daughters. So the first daughter had been asked to live with her own parents.

Because I was living with her, my mother became so happy and had so many expectations. But when you return to your parental home, well, I just did not want to be a 'daughter' again. So first I was living alone and then I became a 'daughter' again, at least that is how the neighbours looked at me. And I myself I was a child again according to my parents. But my mother became very dependent on me and that made me feel insecure. But we made two completely separate households under the same roof (nisetai): separate door, separate bathroom, separate toilet, separate kitchen. There is, however, a connecting door, so it is possible to come and go. But just the fact of living together made my mom feel more at ease. It is something like a close new neighbour. I have to take care of my mother, but when I get sick she cares for me too, or we get some food. Well, my husband is also a first son, and when we got married they [my parents-in-law] asked us to take care of them should one of them end up alone. So we have one extra room should my parents-in-law want to come and join us.

(42 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

Lack of support from husband and institutions

All of the above voices (Voices 26 to 32) then indicate that women have to take care of household chores, children, child rearing, and the elderly. And they have to do it all by themselves. This is in the first place, as already voice 29 clearly states, because there is no support from their own partner. For reference, see the issue on housework-sharing in Table
5.5 and Tsuya, et al., 2000. The partner himself is also terribly busy, functioning within Japan's particular labour market system. But even if he had the time he would probably not get fully involved as gender roles have evolved little or not at all in Japan over the past few decades:

**Voice 33:**
When I think about my own situation, I know somebody who could perhaps have taken care of my child. But that person became ill. And then I became very concerned about who would be responsible for taking care of the child. My husband hardly has any vacation. If he’s late, he returns home at 1 or 2 in the night, and if it’s early, he still only returns home at 10 or 11 pm. I do not just want to give birth and leave it at that.

(35 Years Old - Married – Full-Time Worker)

The above quote then once more clearly shows how Japanese women because of their perception of the incompatibility between work and family – because of demanding jobs and demanding household work in combination with a lack of partner and institutional support – are clearly torn between their identities as working women (what they are) and mothers (what they are expected to be). This issue of 'identity' is in line with van de Kaal’s SDT explanatory framework presented in Chapter 2 (Table 2.3), where he points out in the cultural dimension the “difficulty of establishing personal identity”. The respondent recalls that at a critical moment or ‘transitional period’ (Willekens, 1991) in her life course, namely at the time of the transition from the unmarried to the married state, she ‘thought about’ having children. In other words, that suggests the time that she could have had children, or at least suggests an expectation or aspiration to become a mother. The same concerns are also clear from the next quote:

**Voice 34:**
I think that in the current situation it is not possible for women to continue working. I do not know which one is better, having children, getting married or not getting married, but especially when you are married it is difficult to continue working. There is no support system. I do not know which one is better, but working and having a family at the same time, that is extremely difficult.

(25 Years Old – Never married - Student)

This sometimes makes respondents, especially those living in the urban areas, long for the model of the ‘agricultural household’ or *ie* system, consisting of an inter-generational family in which other family members can provide support, and which can still be found in the rural areas:
Voice 35:
Until yesterday, we were at my parents' home, which is in Nagano. My sister had her first child and that is the first grandchild (hatsumago) for both families. She lives in a completely different environment. She got married into a big extended family. I am just living with my partner, not relying on our own parents, without close friends. But my sister lives together with 9 other family members, and she quit working, but for her there is no need to work in order to pay the rent. Vegetables are grown at home. If there are 9 family members around, there will always be someone helping with child rearing. If something happens, you can always ask for help. The grandparents can take care of the grandchildren, children are the centre of the world. The child is being loved and my sister seems to be very happy and I think that that kind of life is nice. But I started my own life here (in Tokyo). I got married and started my life here. Our lives are completely different, but when I see my sister being so happy I also start feeling that I would like to have a child.

(26 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

9.3.4 My perception on marriage and motherhood

Partnership is about love and trust

The above then clearly shows that female educational attainment and female labour force participation have increased. At the same time, work is not combinable with marriage and motherhood, and marriage and motherhood have become increasingly unattractive in the absolute sense because of the increasing burden of child rearing and care of the elderly. Marriage has also become less attractive in the relative sense because of higher expectations towards it. It is clear that these days, arranged marriages are out of the question. As discussed in Chapter 5, arranged marriages were standard practice under the ie household system. They survived, but to a smaller extent, under the industrial household system. But at present they are rare, and one expert, as discussed in Chapter 5, sees in this collapse of the marriage market an additional cause for low fertility in Japan. The survey results support this. These days, and as illustrated below, partnership should be about love and trust. However, engaging in a partnership does not automatically ensure that one acquires love and trust. The respondent's perception of her parents' kind of marriage is critical in this regard:

Voice 36:
Marriage is based on love, at least that is what I think. And having a child is only possible with someone you love. As for me (laughter), I have not reached that stage. Let me give the example of a closely related couple [who eventually turn out to be respondents’ parents]. She is a nurse, often on duty during holidays and nights. In those circumstances, it is not possible to have a child and work at the same time without help from the father. My father is an easy-going and dynamic person, and he took good care of us. Since my mother was a nurse, and day care facilities were relatively OK, she put us (she has siblings) in day care. But my father thought that we were constrained at the day care during the day, so he said that he would care for us and play with us. ... All of this was possible because they loved each other, and I am not sure whether I will be able to get the same kind of love, and that kind of partner.

(24 Years Old – Never married - Student)
**Voice 37:**
Ah, marriage, marriage and happiness. Not having children and living together just the two of us, I have been thinking about that kind of life. On the other hand, if it is possible to be happy with children, that is also fine. ... I have thought about the two possibilities. Most important is that I get married to whom I love.

(22 Years Old - Never married - Student)

**Voice 38:**
I will not get married irresponsibly. Of course I will marry someone I trust. [But marriage is risky] Your partner may die because of an accident. Or my values and the ones of my partner may be incompatible. Or there is the possibility that my partner cannot be trusted as much as I expected. There are many possibilities. But I do not like to be alone, especially if I have a child. One has to get married, (but it has to be with someone you trust) and marriage indicates that you are sincere and willing to take a risk with that person. I will not get married with a person I do not trust!

(22 Years Old - Never married - Student)

**Partnership is about equality**

Partnership is, however, not only about love and trust. There also has to be more equality between the two partners than there has been in the past. Tsuya and Mason (1995) point out the growing unattractiveness of ‘traditional’ and gender-asymmetric marriages that are still based on the *ie* system and the constructed image of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' discussed in Chapter 5. As the broader context transforms through increased female educational attainment and increased female labour force participation but the narrow family system and gender roles do not evolve, marriage becomes increasingly gender-asymmetric in the relative sense.

This longing for equality is reflected in several issues. First, women want to be able to keep their maiden name. Under the current legal marriage system, in most cases women are expected to be registered as the dependent of the head of the household. This means giving up one's maiden name. That is why, as the following shows, women attach so much importance to being able to keep their own maiden name after marriage, something which is not easily possible in Japan at this time:

**Voice 39:**
Changing names [upon marriage] meant that people who knew me from before would not recognise my name anymore. It also caused problems at work. I had never really thought about the inconveniences connected to changing your name [upon marriage]. But in a way it was also good for me. My parents were intervening too much in my life. So by becoming attached to my husband I was able to get rid of that intervention. So it was also useful for me. But at the same time there was something quite unacceptable about it because my husband found it quite natural that I should change my name. It was inconvenient because I had to change my name on all the official forms, but I also lost some emotional bond with my family, and my husband could not understand that. And I do not know why, but I kept a bank account in my own name.

(32 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)
Increased equality in the partnership should be reflected in the fact that also the partner clearly shares in the household chores:

**Voice 40:**
I think about how I am living with my room-mate now, and I have some views on this. We are very straightforward with each other. One week, I prepare the food, and the next week she does. That is something that we have agreed upon. That makes it very easy. If one person has to do everything, cooking, cleaning and washing, that is too much. That is annoying. Then there is no need to get married or to cohabit. Even if it is the person I love.

(25 Years Old - Never married - Student)

A third and final issue relating to the need for increased equality within the partnership is the scope that should be there for the woman's professional development, breaking loose from the traditional expectations connected to marriage:

**Voice 41:**
In the organisation where I work, there is something called the overseas programme. Initially, I felt like applying too. But I am married, and I first thought about my partner. But even so I thought I wanted to apply. And then my husband said 'why don't you try'. But then my parents said it would be better not to go, because I am married. And then I thought about it again. And my husband said that if I was not sure, then why not try first. But by that time the deadline had passed. And I myself felt that I let it pass because I could not leave him alone. That is just my feeling. I felt that I myself cannot go too far away. And then I thought about exploring areas for self-realisation, which lie within my own sphere and will not affect the family.

(35 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

The above voice once more clearly identifies how the SDT explanatory framework is too ‘smooth’ in the sense that it implies that the individual is provided with a harmonised set of incentives and rules and that the choices to be made by the individual are self-evident. The above voice reveals how the human agent, when confronted at a particular time with a particular choice, was faced with conflicting incentives and opinions from other individuals (the husband and the parents) – 'linked lives'. This prevented the respondent from making a pro-active choice reflected in 'I felt that I myself cannot go far away'. A feeling of regret because of not having been able to make her own choice is clear. This shows that confusing signals lead to traditional choices. Perhaps innovative choices only come about when indeed the individual is presented with a harmonised set of incentives, but that is rare. It is also interesting to observe that in the end the respondent goes along with what the parents say, the parents as representatives of tradition, rather than with what the husband says. The following respondent also feels that work and marriage are incompatible:

**Voice 42:**
As for me, they (my parents) will definitely expect a very formal engagement and marriage. … I think marriage

(To be continued)
is something fixed, requiring a big ceremony, with a gorgeous dress, starting from a proper engagement — that will be their expectation. ... Therefore it is troublesome and I am very reluctant to do that. I think that also with the in-laws it will be very formal. I prefer something more open. But really, the kind of marriage that the parents expect and what my own life entails [being a full-time worker] is completely out of line. Therefore, that kind of expected marriage will be difficult. I also think that I would not be able to get along with the kind of partner that they imagine as their ideal son-in-law.

(35 Years Old – Never married - Full-Time Worker)

The following respondent reverses the thinking. She does not think that marriage should be equal and accommodate work. She rather feels that by working she will attain equality in marriage. A particular background (bad relationship between parents) of the following respondent is noted:

Voice 43:
Fundamentally, I cannot stand working so I want to quit. But I do not want to feel inferior (towards my husband) either, and I want to have equal status (with my husband), and that is why I want to work, I want to be always equal. So I will tell my partner to do household stuff, to do the laundry, because I am working too (laughter). ... It is not necessary to completely divide up the household work but men have to help out, right? That is ideal. And I am doing it like that. So in fact I am in control, I have a stronger position than my partner. ... For a long time, my parents had a bad relationship. When I was a child, and when I was a junior high school student, I thought that they should separate, because they really did not get along very well. I really thought that if my mom was crying and suffering so much they should get divorced. So ever since, I have this image of men, and I am scared that they can turn violent anytime and raise their hand (implying violence). So I feel that if a child has to be raised in that kind of environment, then it is better to separate and raise the child alone.

(29 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

What kind of partnership? Choosing between cohabitation and marriage

An important question which young couples have to answer these days is whether they will formalise their bond through marriage. In a number of previous chapters (for instance, Chapter 4), we have pointed to the absence in Japan of critical SDT components such as cohabitation and extra-marital birth. On the other hand, it was pointed out in Chapter 5 that younger people have a more positive attitude towards cohabitation. It is interesting to find out what respondents think about cohabitation vis-à-vis marriage.

Most respondents agree that ultimately they would like to get married. This is not so much to confirm the bond between two people, but for economic security reasons. So in a way marriage is still to a large extent viewed as an instrumental goal to fulfil lower-order Maslowian needs. Another reason for marrying relates to securing the formal and informal rights of the children. In most Western European countries, including the Netherlands, children’s rights are not affected to the same extent by the form of their parents' union formation (non-marital union, marital union, single motherhood) as in Japan. Being a child of
unmarried parents carries a large social stigma in Japan. It is strongly perceived by respondents that not marrying will disadvantage the child. This underlines again strong ‘meaning-giving’ and ‘behaviour-guiding’ rules in Japan pertaining to union formation and parenthood:

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<th>Voice 44:</th>
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<td>You may think that I am weird but I think that marriage is only a legal issue. I think that if the two of us want to be together then I am fine with cohabitation. I also think that it is possible to have a child while cohabiting. But when you have a child the official household registration becomes an issue. If you are married then at least it is not that easy to break up. There is some kind of written agreement (<em>kakuyaku</em>). Even if my partner runs away, I am still his wife according to the official household registration and my husband is still my husband on the basis of the same official household registration, and that gives some kind of security. That is what I think about marriage.</td>
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<td>(26 Years Old - Never married - Student)</td>
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<th>Voice 45:</th>
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<tr>
<td>It is OK to cohabit if you do not have any problems socially. But if you have a child, things are different. Then it is better to have the partnership officially registered.</td>
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<td>(31 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)</td>
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<th>Voice 46:</th>
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<td>There is no reason not to be officially registered. I do not know whether being registered or not will affect the meaning of the partnership. To me, it is just a minor thing. I do not care. But for instance, if you really think about it, then from a legal point of view, and this is quite realistic, the beneficiary of a life insurance can only be a dependent, so you’d better officially register. But I do not really think about it.</td>
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<td>(34 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)</td>
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So in addition to achieving the Maslowian lower-order need of 'security', an important role is played by the 'surrounding eyes’, i.e. the social expectations and rules communicated to the individual through institutions and other individuals. This happens either indirectly, via the children, as illustrated in the last three quotes. Or this happens directly, via direct societal pressure, as the following quotes illustrate. This can first of all take a 'positive' form, namely the fact that being married gives a kind of social status or recognition, which merely dating or cohabiting couples do not have:

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<th>Voice 47:</th>
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<td>I was told by my friend that it is better to get married, because of 'status' (<em>haku</em>), even though you may get divorced, it is better to get married. I do not know what 'status' she was talking about.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(26 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)</td>
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But respondents would also consider getting married to avoid social sanctioning, to avoid the 'surrounding eyes' negatively perceiving and sanctioning cohabitation. As pointed
out in Chapter 2, norms are always connected with sanctions. Norms tend to provide prescriptive guidance for behaviour in combination with a variety of possible sanctions. Sanctions are very important in the Japanese context and play an important role in achieving standardised behaviour:

**Voice 48:**
As far as cohabitation is concerned, I am very much in favour of it, and cohabiting with someone is very nice. But on the other hand, in Japan, you have to be careful about the 'surrounding eyes', and especially for men it is difficult to continue cohabitation. … I cannot stand the 'surrounding eyes' [which is why I rather marry than cohabit] And I would feel sorry for the child. The child would take my name. So for the father who is living there too, people would ask 'who is that?' The child would suffer. And it would be very difficult to explain to the child why the father is living together with us yet the child cannot take his name.

(25 Years Old - Never married - Student)

More often than not it is the respondents' parents that are the main representatives of these ‘surrounding eyes’, who can provide the respondent with social approval. It is noteworthy that the interviewees make numerous mention about their parents when it comes to the issue of sanctioning somewhat deviant behaviour such as cohabitation:

**Voice 49:**
It is not clear to me but marriage has something to do with parents. The external force of parents. Something that involves the whole family – that is parents, relatives, that is perhaps a very Japanese thing, but I feel that particularly a lot.

(35 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

**Voice 50:**
My parents said that it is not possible, not possible to cohabit, not to get married and do such things. My parents have very traditional values. I don’t think that they would like me to live together without being married. My parents will not accept that.

(26 Years Old - Never married - Student)

On the other hand there are rare exceptions of parents who do not mind their children cohabiting, suggesting attitudinal change even among the parents' generation. But even so, there is still the wider society to be taken into account:

**Voice 51:**
I do not think that my parents would say anything. Whether I would get married or not, have children or not, I think they would not say anything. Ever since I was a child my parents always let me do my own thing. … When I was dating someone, for instance, they did not say anything. That is my family, they won't say anything I think.

(34 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)
Do I want children?

A core question which this study tries to answer is whether women want to have children or not, and why, and when. Female educational attainment and labour force participation have increased. Work is not combinable with marriage and motherhood. And marriage and motherhood have become increasingly unattractive in the absolute and the relative sense. But a large proportion of the respondents (interpretation from the individual classified data) still want to have children. Several reasons are given for this.

First, it fulfils the desire to devote oneself to one's child. The following respondent derives her image of motherhood from the example of her own sister, who is married and has children. In this way, her sister communicates to the respondent the 'meaning' of certain behaviour: devoting oneself to one's child gives meaning to one's life.

Voice 52 (overlap and continued from voice 35):
Our lives are completely different, but when I see my sister being so happy I also start feeling that I would like to have a child. I have 4 siblings and when we play a video-game, even though we have fights, we have fun. When you become a mother, what is wonderful is that you can forget all about trends and work and can devote yourself to that. It is different for men [they do not have the same bond with their children]. I think that devotion is the privilege and the happiness of women.

(26 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

A second reason is that one wants to pass on one's genetic material to the next generation and avoid being alone. The latter refers to the importance of the emotional connectedness to others, but also to a kind of biological attachment to one’s future child:

Voice 53:
As for me, I am not too fond of children. I feel I only want to use my money for myself. But then, when I grow old, when I really get old, I think I will feel very lonely, either being alone or just with my partner. … Quite honestly, I would feel very sad if there would be no one coming after me who is biologically connected. On the other hand, [being a mother] could be financially tough, and it is also difficult to combine work and motherhood.

(25 Years Old - Never married – Student)

A third reason is that having a child makes one belong more to the community. This relates to the Maslowian higher-order need of belonging. But the following quote also shows the difficulty for young Japanese women to define their own ‘identity’, torn between work and family, and the importance of community ('location time and place’) in determining fertility behaviour:

Voice 54:
Of course I also want to be a mother. But it has been more than 10 years now [since I got married]. That is how it (To be continued)
Voice 54 (end):
is. I want to have a child because when you have children you are much more integrated into the community. Most other women of my age are mothers, and somehow I feel left alone. When I am at work I do my job as an employee, but once you get off work, in society, you are called the wife of so and so, or the mother of so and so, so in certain aspects I am non-existent to society at large. Therefore I want to have a child. Because now I do not fit in socially.

(39 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)

Or a woman has children, not because she wants them so much (just to avoid routine), but because her partner wants them. So she wants to have children as a result of social interaction or to maintain a good relationship with her partner. Children (fertility) then become a lower instrumental goal to reach the higher instrumental goal of a good quality relationship, which fulfils the satisfaction of higher-order needs. This also refers to Lesthaeghe’s (1995) notion of the quality of dyadic relationships, in which there is negotiation and give and take (cultural factor in SDT):

Voice 55:
I am quite positive about having a child. But even given my age, for the moment I will not consider medical treatment. But, yes, preferably I would have a child. Life is too much of a routine right now. I need some change in my life. I do not know whether I will be able to have a child, it is probable that I will have one. But, if you are not able to have one, then that is unfortunate. … My husband has high expectations. He thinks a family is only complete when there are children. That view is very strong. So if we are not able to have a child, I do not know what to do. … [Depending on whether we will be able to have children or not] The balance in our relationship can improve or worsen.

(32 Years Old - Married – Full-Time Worker)

Voice 56:
In my former job, I had the opportunity to think about what I would do in the future and I thought about how to plan my professional career and about where I wanted to be in the coming years. I calculated how many years it would take me to get sufficient work experience. And then I thought about changing jobs. But then, you need to build up professional knowledge and experience, and that cannot be easily obtained if you change jobs. You need to spend at least some years in one and the same job. So I decided to stay in the same job for a while. And my planning has not changed much since then. … On the other hand, when I ask my husband about how he imagines the future, it is all about children. He likes playing baseball so he dreams of playing baseball with the child. … It is not feasible, but sometimes I just think that it would be interesting to have a child, and move back to the rural areas just before the child enters elementary school and to tell the child to go and play in the village when I go to work and then to be able to just go off and come back in the evening.

(35 Years Old - Married - Full-Time Worker)
CHAPTER 9: INDIVIDUAL LIFE STORIES:
VOICES OF JAPANESE WOMEN

9.4 My choice on when to have my first child

Given all of the above personal background and contextual elements communicating behaviour-guiding and meaning-giving rules to the respondent, what then is an acceptable age range to give birth? Is it likely that the respondents have a framework of reference with regard to the so-called social time (see our discussion of different kinds of time in Chapter 2 and the explanation of that in the Japanese context in Chapter 5), an 'expected' age to experience a particular life event. And what ultimately will determine at what exact point in time these women will give birth?

9.4.1 Acceptable ages to have first child

The first question then which occupies us here is about an acceptable age to give birth. And when we discuss acceptable ages, we are basically talking about the behaviour-guiding rules prescribing the age at which to give birth. As we have mentioned in Chapters 2 and 5, in the past, there was a very strong norm in Japan on the age to get married, namely one had to get married by the age of 25. Marriage and motherhood were synonymous and women gave birth very soon after marriage. So the age norm on marriage also constituted an age norm on first birth. It has already been demonstrated in Chapter 6 that this age norm is weakening overall, especially for high-educated women. The following respondent still represents the traditional point of view:

Voice 57:
I agree with A and C, I would like to have children. In the past, I wanted to have children by age 25. But as I got closer to that age, I started feeling very constrained. In Japan now it is impossible to work [if you have children], it is extremely tough. And also from a financial point of view, if you have children then you do not have money to raise them. Therefore, as for the age of 25, it is better to earn money first.

(25 Years Old - Never married - Student)

The following respondents show that this age norm (social time) is disappearing. It is interesting to observe, for instance, that there seems to be a consensus among many respondents that an acceptable minimum age at which to give birth is 30 years old and an acceptable maximum age at which to give birth 35 years old. The following respondent finds age 30 an early age to give birth:

Voice 58:
By which age would you like to give birth? 30, because the earlier the better.

(22 Years Old - Never married - Student)
The following respondent finds age 35 the maximum age to give birth. She gives a clear indication of how age norms, 'social timing', have changed over time. She refers to the fact that in the past, if women gave birth after age 30, then a specific note, called 'marukou' was made in the 'mother and child health registration booklet', indicating that it was considered risky to give birth after age 30. She feels that this age limit is no longer relevant:

Voice 59:
In the old days, when you gave birth after age 30 then 'late child bearing mother' (marukou) was specifically stated in the 'mother and child health registration booklet'. Now, well, I am not a doctor, but I heard that it is still OK to give birth by age 35. And there are a lot of people giving birth by age 35. On the other hand, once it goes beyond that (age 35), then when the child is 20 years old and you yourself are 60 years old (kanreki) then that is a problem for the child.

(25 Years Old - Never married - Student)

Age norms, even in their weakened or reformulated form, come from outside but are also reinforced through personal life experiences. In other words, it is not only the social timing that matters but also the individual timing. Reference can be made here to Lesthaeghe and Surkyn (1988) who argue that the "individual no longer takes externally supplied norms and morality for granted, and instead stresses his or her own freedom of choice" (pp. 22-23). This is clear from the following respondent's perception of her mother's late birth:

Voice 60:
This is a very personal story, my mom had me at age 37. … Therefore, my mother was about 10 years older than other mothers. Therefore, from the child's point of view, if the mom is old … it was not so much fun. My mom is now over 70 … Therefore age 37 is a clear age limit for me.

(35 Years Old - Never married- Full-Time Worker)

9.4.2 How to respond to parallel careers – postpone, reject or take the traditional path

Both in the introduction, in Chapter 5 and earlier in this chapter, we have already noted that it would be possible to divide the respondents gathered in the focus group discussions into a number of different groups according to their behaviour concerning the timing of first birth. In particular, we made a provisional distinction between the so-called 'traditionalists', 'rejecters', and 'postponers' and 'failed postponers'. In the multi-state life table analysis, state transitions at the aggregate age level were expressed in terms of age-specific transition probabilities.

Let us therefore first of all, briefly and more specifically define these different groups, after which we will illustrate the characteristics of each group with a number of quotations from the participants. As has been pointed out before, where in the Netherlands the change across cohorts is from a standard to a choice biography, that is not the case in Japan, as has been demonstrated in the various quantitative chapters. In Japan, change across cohorts takes
the form of continuation ('traditionalists') but also increasing rejection, either through postponement ('postponers' and 'failed postponers') or complete rejection ('rejecters'), of the standard biography. The first small group consists of those women who fully adhere to the traditional sequence of marriage and motherhood, as well as the usual ages and durations connected to it. The second small group consists of the so-called ‘rejecters’. This group consists of those women who, from the very beginning, reject the traditional sequence of marriage and motherhood, preferring not to get married and remaining childless. And the third group, by far the most important, consists of so-called ‘postponers’ and ‘failed postponers’. These are women who ultimately would like to stick to the traditional sequence of marriage and motherhood, but do not agree with the usual ages and durations connected to it. They prefer to delay the time of marriage, and therefore of their first birth, in order to work first. And this is because work is not combinable with marriage and motherhood. But sometimes, because of this strategy, they end up without a partner and therefore become a ‘failed postponer’.

It is important to note, however, that as far as these groups are concerned, the abovementioned categorisation is not as straightforward as it may appear at first sight. This is because respondents are classified according to their opinion at a certain point in time, which is at the time of the focus group discussion and subject to change later on, and not according to their actual behaviour. Declared ‘postponers’, for instance, can easily become ‘rejecters’ and vice versa.

We will show first of all how the formulation of instrumental goals to achieve ultimate goals is context-specific, deriving from the structural and cultural dimensions (opportunities, constraints and sanctions) in which the individual is situated. We will also show how choice processes are also influenced by the individual's background – by which we mean such factors as the process of growing up (early life course) and 'linked lives' consisting of parents and partners – which explains why members of a same cohort display different behaviour.

**Traditionalists**

This small group of respondents would like to adhere to the traditional sequence of marriage and motherhood. There are two possible reasons for this. Some respondents make a positive choice for this kind of behaviour. They do what they do because they feel that it is what should be done. They carry a traditional or ‘textbook’ image in their minds of how their life course should evolve. The traditional way of life – marriage, children, some work, and sufficient money – gives meaning to them:

**Voice 61:**
I have an image. And, of course, like what the others said, maybe things will not turn out to be that way. But, (To be continued)
first of all, I do not want to live that long. 50 years let’s say. I want everything to be finished by age 50. I will definitely get married. And I will have a child. And I will stay at home. And if I feel like working, then I will just work a little bit, something flexible. I want to care for my husband and take care of the child and become happy in that way. And I want to travel from time to time. And I seek general happiness. I do feel it is troublesome to raise a child (laughter). I want my life to be what I find in the textbook.

(26 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

The following voices also provide an illustration of this first group of 'positive choice' women, who prefer to marry and give birth early. Some already have low expectations as far as work is concerned and seek jobs where they work only temporarily and plan and intend to marry as quickly as possible. Marrying directly without working and becoming a ‘shufu’ is not well-appreciated and, therefore, some years of work before marriage are sufficient:

**Voice 62:**
I already have a job lined up for me. And it is the kind of company where after marriage everybody resigns. So that will happen to me too. In the future, being a housewife is fine for me, my mom is also a housewife. Housewives also look very busy at home. I am going to use some time for my hobby, and look for hobby time. When you stay at home you feel very constrained. I think that it depends on yourself, on how much you can. I think I will end up in that situation.

(22 Years Old – Never married - Student)

**Voice 63:**
I am now looking for a job. If it is a job, where it is possible to continue after marriage, then I would like to do that. But if I do not feel any attachment to the job and if I am just working for money, and if our marriage is financially OK, then I will not continue. My mom was also a housewife.

(22 Years Old – Never married - Student)

Other women make more of a negative choice. They do what they do because they are not able to do what they would like to do. The following respondent perhaps would like to work after graduating. But she would also like to get married and have children. But she feels that she is not able to handle the stress that comes along with combining work and motherhood, a consequence that comes along with a professional career. Therefore, she feels she may become a housewife:

**Voice 64:**
I really want to continue working. Maybe I will become a housewife if I feel work is not for me. Maybe. I am not accustomed to stress. I am not a person that can handle 100 things at the same time. Then I feel I should not even try. Really, I want to continue but not to the extent that it will be too much for me.

(24 Years Old - Never married - Student)
Rejecters

Another small group consists of those Japanese women who make a conscious choice not to get married and not to have children. Voice 21 is representative of the rejecters.

Postponers and failed postponers

By far the most important and largest group of respondents consists of those who postpone and sometimes fail in their postponement and therefore end up unmarried and childless. Postponement can take place for different reasons. The following respondent postponed marriage and motherhood because she was studying at university at this time. The delaying effect of educational pursuit on union formation and first birth is well established. So education in and by itself already leads to postponement of first birth at least beyond age 25:

Voice 65:
I am 23 now, and I am still a student, and therefore 23 or 24 it a bit too early, and giving birth by 26 or 27 that is also still early but on the other hand by age 35 then that is a bit too late.

(24 Years Old - Never married - Student)

After education, the transition into work is fairly self-evident, and work will again lead to further postponement. There are some women, however, who seem to be undecided between pursuing a career after their studies and getting married and giving birth. Work still, however, seems to come first, and it is only when they cannot find the job they really want, that they will immediately get married and go on to bear children:

Voice 66:
As for me, I think it all depends on the kind of job I can get. If I can get the kind of job that I really want then, even without getting married, I can do the things I want to do. I think it is quite impossible to be able to combine [work and motherhood]. Therefore, if I am able to do what I want to do, then I think marriage could come much later. But if I am not able to get the kind of job I would want to have, I would not mind getting married earlier. Therefore, everything depends on the kind of job I can get.

(22 Years Old - Never married - Student)

The above voice therefore shows how one is able to flexibly reorder the priorities and reassess the situation and is willing to make choices. In other words, by keeping in mind the ultimate goals, individuals are able to reassess the instrumental goals (work, marriage and motherhood). This links to what Lesthaeghe and Moors (2000b) call the dual process of selection (values as predictors of later events) and adaptation (events as determinants of changes in values orientations).
Once in the job, new needs arise, again pointing to the cumulative nature of causation. For example to become a specialist one needs to work at least for a few years, leading to further postponement:

**Voice 67:**
I wanted to be a specialist. I wanted to study very hard to become a specialist. So that was my dream. I looked down on marriage and wanted to be strong enough to be able to live alone. [But now I feel that I want to get married] But when I think about myself, being married, having children, becoming a housewife, preparing meals, I think I just cannot do that, I am not that kind of person. That is why I want to continue working and while working I want to raise my child, that is precisely my intention.

(25 Years Old – Never married - Full-time Worker)

And after specialising, as work becomes more interesting, a woman may not want to give up the job so easily:

**Voice 68:**
I am demanding towards myself. I want to get much more specialised (in my work), so that I do not have to starve. Therefore, I have some kind of practical planning, such as 'take this path' or 'take that path'. I just have to do it. I want to have a child, but there is a problem. … I am not sure whether I want to get married and stay together with the same partner for the rest of my life. … If I can have a flexible relationship and raise my child in that way then it is possible to progress in life and also be able to keep my career. But I am not able to move into that stage. So, what is my planned life? That is so difficult. I think I am rejecting those possibilities [of fixed marriage and motherhood].

(32 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

A Japanese woman also realises, for instance, that, because of the high cost of education in Japan, it is better to save substantially before getting married and having children, reflecting the need to have a sufficient pool of resources before even considering these events, and that this leads to years of postponement. This is reflected in Voices 30 and 57. Or perhaps a woman may not have a partner, and finding a partner takes time. As long as there is no partner, work comes first:

**Voice 69:**
I will continue to work until I die. Of course I want to have a family, but I do not have that kind of partner yet. Therefore the possibility (of getting married) is low. Work is the first priority.

(25 Years Old – Never married – Student)

Once a woman reaches a certain age she may start worrying a bit:

**Voice 70:**
Yes indeed, I am not married now, but I would like to become a mother if I could. Why do I want to become a

(To be continued)
Voice 70 (end):
mother? It has to do with timing. There is no reason why I should not become a mother. Age is of course the
main concern. There is no age limit for marriage, but there is one for motherhood because of (the biological limit
to) childbearing. It is a physical thing, related to the body. I am concerned about my age. And therefore, I have
my own timetable, my own target date.

(35 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)

Voice 71:
I have not really thought about it. Basically, through my work, I want to have my own world. I want to find a
challenging job. I want to have something for myself. But within that I want to have a child. It is a challenge. If I
cannot get it [immediately], I will keep searching for it.

(34 Years Old - Never Married - Full-Time Worker)

If a woman has not found a partner by the mid-30s then she starts accepting the
inevitable and redefining her priorities, goals and careers. For instance, in Chapter 7, the
results on age-specific transition probabilities show that at age 35, the probability of a woman
to make the transition out of the never met partner state is less than 5 percent, indicating the
low chances of finding a partner, which eventually indicates lower chances of getting married
and having children.

Voice 72:
There are many ways in which one can become a mother: bearing a child yourself, or not bearing it yourself.
There is, of course, also the possibility of becoming the mother of someone else's child. Now, I do not feel like
having a child. Motherhood, work, marriage and childbearing, it interests me because it is my field of study, and
also personally, I have an interest. You mentioned advantages and disadvantages. Well, having a child is a
challenge and, therefore, this attitude of 'go for it'. I just do not have that kind of feeling. If there is a child, then
parents are needed. My sister has a child, and a very cute one. … I am 34 now, and when you have lived alone
for 34 years without having a partner, being alone becomes very natural. And then living together with someone
else, that is just tremendous. In the old days, everybody got married at age 24, very naturally. And therefore, for
myself, at which point do I make that big transition? I just do not have that courage. And I feel I do not want to
change my own situation.                                                        (35 Years Old – Never married - Part-Time Worker)

*note by the author while the respondent says she is 34 years old, in the questionnaire later on, it was discovered
that she was 35 years old, indicating misreporting of the age and perhaps indicating the different social time of
34 and 35 or simply misreporting.

Voice 73:
I think having a job is the basis of one's life. Well, I can only speak about work, and about myself. I wanted to
build a factory at my parents' house. I am bit ashamed to say this, but I have been thinking that if I do something
like that, it will be a wasted investment if I get married [and leave the parental home]. Because when you leave
home you cannot take that with you. But when I reached the mid-30s, age 35, I thought that I might end up alone
and would not get married. So then I gave up [on getting married]. I saw the reality. And I saw that I have to be
independent. Therefore, before getting married and having children, I really want to get ahead with work. I have
to keep up!

(35 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)
So this section has demonstrated in particular how most women's overall postponement or even 'rejection' of first birth is not actually carefully planned from the very beginning, say in their early twenties.

Using this line of thought, imagine a young Japanese woman, who, for instance, at age 18 would like to have two children, or even more, over her lifetime. In other words, 2 children is at that time her stated fertility preference. Then this woman enrols in higher education, either because she wants to or, and more likely, because of her parents. And perhaps during her education, this woman thinks that she will get married and have children upon completion of her studies. But once she has completed her education, it is somewhat more likely for her to make the transition into work, in other words, look for a job, and think that she will get married and give birth after a few years of work. But once she is working, she again reassesses her situation and redefines her priorities. She sees, for instance, that she really likes the job she is doing and would like to continue this job at the expense of pursuing marriage and motherhood, at least for the time being. Or that, even if she would want to get married, she does not have a suitable partner yet. Or she realises that it is better to save quite substantially before getting married and giving birth, as the cost of raising children in Japan is very high. Ultimately, she may end up either postponing substantially or even end up without any children at all.

So postponement is not so much planned ahead of time as it results from the accumulation of several 'small' postponements. The nature of postponement is 'cumulative'. This refers to the notion of cumulative causation.

Underlying this process of cumulative causation is a process of continuity and shift. On the one hand, there is continuity. The cumulative nature of postponement is the result of 'self-evident' (higher probabilities in state transitions) transitions from one life stage ('state') into another, for instance, from education into work. Such 'expected' or 'self-evident' character of the transition is of a contextual nature: given a certain structural and cultural context certain transitions are 'expected'. These 'expected' and 'self-evident' transitions give rise to the notion of path dependency. This can be interpreted as the individual having some control over his/her life and also how the individual is very much conditioned by the choices which he or she has made in the past.

On the other hand, there is shift. Each time that one enters into a new life stage ('state'), one reassesses one's situation and redefines one's priorities. This relates to what we have discussed as the 'coordinating process' in chapter 2, where the co-ordination between/of different domains takes place through a process of ranking the different competing instrumental goals. And this precisely occurs during the so-called ‘transition period’ or ‘turning points’. At certain moments in time, a fundamental reordering of priorities and the ranking of the instrumental goals take place. These constitute fundamental reassessments of the cognitive schemes and require the individual to “summarize, evaluate and terminate the past and to start the new future “(original, Willekens, 1991, p. 18).
This notion of continuity and shift relates to the idea that the past determines the future, but not in a predetermined way. The past is always mediated by accumulated life experiences and contextual change. According to the life-course perspective, choices that are made in the early life course stage, even going back to childhood experiences, can have effects much later on in life. However, these effects filter through and change because of later life experiences and contextual change. As Runyan (1984, p. 212) notes, “the effects of early experiences are mediated through a change of behaviour-determining, person-determining and situation-determining processes through the life course”, which means that these choices in the early period have an implication for future behaviour. And this then explains to a very large extent the considerable discrepancy, referred to in the introduction, between fertility preferences and actual fertility outcomes (Backrach, 2001; Livi Bacci, 2001).

9.5 Conclusion

The main research question to answer is: what ultimately determines postponement of first birth based on the life stories of these women? An important conclusion of this chapter is that postponement is not planned ahead of time. It is of a cumulative nature. In real life, rather than looking and planning far ahead, women make decisions in the short to medium term. These decisions usually concern the transition ‘into the next stage’. What is key then is how exactly these decisions on transitions are made. And this is where the life story, the investigation of cognitive schemes comes in. Depending on one’s accumulated life experience and contextual change, certain transitions become more ‘expected’ or ‘self-evident’, while others become less so.

The first and decisive step in the cumulative postponement process consists of the child rearing choices made by the parents. This points to the inter-generational nature of postponement. In particular the educational career choices made by the parents are critical. Most of the respondents think that they are encouraged by their mothers into reaching high levels of educational attainment. Respondents consider that mothers make these choices on the basis of their own accumulated life experience (life course) and contextual change (location in time and place). Sometimes the mothers make these choices on the basis of their own unrealised life objectives: that they themselves did not obtain all the education they would have liked to have and they want to spare their children the same fate (‘accumulated life experience’). The respondents’ mothers lead ‘industrial’ life courses, what we also discussed in Chapter 5. These industrial life courses are about dependency, no longer survival, and consist of some education, a few years of work, complete withdrawal from the labour market at the time of marriage and motherhood, and gradually rebuilding one’s labour force participation thereafter. They are supported harmoniously by both the structural (initially limited but growing need for female labour) and cultural (the constructed image of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’) dimensions. Sometimes also the mothers make these education choices
for their daughters on the basis of their own awareness, acquired through part-time or full-time work outside the house, of Japan’s rapid economic development and its first-class education. Especially for mothers in the rural areas that entails deviant behaviour and going against prescribed norms. Educating their daughters to the fullest of their ability in itself already leads to postponement.

So the mere fact of being encouraged to obtain higher levels of education already leads to postponement. But being encouraged to attain higher levels of education also means being put on a particular path, a particular life course. This life course is partially of a self-sustaining, path-dependent and predictable nature, as well as partially unstable and unpredictable. This is captured through notions such as continuity and shift. The balance of continuity and shift depends on the reinforcing or weakening impact of ‘mediated’ childhood or later experiences and contextual change. The context sends out ‘internally conflicting’ signals, however, as well as signals which are different from the ‘mediated’ childhood or later experiences.

Having completed one's education one has to decide what the next transition will be. The transition from education into work constitutes an ‘expected’ or ‘self-evident’ tradition. And this is where the cognitive schemes come into play. The first input into the cognitive schemes consists of the ‘mediated’ memory of childhood experiences. It is important to first explain what is meant by this. During their own youth (early adult transition), the respondents’ parents are confronted with and absorb into their own cognitive schemes certain ‘agricultural household’ parental and societal pressures and expectations on continuing the family line, taking care of the parents, and getting married by a certain age. These behaviour-guiding rules are rooted in strong meaning-giving rules on what it means to be a good eldest son, a good wife, a good mother. During their adulthood, the parents, depending on their accumulated life experiences and contextual change since their childhood, either embrace this heritage or reject it, and communicate these views to their children who will absorb these parental and societal pressures and communications into their cognitive schemes. But no matter what the parents communicate, the children’s behaviour during adulthood will again depend on their own accumulated life experiences (path dependency) and contextual change (location time and period). Either way, these communications constitute boundaries to be accepted or rejected. This points to an intergenerational process of continuity and shift. Parents do not have unlimited freedom in broadening or restricting the scope for innovative behaviour by the children. Parental impact is always mediated, by contextual and personal factors, but remains strong.

In the case of the transition from education into work, important considerations are the children’s mediated memory of the parents’ actual life course and what the parents think and communicate about their life course to their children. The parents’ life course and what they think and say about it is absorbed by the individual during his/her youth, but later on this memory is again mediated by accumulated life experience and contextual change. Even for
their mothers in the early stages of the industrial household it was natural to make the transition from education into work for a few years. Both the structural and cultural dimensions pushed women to work at least a few years between the completion of their education and marriage. Mothers who continued to work full-time throughout, or even part-time, were negatively perceived by the children during their youth. But, as working has now become much more acceptable and the children now work themselves, the children’s perception of their own youth experience has changed. On the other hand, women who did not work at all were positively perceived by the children during their childhood, but that perception has now turned negative. This shows how ‘mediated’ childhood experiences can reinforce some choices later in life and weaken others.

Then there is the context: it is acceptable now to go on working after completing one’s education. And then there is the ‘mediated’ memory of the childhood experience: ‘My mother worked and that was a good thing, or my mother did not work and that was a bad thing’. So the mere transition from work into education leads to additional postponement.

Once this transition has been made the individual reassesses the situation, finds work interesting and wants to specialise, if she is able to do so. The individual flexibly reorders priorities. The only barriers are time and money. Work becomes an instrumental goal to reach higher-level goals. At the same time the individual is confronted with the fact that work is not combinable with marriage and motherhood, that marriage becomes less attractive in absolute and relative terms. But still women are confronted with strong meaning-giving rules on what it means to be a woman. They still want to have children. Since work and family are not combinable this leads to dilemmas between conflicting instrumental goals. The context gives conflicting signals forcing women to choose between different views of what it means to be a woman (‘meaning-giving rules’). Based upon her mediated childhood and later experiences a women will formulate a choice. This manifests itself in traditionalism, rejection or postponement/failed postponement, showing how postponement is cumulative and dependent on a process of continuity and shift. What happens thereafter, however, is new to this generation.

The context confronts women with two different constructed images. In other words, the context is split and provides the individual with conflicting choices. The first constructed image is the ‘new’ self-realising individual, trying to realise her potential in all dimensions of life. This means work but also non-exclusive family. The second image is the ‘old’ constructed image of the exclusive wife and mother, especially mother. The two constructed images cannot be reconciled. What determines the choice women make is determined by the accumulated life experiences. Some women go for wifehood and motherhood. The others go for work. The voice of a 32-year-old respondent illustrates the typical situation in real life (voice 68):
I want to have a child, but there is a problem. … I am not sure whether I want to get married and stay together with the same partner for the rest of my life. … If I can have a flexible relationship and raise my child in that way then it is possible to progress in life and also be able to keep my career. But I am not able to move into that stage. So, what is my planned life? That is so difficult. I think I am rejecting those possibilities [of fixed marriage and motherhood].

(32 Years Old - Never married - Full-Time Worker)