

CHAPTER II

THE CHILDFREE PHENOMENON IN GLOBAL AND INDONESIAN CONTEXTS

2.1. Definition of Childfree and Related Terminology

The term childfree refers to individuals or couples who consciously choose not to have children. This choice differs from childlessness, which often refers to those who are unable to have children due to biological, medical, or circumstantial reasons (Blackstone, 2019). The terminology has shifted over time, with childfree being a more positive and autonomous label that emphasizes voluntary decision-making. This shift not only reflects a linguistic change but also a cultural one, where the choice to remain childfree is increasingly recognized as a valid and respectable life decision.

The notion of being *childfree* has historically been met with social resistance, particularly in cultures that emphasize procreation as a moral or social obligation. For centuries, parenthood was seen as the default pathway into adulthood, with women especially expected to fulfill reproductive roles. The term childless carried a negative connotation, implying that an individual or couple was lacking something fundamental to a "complete" life. In contrast, the term childfree reframes this decision as a positive and empowering choice, giving agency to individuals who decide not to have children (Gillespie, 2003).

This shift from *childless* to *childfree* has been supported by various social movements, particularly feminism, which challenged traditional gender roles. Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s began advocating for women's reproductive autonomy and the right to define their lives beyond motherhood (Friedan, 2018). Feminist scholars argued that the societal pressure to have children was part of the patriarchal structure that defined women solely by their reproductive abilities. By embracing the term *childfree*, women asserted control over their bodies and their futures (Rich, 2019). The term childfree was popularized in the 1970s by organizations like the National Organization for Non-Parents (NON), established in 1972 in the United States. These groups advocated for population control and

promoted the idea that choosing not to have children could be a responsible and fulfilling life choice.

In contemporary discourse, *childfree* individuals are increasingly viewed through the lens of personal freedom and self-fulfillment. Sociologist Amy Blackstone (2019) has noted that many childfree individuals do not see their choice as a rejection of societal norms, but rather as a proactive decision based on personal values and circumstances. Motivations for remaining childfree often include environmental concerns, financial stability, career ambitions, and a desire for personal autonomy. Blackstone's research demonstrates that many individuals see their childfree status as a core part of their identity, one that is chosen deliberately and celebrated.

The language surrounding childfree individuals has evolved as societal attitudes have shifted. This shift from using the term "childless" to "childfree" reflects a broader cultural change, moving away from the notion of a lack and instead emphasizing choice and autonomy. According to research, the term "childfree" highlights the decision to live without children as a valid and intentional life path, challenging traditional societal expectations that equate adulthood or fulfillment with parenthood (Brooks, 2019). Furthermore, the childfree movement intersects with growing concerns about environmental sustainability. Research shows that some individuals opt to remain childfree as part of a conscious effort to reduce their environmental impact. This perspective frames the choice to forgo parenthood as not just personal but also socially responsible, as it aligns with efforts to address global challenges like overpopulation and climate change (Coope, 2019). This ethical dimension adds another layer of meaning to the childfree lifestyle, transforming it into a decision that reflects both individual autonomy and environmental consciousness.

As society continues to evolve, the definition and understanding of the term childfree are likely to expand further. The increasing visibility of childfree individuals in media, literature, and public discourse is helping to normalize the choice and reduce the stigma associated with it. The ongoing dialogue about what it means to be childfree is contributing to a broader acceptance of diverse life

choices, and is challenging traditional narratives about family, gender roles, and personal fulfillment. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the importance of personal autonomy and the right to choose one's own path in life.

2.2. Historical and Cultural Context of Childfree

The decision to remain childfree is not just a personal or individual choice but is influenced by broader historical and cultural forces. Throughout much of human history, parenthood—particularly motherhood—was seen as an essential part of adulthood, and those who did not have children were often viewed with suspicion or pity. This was particularly true for women, whose social value was closely tied to their roles as mothers and caregivers. In many societies, parenthood was not simply a personal decision but a social duty, linked to the continuation of family lines, social stability, and religious or cultural beliefs.

In many traditional cultures, the decision not to have children was largely unthinkable. Historically, children were considered essential for economic support, the continuation of family lineage, and as social security in old age. In agrarian societies, large families were common, with children playing a crucial role in agricultural labor or family businesses. Choosing to be childfree would have been viewed as not only unusual but also socially irresponsible (Rybińska & Morgan, 2018).

2.2.1. Evolution on Childfree Choices in Society

The evolution of childfree choices in society is a relatively recent phenomenon. Historically, most societies emphasized procreation as a fundamental aspect of adulthood, particularly for women, whose identities were often tied to their roles as mothers. The idea of voluntarily choosing not to have children was almost unthinkable in most cultures. However, as societies have modernized, especially in the West, attitudes toward family structures and reproduction have evolved, giving rise to the childfree movement (Gillespie, 2003).

The feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s were pivotal in challenging traditional gender norms. Pioneers like Betty Friedan, through

her groundbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), argued that women should not be defined solely by their ability to bear children but should have the freedom to make choices about their bodies and lives, including the decision to remain childfree. This was a radical departure from the long-standing belief that motherhood was a central aspect of womanhood. The availability of reliable contraception, starting with the approval of the birth control pill in the 1960s, further empowered women by allowing them to take control of their reproductive lives. This provided women with the freedom to prioritize careers and personal fulfillment over societal expectations of motherhood.

The rise of second-wave feminism also coincided with other social changes that contributed to the evolution of childfree choices. For example, the availability of reliable contraception gave women more control over their reproductive lives, making it easier for them to choose not to have children. The increasing participation of women in the workforce also played a role, as more women began to prioritize their careers and personal development over traditional family roles. These changes were part of a broader cultural shift towards individualism and personal autonomy, where people were increasingly encouraged to make choices that reflected their own values and desires, rather than conforming to societal expectations.

As the childfree movement gained momentum, it began to attract the attention of scholars and researchers. Academics like Amy Blackstone have explored the motivations behind the decision to remain childfree, identifying factors such as the desire for autonomy, career ambitions, environmental concerns, and personal fulfillment (Blackstone, 2014). Blackstone's work emphasizes that childfree individuals often view their decision as a proactive and positive choice, rather than as a rejection of societal expectations. This perspective challenges the traditional view that equates adulthood and maturity with parenthood and suggests that there are many different ways to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life.

The language used to describe childfree individuals has also evolved alongside societal attitudes. The shift from childless to childfree reflects a broader cultural change, where individuals are increasingly encouraged to define their identities outside of traditional family structures. Sociologist Peggy J. Morgan discusses how this linguistic evolution underscores a growing acceptance of diverse life paths and recognizes childfree lifestyles as valid and legitimate choices. The term childfree has become a powerful symbol of autonomy and self-determination, representing a conscious decision to live a life that may not conform to conventional expectations.

Despite these changes, the decision to remain childfree is still met with resistance in many parts of the world. In cultures where traditional family structures are deeply valued, the expectation to have children remains strong. For example, in countries such as India and Indonesia, having children is often seen as a cultural and religious obligation, with individuals who choose not to have children facing significant social pressure and familial expectations (Pradipta, 2021). In many cases, childfree individuals, particularly women, may be perceived as selfish, incomplete, or going against societal norms. This social stigma can be compounded by pressure from family members and religious institutions, which often emphasize the importance of procreation. In some countries, legal and policy frameworks may further reinforce pro-natalist values. For instance, in Singapore and Hungary, governments have implemented policies to encourage childbearing, often framing parenthood as a duty to the nation.

However, as more people embrace the childfree lifestyle and speak out about their choices, societal attitudes are gradually shifting. The growing visibility of childfree individuals in media, literature, and public discourse is helping to normalize the choice and reduce the stigma associated with it. Public figures such as Oprah Winfrey, Shonda Rhimes, and Emma Watson have openly discussed their decisions to remain childfree, challenging the assumption that parenthood is necessary for a fulfilling life. Additionally,

social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram have provided a space for childfree individuals to share their experiences, connect with others, and build supportive communities that counteract the isolation and stigma they might face in their offline lives (Burgess & Green, 2010).

Looking to the future, the evolution of childfree choices is likely to continue as societies become more diverse and inclusive. The ongoing dialogue about what it means to be childfree is contributing to a broader acceptance of diverse life choices and is challenging traditional narratives about family, gender roles, and personal fulfillment. Scholars argue that as feminist ideals around reproductive autonomy gain wider acceptance, individuals will increasingly feel empowered to make reproductive choices that align with their personal goals and values, rather than succumbing to societal pressures (Blackstone, 2019). Moreover, as environmental and economic concerns continue to influence people's decisions about whether to have children, the childfree choice may increasingly be viewed as a responsible and ethical decision in the context of global challenges such as overpopulation and climate change.

2.2.2. Cultural and Social Contexts Surrounding the Childfree Phenomenon

The cultural and social contexts surrounding the childfree phenomenon vary significantly across different societies, influenced by factors such as religion, tradition, and social norms. In many cultures, the expectation to have children is deeply ingrained, with family and procreation seen as essential components of a fulfilled life. This expectation creates a challenging environment for those who choose to be childfree, as they often face social stigma and criticism for deviating from the norm. However, the growing visibility of childfree individuals in media and public discourse is helping to challenge these traditional expectations and create space for alternative lifestyles. Scholars have noted that societal shifts, particularly in more urbanized areas, are opening up new discussions about personal autonomy and the diversity of family structures (Blackstone, 2019).

In Indonesia, for example, the concept of being childfree is relatively new and remains controversial. Indonesian society is deeply influenced by traditional Javanese culture and Islamic teachings, both of which place a high value on family and procreation. Children are seen as a blessing and a source of pride, and the decision to remain childfree can be perceived as selfish or contrary to religious and cultural values. These cultural values see children as a continuation of one's legacy, and the decision to remain childfree is often viewed as a rejection of these core values. The pressure to conform to societal expectations can be intense, particularly for women, who are often expected to fulfill their roles as mothers and caregivers. Traditional gender roles further reinforce these pressures, with childbearing being viewed as an essential part of womanhood (Gillespie, 2003).

The influence of religion on attitudes toward the childfree choice cannot be underestimated, especially in predominantly religious societies like Indonesia. Islamic teachings, which dominate the religious landscape of Indonesia, often encourage large families as a sign of prosperity and divine favor. The idea of choosing not to have children can be seen as going against God's will, leading to social and familial pressure to conform. However, interpretations of religious teachings can vary widely. Some progressive Islamic scholars have begun to argue that the decision to have children should be a personal choice rather than a religious obligation, allowing for more individual autonomy (Nugroho, 2020). This reflects a broader global trend, where religious views on family are increasingly subject to reinterpretation in light of contemporary issues like environmental sustainability and personal fulfillment.

Despite the traditional emphasis on family and procreation, there is a growing presence of alternative voices in Indonesian society, particularly among younger, urban Indonesians. These individuals are increasingly challenging traditional narratives and advocating for broader acceptance of diverse life choices. Online spaces, including social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram, have become important arenas for these discussions. These platforms allow people to connect with others who share their views and provide a forum for challenging the status quo. While mainstream Indonesian media often reinforces traditional family values, platforms like YouTube offer a space for alternative narratives to gain visibility and foster discussions on childfree lifestyles (Nugroho, 2020).

The growing visibility of childfree individuals in Indonesian media and public discourse is helping to normalize the choice and reduce the stigma associated with it. For instance, content creators and influencers like Gita Savitri Devi, who openly discuss their decision to remain childfree, have sparked widespread debate and drawn attention to the topic. These discussions often provoke mixed reactions, reflecting broader societal tensions between traditional expectations and modern individualism. Nevertheless, these online platforms provide an important space for challenging traditional norms and creating space for alternative lifestyles. The childfree choice is gradually becoming part of the broader dialogue about modern identity, autonomy, and the changing family structure in Indonesia (Shifman, 2019).

As the childfree movement continues to gain traction in Indonesia, it is likely to face both support and resistance. The decision to remain childfree challenges deeply held cultural and religious beliefs, and those who choose this path may continue to face social stigma and pressure to conform. However, as more people embrace the childfree lifestyle and speak out about their choices, societal attitudes are gradually shifting. The growing presence of childfree voices in media, literature, and public discourse is helping to create a more inclusive society where diverse life choices are recognized and respected. Scholars argue that as Indonesia becomes more globalized, these voices will become increasingly important in reshaping societal expectations around family and reproduction (Blackstone, 2019).

Looking to the future, the cultural and social contexts surrounding the childfree phenomenon are likely to continue evolving as Indonesian society becomes more diverse and inclusive. The ongoing dialogue about what it means to be childfree is contributing to a broader acceptance of diverse life choices and is challenging traditional narratives about family, gender roles, and personal fulfillment. As more individuals in Indonesia choose to define their lives on their own terms, the concept of being childfree will continue to evolve, reflecting the changing values and priorities of Indonesian society. This shift points toward a more pluralistic and tolerant society that increasingly values individual freedom over adherence to long-standing norms .

2.3. YouTube as a New Media

YouTube has emerged as a powerful platform for sharing and shaping public discourse, including discussions around the childfree phenomenon. As a new media platform, YouTube allows for diverse voices and perspectives to be heard, challenging traditional media narratives. Scholars note that platforms like YouTube enable the democratization of content creation, giving users the freedom to discuss issues such as the childfree choice without the editorial gatekeeping often found in traditional media (Burgess & Green, 2018). This accessibility has made YouTube a crucial tool for raising awareness and fostering discussions about the childfree lifestyle, especially in societies where mainstream media reinforces conventional family values.

The significance of YouTube as a platform for childfree discourse lies in its global reach and the freedom it offers for discussions that might be censored in more traditional media spaces. Unlike television or print media, where content is often subject to editorial control and censorship, YouTube enables content creators to share their perspectives with minimal oversight. This has led to the emergence of a wide range of voices, including childfree individuals who may not have had a platform in mainstream media (Burgess & Green, 2018). The platform's interactive nature allows for immediate feedback and discussions, creating a participatory

space for exploring societal norms and alternative lifestyles, particularly the decision to remain childfree.

In Indonesia, YouTube has played a significant role in bringing the childfree discourse into the public eye. Influencers like Gita Savitri Devi have openly discussed their decision to remain childfree, sparking widespread debate. These discussions often provoke mixed reactions, reflecting broader societal tensions between traditional expectations and modern individualism. Gita Savitri's content, for instance, has drawn both support from younger audiences and criticism from those who view her choice as contrary to cultural and religious norms. This polarized reaction underscores the complexities of the childfree discourse in Indonesia, where traditional values still hold significant influence.

The role of YouTube in shaping public perceptions of the childfree choice is critical. As a platform, YouTube enables the dissemination of content that challenges traditional norms. Content creators frequently present the childfree lifestyle as a legitimate and positive choice, countering the negative portrayals often found in traditional media. This positive representation helps to normalize the childfree choice and reduce the stigma associated with it, particularly among younger audiences who are more likely to engage with digital platforms.

Media scholar Ika Nugroho argues that while mainstream Indonesian media often reinforces traditional family values, YouTube offers a space for alternative narratives to gain visibility (Nugroho, 2020). This is particularly important in societies like Indonesia, where traditional media tends to promote conservative views on family and procreation. In contrast, YouTube provides a platform for more progressive and diverse perspectives, allowing for a broader discussion of the childfree lifestyle, particularly among urban, younger Indonesians who may be more open to alternative life choices.

The impact of YouTube on the childfree discourse is also evident in how it fosters community building and support among childfree individuals. The platform enables the formation of online communities where like-minded individuals can connect, share experiences, and support one another. This sense of community is especially important for those who may feel isolated or stigmatized for choosing to

remain childfree. By providing a space for these individuals to connect and share their stories, YouTube helps foster a sense of belonging and validation, which can be crucial in challenging societal norms (Blackstone, 2019).

Looking to the future, the role of YouTube in shaping the childfree discourse will likely continue to grow as digital platforms become increasingly central to public discourse. As media consumption trends shift away from traditional media and toward platforms like YouTube, the influence of new media on societal norms and values will continue to expand. As more people turn to YouTube for information and discussion, the platform will play an increasingly important role in shaping public perceptions and understanding of the childfree phenomenon, both in Indonesia and globally (Burgess & Green, 2018).