

The Childfree Phenomenon As A Paradox In The Modern Family In Bali

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Abstract

The phenomenon of being childfree, the conscious decision of individuals or couples not to have children, has become a social issue reflecting changing values within the modern family. This choice has emerged alongside the rise of individualism, gender equality, and freedom to determine one's life direction. However, this decision is often considered a deviation from traditional norms that view the ideal family as a reproductive and progeny-oriented institution. From a sociological perspective, this situation creates a paradox: on the one hand, childfree reflects social progress in the form of individual autonomy and women's freedom over their bodies and social roles; on the other hand, it generates stigma and resistance because it contradicts the conventionally understood function of the family. Through a literature review, this paper analyzes childfree as a reflection of the transformation of family values in the modern era, using functionalism, feminism, and individualization approaches to understand the tension between personal freedom and social norms in contemporary family construction. This paper emphasizes the urgency of understanding the changing functions and roles of the modern family, while also presenting a perspective on women's bodily autonomy.

Keywords: *childfree, modern family, sociology of the family, social paradox, and bodily autonomy.*

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of *childfree* has become a social issue that reflects the changing values in modern families today by intersecting with family traditions and norms. Historically, the origins of the *childfree movement* can be traced back to the initiatives of Shirley Radl and Ellen Peck, who founded the *National Alliance of Optional Parenthood* in Palo Alto, California, in 1972. This organization became a pioneer in opposing pronatalism, the view that having children is a social obligation. Through his advocacy network, the idea then spread widely and gained recognition in different parts of the world (Agrillo & Nelini in This Yuli et al., 2025) *childfree choice* emerged along with the life of the process of globalization, urbanization and the entry of the influence of individualist values that strengthened the understanding of the right to autonomy of the individual body in determining the direction of his life. In Indonesia, this phenomenon began to receive attention since the news about influencer Gita Savitri. According to Bening (in Leliana et al., 2023) in his marriage, the couple Gitasav and Paul Partohap declared themselves as adherents of the *childfree* principle in 2018 based on concerns that they could not be fully responsible and potentially cause suffering for their children in the future. This has succeeded in raising and popularizing the issue of *childfree* to the wider Indonesian public.

From the perspective of family sociology, the institution of the family is traditionally seen as the smallest social unit that forms the foundation for the process of population regeneration and the continuity of the kinship system, a function that is increasingly relevant to study in Indonesia, considering the strength of family values and the importance of heredity in the culture of society. Based on Burgess and Locke's definition, the family is a group of human beings with the following characteristics: (1) formed through marriage, blood relations, or adoption; (2) forming a household by living together; (3) interacting according to their respective roles, such as husband and wife, father and mother, and children; and (4) creating, maintaining, preserving, and living a common culture.

This definition is broad because it includes various forms of families, whether formed through marital bonds such as husband and wife, or through blood relations or adoption such as parents, children, and other relatives. In the context of the childfree phenomenon (Riarismayanti, 2025), a paradox arises because in the modern family, the n-reproductive functions of the family and redefine the fundamental meaning of the family is redefined Reflecting on Burgess and Locke's statement that the family is an institution responsible for cultural continuity through regeneration, the childfree phenomenon in the

modern family obscures this fundamental function. In the long term, the absence of reproductive roles can disrupt the balance of the social system, which has been based on the presence of the next generation.

In theory, the family has eight functions, ranging from religious to environmental development, including socioculture, love, protection, reproduction, socialization and education, economy, and environmental development. These eight functions are expected to guide the lives of Indonesian families. Additionally, they are a prerequisite, reference, and lifestyle for every family to realize a prosperous and quality family. Thus, (Wijayanti & Berdame, 2019) *the child-free* lifestyle has the potential to shift society's interpretation of the concept of the ideal family in Indonesia and ultimately affect the way people perceive the role of the family in cultural and social contexts. In line with this, the battle between bodily autonomy and freedom has become very real in Indonesian society, which has strong customs and religious values, and in various tribes, the sustainability of offspring is still preserved and not just a tradition, but has been internalized as a sacred religious obligation, so that *the childfree* option is often seen as contrary to the social and spiritual values that are upheld.

From a sociological perspective, this situation creates a paradox in modern families today. On the one hand, *childfree* individuals demonstrate autonomy and women's freedom in their social roles, choosing not to have children, either through biological birth or adoption. As explained by Rizka et al. in (Yessino et al., 2025), this decision is consciously by individuals without any coemad rcion from other partiothers But on the other hand, when this decision is reflected in traditional values such as in the culture in Bali, there seems to be a rejection of *the child-free* way of life because the community strongly adheres to the norms that place heredity as a social, spiritual, and cultural foundation. Thus, although it is an individual right, *childfree choice* is no longer understood simply as an expression of bodily autonomy, but as an inalignment with the family's social responsibility as guardian of regeneration, continuity of values, and cultural heritage.

For example, in Hindu views, giving birth to children is considered a noble act that furthers family values and strengthens relationships between people. This view shows how noble it is to have children in the Hindu view and the function of children in maintaining the spiritual and social balance of Hindu families. However, it should be understood that the concept of caste as known to the public today is a misunderstanding of the varna teachings that have emerged since the colonial period. According to Hinduism, the term caste is not known, but Hadriani et al., 2024) in (Damayanti, 2020) *refer to chess varna*. Furthermore, according to Wiana (in Damayanti, 2020), varna is the classification of society based on function and profession, whereas ste refers to stratification based on heredity. Although both terms have different meanings, the lack of understanding makes people more familiar with the term caste than *varna*. The demand to pass on the family line is understood as a social responsibility that supports the temple system, customary obligations, and cultural inheritance. Therefore, further research is needed on how *childfree* decisions, if normalized, are perceived by the Balinese people as a threat to the preservation of ancestral values and the traditional family order.

The tension between modern values and customary obligations shows that the family is still the main cultural agent that is difficult to replace by individualistic orientation, thus making *the issue of childfree* even more complex in Balinese society. Supported by religious verses and customary teachings, they synergize to form a social construction that places marriage and having children as an inevitable way of life. Society views that marriage should produce offspring; therefore, a childless family is considered a failure (Iskandar et al, 2019). Through the analysis knife of Robert K. Merton's functional structural theory, *the childfree* phenomenon can be seen as a friction between traditional family functions that emphasize the continuity of offspring as a cultural support, colliding with modern family dynamics that begin to prioritize individual autonomy. Through Merton's functional structural theory, this phenomenon can be analyzed how *childfree* is perceived as dysfunction or even non-function in the social system, but at the same time hints at the process of adaptation to more diverse family forms. Therefore, this study is important to explore how the paradox of the modern family exists in the face of an alternative to life as *childfree*.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have discussed the childfree phenomenon; however, few have specifically highlighted the paradox that occurs in modern families in Bali in the context of *childfree* in Balinese society. Neysa et al.'s (2024) study, "Childfree Individuals in the Community in the City of Denpasar," discusses how society interprets and stigmatizes individuals who choose to live childfree, especially in the social environment of Denpasar. This research has similarities in viewing *the childfree phenomenon* as a social issue influenced by cultural norms, societal expectations, and strong values regarding the obligation to have children, especially in the Balinese context. However, it has an analytical focus and depth through the perspective of Robert K. Merton's functional structure to examine *childfree* as a phenomenon that contains dimensions of function and dysfunction simultaneously. This research not only views *childfree* as a source of dysfunction for the traditional Balinese social system but also explores its hidden function in driving the evolution of social norms and reconstructing the meaning of cultural preservation in the modern era. Thus, this study fills an academic gap by offering a more comprehensive analysis of the structural contradictions that arise when traditional values are confronted with the realities of contemporary society.

Furthermore, the study entitled "The Phenomenon of Choosing to be Childfree: An Analysis through Imam al-Juwayni's Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah" discusses the decision to *be childfree* from the perspective of Islamic law, especially using the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah framework formulated by Imam al-Juwayni. The study sees that *childfree* decisions can be understood through Islamic principles such as ḥifẓ al-nasl (preservation of offspring), ḥifẓ al-māl (protection of property), and ḥifẓ al-nafs (protection of the soul). The difference lies in the fact that in this study, the decision not to have children is acceptable in sharia if it is based on rational and contextual reasons, such as extreme economic hardship, psychological trauma, or serious health risks; however, it is contrary to the principles of sharia if it is based only on the fear of poverty or worldly reasons.

This study examined cultural and religious contexts as the main factors in determining whether *childfree decisions* are considered morally and spiritually valid. This study is different from previous studies because it examines the phenomenon of *childfree* through the perspective of Robert K. Merton's functional structure to analyze the sociocultural paradoxes that arise from the tension between bodily autonomy and cultural demands in modern Balinese families. In contrast to previous research that focused on religious justification from an Islamic perspective, this study examines how *childfree* operates in the traditional Balinese social system as a source of dysfunction that threatens the continuity of cultural practices such as ngayah in banjar and ancestral rituals, while having a hidden function in encouraging the evolution of social norms. The focus of this research is to understand how structural contradictions in modern Balinese society create space for negotiation between collective values and individual autonomy, as well as how the functional and dysfunctional consequences of *childfree* choices shape unique sociocultural dynamics in the local Balinese context.

The last relevant research is entitled "Safitri et al., (2023) *Childfree Phenomenon* in the Gen-Z Era According to Religious Views". This study uses a literature review method with a normative-religious approach. Departing from a religious framework that places marriage and procreation as part of nature and moral obligations, this study concludes that *childfree* is seen as contrary to religious teachings because it is considered to reject the command to continue procreation. In contrast to this research, it seeks to fill an academic gap that has not been addressed by previous studies, especially regarding the paradox of the modern family in Bali. By applying Robert K. Merton's functional structural perspective in the specific context of Balinese society, this study does not only view *childfree* as a moral problem or social stigma, but as a complex phenomenon that contains paradoxes of function and dysfunction in sociocultural systems. This approach allows for a more dynamic analysis of how *childfree* can simultaneously threaten the survival of traditional systems while also playing a role in the transformation of social norms towards a more egalitarian family format.

The main contribution of this study is its ability to uncover the dialectic between cultural preservation and social change in contemporary Balinese society, especially in the context of the modern family paradox, where the values of individual autonomy are confronted with a solid wall of collective

norms. This research is significant because no previous study has specifically addressed the paradox of the modern Balinese family in the context of *childfree*, where modernity's demands for gender equality and bodily autonomy must negotiate with patriarchal structures and cultural obligations that have been passed down from generation to generation. By offering an analytical framework that blends an understanding of structural pressures with individual agency, this study provides a deeper and contextual perspective on the phenomenon of *childfree* in one of the cultures in Indonesia.

3. Research Methods

Research This study used a descriptive qualitative approach. According to, qualitative research aims to understand the meaning given by individuals to a phenomenon through descriptive and narrative data. The descriptive research conducted by the researcher, as explained on page 227, focuses on in-depth observation of the subject and organizes the findings into relevant themes. This approach is appropriately used to examine research on Creswell & Creswell (2023), *the issue of childfree* in the modern family today in Bali and the social, emotional, and legal implications arising from both. Furthermore, there are two data sources in this study, namely primary and secondary. According to p. 230) the primary data in question was obtained through face-to-face interviews.

Primary data was also obtained from informant sources, namely the Balinese Hindu community who understand Creswell & Creswell (2023), *the issue of childfreedom*. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained by the author indirectly through public documents such as official reports, journals, audiovisuals, websites, or texts from the media. To understand the phenomenon of *childfree* in the context of the modern Balinese family in depth, this study uses a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it is able to capture experiences, meanings, and social dynamics that cannot be explained through numbers alone. Correspondingly, according to p. 282) a case study is a qualitative research design that is used to explore in depth a program, event, activity, process, or individual that is limited by specific time and activity. Information is collected in detail through various data collection procedures over an ongoing period of time. Creswell & Creswell (2023).

Furthermore, the data analysis of this research will be systematically processed to organize and interpret the data so that the researcher gains a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied. According to pp. 238–239, the analysis process is carried out through several sequential steps. First, the researcher prepares and organizes the data, including transcribing interviews and grouping information sources. Second, the researcher reads all the data to obtain an overview. Third, the researcher encodes by labeling important parts of the data. Fourth, the code results are developed into the main themes. Fifth, the researcher compiles descriptions or narratives that relate to these themes. Furthermore, researchers can conduct further analysis as needed through a case study approach. In the final stage, the data are presented in the form of a narrative that is reinforced by citations or visualizations to make the findings more meaningful. Thus, the entire data analysis process carried out in this study is directed toward reading Creswell and Creswell (2023), a *childfree* phenomenon in depth in the context of Balinese culture that continues to undergo a transformation in family order.

Using Robert K. Merton 's functional structural framework, this study maps the perceptions and experiences of the participants and analyzes how *childfree* choices create functional and dysfunctional consequences in the Bali social cultural system. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how Balinese people respond to *childfree living choices* as a form of adaptation and a threat to the balance of the social system, where traditional values are confronted with the increasingly complex realities of the modern family. This analysis reveals how a phenomenon that appears to be personal has a systemic impact on the sustainability of cultural practices, the regeneration of traditional values, and the transformation of the meaning of family in contemporary Balinese society.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 *Childfree* and the Preservation of Indonesian Family Values

Each region in Indonesia has a distinctive cultural configuration in which local traditions and wisdom are inherited through intergenerational regeneration mechanisms in traditional families. For example,

according to Sormin, in Batak society, there are four moral messages and cultural values that are still maintained and respected, one of which is the value of hagabeon, which is an important symbol for having descendants in a family.

This shows that in Batak society, the continuity of generations and the quality of offspring are considered vital aspects in building a prosperous family and community. In addition, the sustainability of the customary holder is also reflected in the Semende custom in the Tunggu Tubang system, which stipulates that the eldest daughter is the recipient of an estate that cannot be sold. As a strategic role holder, he is in charge of bonding the extended family, representing collective interests, and managing legacy assets. Furthermore, various cultural systems, such as the traditions in Java and the matrilineal system in Minangkabau, show the same dependence on human regeneration in the traditional family. The survival of these cultural institutions depends heavily on the existence of successors who will carry on and continue these traditions to the next generation. (Samosir et al., 2025; Velinda et al. 2018)

From the perspective of family sociology, the rise of *childfree* individuals has the potential to trigger a shift in cultural reproduction, which has traditionally supported the sustainability of the sociocultural system. The emergence of the modern family with the childfree phenomenon, in which the presence of children is no longer viewed as a necessity but focuses more on the autonomy of the individual body, presents a new paradigm in Balinese social structure. However, there is a contradiction from the other side, namely cultural logic, in that heredity is the axis of family sustainability and the decision not to have children is understood as a direct threat to the stability of the social and spiritual structure of Balinese society. As a result, to continue and consider the continuity of tradition to be something natural and normal, this value acts as a boundary that determines who is considered necessary, determines how a family should be formed, and who is obliged to continue the lineage, resulting in *childfree* decisions being viewed as deviant or threatening the established social order.

From a feminist perspective, women face layered pressures as guardians of tradition; therefore, choosing to be childfree can be interpreted as a form of emancipation that is contrary to patriarchal structures and caste systems. Sociologically, this tension can be read as a social dysfunction or, rather, as a trigger for reform towards the modern family norm. This situation confirms the paradox of the modern family, in which the family is maintained as a traditional institution full of collective values, but individuals increasingly demand autonomy, equality, and freedom to make life choices. Thus, the childfree choice reveals the contradiction between the demand to preserve ancestors and personal aspirations, as well as opening up a space for cultural dialogue about how tradition and modernity are transforming the modern family in Bali.

More deeply, it is important to understand the context of the transformation of the modern family structure that is the background of this research by looking at the definition according to today's family model, which tends to emphasize the partnership relationship between husbands and wives, in which both have equal rights and responsibilities in carrying out domestic and public roles. In the modern family reality, women have played a significant role in various fields such as economics, social, and politics. The increasingly strong involvement of women in the public sphere makes the relationship between husband and wife develop to be more collaborative than hierarchical. (Riarismayanti, 2025)

This dynamic is increasingly relevant in the context of Balinese society, where the transformation of modern family values that are more egalitarian is reflected in the changing lifestyles and mindsets of contemporary Balinese women. This shift in priorities not only transforms traditional gender role structures but also disrupts the value of lineage continuity, which has relied on women's active contributions to biological and cultural reproduction. Under such conditions, *childfree options* have emerged as a form of rejection of the double burden that Balinese women must bear between the demands of modern careers and complex customary obligations, as well as a negotiation strategy for traditional expectations that are increasingly aligned with personal aspirations in the contemporary era.

4.2 Analysis of the Modern Family Paradox in the Childfree Phenomenon Through Functional Structural Theory

Merton's functional structural theory offers the correct perspective for understanding the impact of such changes on social systems. According to Merton, function is the way in which various social or cultural elements carry out their roles in society to give rise to the process of adaptation or adjustment in a system. In other words, each element complements the others to maintain the stability and balance of the system. In line with this concept, the function of the family, as well as the role of reproduction both in a biological sense and in the form of reproduction of values, culture, and customs through intergenerational reproduction, can continue to survive. (Nurhakim et al., 2023) In the Balinese context, this function is evident through various rituals, customary obligations, and cultural practices that demand the existence of the next generation. This is also reflected in one of the interviews which stated that

"I think regardless of the caste that must be lowered for my race, there is an important thing, namely, who will continue the sacred duties of the Balinese people. Who will continue the arts in Bali, the training for ogoh-ogoh from childhood, and who will do it in the banjar, contribute energy and thoughts for the common good and, most basically, who will carry out ceremonies for our ancestors, celebrate Banten, and ensure that this cycle of life and death continues to run in accordance with religion and customs. This is about our sacred obligation to maintain a balance between nature and scale and the relationship between the natural relationship between parents and children" Ida Bagus Oka, interview November 1, 2025

Based on the data disclosed by the informant, the function of the family in Balinese society plays a role as the main support for the sustainability of the sociocultural system. As emphasized, the family not only plays a role as a biological unit but also as a cultural institution that ensures the continuity of important rituals, such as *ngayah* in banjar, the making of ogoh-ogoh, and the implementation of ancestral ceremonies. The fundamental function of the Balinese family lies in its ability to ensure regeneration both biologically and culturally, including the inheritance of spiritual responsibility to maintain a cosmological balance between the natural and temporal realms. Thus, the presence of children in Hindu families is essential and irreplaceable, as it becomes a link that connects past traditions, present life, and spiritual continuity in the future.

Therefore, the informant did not agree with the concept of *childfree* because it was not in line with the functioning of traditional Balinese family institutions. Although there is a paradox about individual autonomy, we must see that the main function of traditional family norms is precisely to give transcendental meaning to every member of society. Attachment to sacred tasks such as performing *banten* and continuing the lineage is not just a burden, but a social mechanism that ensures the stability of the Balinese people's collective identity. A form of active participation function in maintaining harmony that gives deep meaning to community life.

In contrast, based on the interview: *"The pressure of Balinese women that I see where they have to bear customary, domestic, and economic roles but are also required to be able to give birth to offspring. Even though not necessarily all of us women must give birth, right, especially in Bali it must be a boy, even if she gives birth to a girl is not enough. How about it, giving birth that I understand after this qualification is to return to the woman whether she wants to have children or not..."* -Cokorda Dianda, interview 10 November 2025

The paradox of family function is evident when informants, as women, begin to reduce reproductive practices, weakening the mechanism of inheriting cultural values that have been passed down through family institutions. In the context of Indonesia's demographics, if this is done on a massive scale, there will be a change in the potential reduction of the birth rate to below the *replacement level of fertility*, a condition that can hinder population regeneration and have long-term consequences for social stability and sustainable development. In addition, if these functions are no longer in line with individual experiences and choices, such as women's childless decisions, there is tension in the system. From Merton's perspective, this condition reflects how a social element can function to maintain balance, but

at the same time create dysfunction when its demands are unable to accommodate more complex social realities. Therefore, the stress experiences expressed by the informants are not purely individual cases but part of a historical pattern of reproductive roles. Furthermore, the second informant emphasized that social pressure on women who choose not to have children is not only present in the form of abstract norms but also appears directly in daily interactions.

An excerpt from an interview states, "*Pressure is honestly there, especially after revealing that it exists, especially from external, from family, from the environment in the village. They said, 'Why is that?' 'You don't love your family, don't you want to continue?' More there is pressure. They seem to have not gotten used to it, have not accepted that there are people who decide not to have offspring and indeed their own decision.*" - Initial D, interview November 10, 2025.

The informant described how prohibitions and taboos related to *child-free choices* work in real life in family relations in the village as a form of social control that is institutionalized through family norms, parental expectations, and the discourse of the need to have heredity that continues to be reproduced from generation to generation. By contrast, the community's objection to *child-free options* can also be understood as part of a collective effort to maintain the sustainability of family institutions and the preservation of local culture. In the context of customary villages, reproduction is seen not only as a personal decision but also as a social mechanism that ensures the continuity of lineages, the sustainability of communal duties, and the preservation of rituals that are the foundation of Balinese cultural identity. Therefore, views that reject *child-free* choices can also be interpreted as a form of protection for social order that maintains community cohesion. In this framework, the determination of society to maintain reproductive norms is not necessarily a form of oppression but also a manifestation of collective responsibility to maintain the sustainability of customary values and social harmony that have been inherited across generations.

The results show that reproductive demands are not only related to demographic sustainability but also closely related to the structural burden that women must bear in the Balinese sociocultural system. In the context of the modern family, which increasingly emphasizes individual choice, bodily autonomy, and gender equality, these traditional demands are beginning to be questioned by some women. Conversely, as more and more women begin to question or reject these demands, including choosing *to be child-free*, the social structures that depend on biological reproduction and customary reproduction have the potential to experience imbalances, especially in societies that maintain traditional family forms as the foundation of cultural sustainability.

Explained with an interview excerpt, "*My pressure from being childfree is pressure, moreover, I definitely tell my desire to be childfree to my parents. Especially when my parents had said that, but they replied 'don't say this'. It is considered that talking childfree is something that is not true, a disgrace, and a taboo. Tend to refuse, refuse and talk in 'amit-amit', 'don't let my child be like that.'*" - Cokorda Dianda, interview November 10, 2025

These pressures reflect the way society associates women's identity with reproductive success and family responsibilities, such that the choice not to have children is positioned as an "unnatural" or "violating" act of gender norms. In the context of the modern family, which increasingly emphasizes individual choice and bodily autonomy, this tension is becoming increasingly apparent as traditional values regarding reproduction are confronted with a more egalitarian family orientation. According to Merton's conceptual framework, "the functional unity of an adaptive society is limited as a state in which all parts of the social system cooperate in an adequate degree of internal harmony or consistency, without producing prolonged conflicts that cannot be limited or regulated", (Jonathan in Adibah, 2017), the *phenomenon of childfree* confirms Merton's postulate that "the perfect functional unity of a society is at odds with facts". Thus, in the context of *childfree*, childless life choices are functionally at the individual level, such as providing personal freedom and financial independence; however, they are functional at the level of the wider community, especially in a social system that relies on family regeneration for cultural preservation in Bali. In line with Merton's paradigm which asserts that "what is functional for a group may not be functional for the whole". Thus, (Jonathan in Adibah, 2017)

childfree is not just a personal choice, but a complex social phenomenon that shows a dialectic between function and dysfunction in the social system.

According to Merton, the concept of dysfunction refers to the negative consequences that arise from an action or institution on the social system as a whole. In this context, *childfree* choices made individually, especially if they become a mass trend, can be seen as dysfunctional because they threaten culture as the main pillar of Balinese society. More deeply, dysfunction is defined as a state in which a structure or institution, although it plays a role in maintaining the stability of one part of the social system, can actually cause undesirable negative consequences for other parts. Therefore, when some women begin to reject the reproductive demands that have played a role in maintaining the sustainability of customs and lineages, one of the cultural elements that supports social stability is no longer running according to the expectations of the community. In this framework, the prohibition or rejection of (Nurhakim et al., 2023) *childfreedom* can be understood as an attempt to maintain the functioning of the system in balance, while the individual's choice not to have children is perceived as a factor that has the potential to disrupt the continuity of the social structure.

The experience shows that the decision not to have children is not only questionable but also positioned as something dangerous, reprehensible, or as a violation of family values. The rejection that appears in the form of expressions such as "amit-amit" indicates that *childfree* is placed in the realm of things that are not worth talking about, even perceived as a threat to family honor and social stability. Through Merton's lens, this situation shows the potential dysfunction in the social system. By maintaining the function of traditional family institutions to preserve culture, the system can actually create negative consequences in the form of pressure and label deviation for individuals who choose a different way of life.

Meanwhile, the second informant emphasized that, *For even though I am not seen as like other Balinese women, the autonomy I have over myself is the same as my decision and even if I decide to be childfree it is me who bears, so as long as I can still live this and from my determination too and indeed I must be able because I have my own body autonomy.*" - Initial D, interview November 10, 2025.

The informant's statement affirming his bodily autonomy over *child-free* choice represents a fundamental tension in contemporary Balinese society, which can be read through the lens of Merton's functional structure. From the perspective of the traditional Balinese social and cultural system, which relies on the continuity of lineages, ceremonies, and the regeneration of ancestral values, the decision not to have children is clearly a dysfunction. This action is perceived negatively because it is considered to disrupt the long-term stability of the social structure by breaking the chain of cultural and religious regeneration; accordingly, the emerging social stigma can be seen as a system defense mechanism to restore the threatened balance. However, in the context of the modern family that emphasizes individual choice and personal freedom, the same choice can be seen as having its own function, namely, as a driver of the evolution of social norms towards a more egalitarian and inclusive family format, which no longer solely defines the value of a woman through her reproductive role.

Furthermore, this choice is essentially a statement of nonfunction, a conscious refusal to exercise the reproductive functions that are inherent and required by the institution of marriage and the family. Thus, the conflict experienced by the informants reflects the paradox of modernity in that when the values of individual autonomy are proclaimed, their most consistent application is confronted with the wall of collective norms. Through his statement, he not only affirmed the right to his body but also indirectly challenged the system to redefine what is considered a "contribution" and "reasonableness" in the ever-changing social order.

A personal decision, when taken massively, undermines the collective foundations of Bali's existence. If this generation breaks the chain, then the fading of this sacred obligation will essentially mean the fading of our identity as Balinese people" Ida Bagus Oka, interview November 1, 2025

Based on this statement, a personal decision, when taken massively, will undermine the collective foundation that is the spirit of Bali's existence. It is further emphasized that if this generation breaks the chain, the fading of this sacred obligation essentially means the fading of our identity as Balinese people. Thus, *the childfree* phenomenon in Bali is not only a matter of individual choice, but also a reflection of social dynamics that renegotiate the relationship between tradition, modernity, and personal freedom. The sociological challenge is not to maintain or reject a particular value system but rather to create a space for dialogue that allows the reformulation of family norms and spirituality to remain relevant in an ever-changing society without losing the essence of harmony that is the basis of Balinese philosophy of life. From this perspective, *childfree* emerges as a complex phenomenon that sits at the intersection of individual autonomy and collective responsibility, as well as a test for the elasticity of the Balinese cultural system in responding to changing times while maintaining the fundamental values that are the soul of Balinese society.

From the perspective of traditional family functions, the overemphasis on bodily autonomy and resistance space can be seen as a threat to social cohesion, which has been maintained for centuries. The traditional understanding is that the unlimited autonomy of individuals has the potential to cause great dysfunction, that is, disconnection from the chain of generations, which weakens cultural joints, collapses the kinship system, and ultimately threatens collective identity. Thus, the traditional family offers deep stability and meaning, which begins to disappear when modern values, such as radical autonomy, are glorified without considering the long-term consequences for the established social construct.

Based on the interview: *"Economics, there are many things that I want to pursue in terms of economics. My boyfriend and I agreed to be childfree after our studies were over and planned to move abroad. For us, living without children is a conscious choice to fully explore one's potential, pursue a career, and have a stable economy. We believe that happiness does not have to be tied to having offspring, but to the freedom to determine our own way of life according to the values we believe in"* Initials B, Interview November 12

It can be seen how the logic of the "market model of modernity" that Beck puts forward works in a real context. This statement reflects how the demands of careers, global mobility, and economic stability encourage couples to choose childless, a condition that Beck calls characteristic of the "most ideal market society," which is a form of adaptation to an economic system that requires individuals to be fully available to the market. Individualization in this case is reflected in the priority of self-development, study, and migration plans, as well as a consequence of reflective modernization, in which the family as a social institution is redefined, even the potential for gradual disappearance. Thus, the *childfree* phenomenon in this study not only shows a shift in values at the individual level, but also confirms Beck's thesis on how modernity and market logic can erode the traditional role of the family, replacing it with a more individualized and integrated orientation in the global economic system. (in Charles et al., 2008)

Based on Merton's theory, *the childfree* life choice of an adult couple can be seen as an example of Merton's non-function, which is also born in the context of this modern family paradox. Non-function is a neutral consequence that does not directly strengthen or weaken the social system but represents a shift in behavioral patterns in society. For example, *childfree* couples who allocate children's education funds for travel are a consequence that is not directly related to family or cultural reproductive functions but is the result of this phenomenon, a decrease in the frequency of visits to parents due to the lack of motivation to introduce grand children and changes in home-buying patterns that tend to be smaller because they do not need children's rooms. While these changes do not directly threaten the sustainability of social systems as much as they do dysfunction, they reflect a transformation of values and priorities in modern society that is beginning to move away from traditional family norms.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

The childfree phenomenon in the context of Balinese society creates a complex modern family paradox. On the one hand, modernity offers a space for Balinese women to negotiate their identity and bodily autonomy through childless life choices; on the other hand, tradition firmly maintains the hegemony of hereditary norms as the foundation of cultural sustainability. This paradox deepens as globalization opens up the discourse of alternative families, but customary structures, patriarchy, and caste systems remain symbolic boundaries that frame reproductive decisions. However, it is important to underline that this dynamic does not necessarily place culture as the wrong party in regulating or interpreting bodily autonomy.

Thus, the tension that arises is not merely a conflict between the individual and culture but a reflection of the process of society's adaptation when faced with new forms of choice in today's modern family that have not been fully accommodated within the existing value framework. This unresolved paradox reveals how the Balinese people are in a constant negotiation process between maintaining traditions and responding to changing times. *Childfree* in this context is not just a rejection of traditional values but a mirror of how the Balinese family institution is transforming without losing its fundamental cultural roots and understanding the dynamics of changing modern family functions and the context of women's body autonomy in contemporary social discourse.

5.2. Problem Limitations

Although this study presents a comprehensive analysis of childfree individuals in Balinese society, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study included only respondents with limited sociocultural backgrounds; therefore, the findings may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives across the Bali region. Second, the focus of the research on the Balinese context limits the generalizability of the findings to communities with similar kinship systems and traditional values. Methodological limitations should also be considered. Theoretical limitations appear in the use of Merton's functional structural frameworks, which, while relevant, may not fully capture the complexity of the dynamics of power and resistance in contemporary society. This study has not adequately explored cross-generational perspectives and differences in views based on gender.

5.3. Suggestions

However, this study has some limitations that must be acknowledged. The geographical and demographic scope of respondents was limited to the Balinese urban community, which means the research findings may not necessarily represent similar dynamics in rural areas or communities with different cultural characteristics. The qualitative approach applied, while capable of in-depth exploration of meaning, limits the generalizability of findings to a broader scale. In addition, the focus of the research on the perspective of *childfree individuals* without involving the comprehensive views of parents, traditional leaders, and couples who choose to have children, causes the analysis of relational dynamics to be less optimal. Theoretical limitations are also apparent from the use of Merton's functional structural framework, which has not been fully able to accommodate the complexity of power and agency in contemporary society. Future research should broaden the scope of respondents, develop mixed-methods approaches, and include cross-generational and gender perspectives to better understand the transformation of family values in the context of cultural modernization.

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