

‘The Childfree Choice of Women’

Looking into the childfree discourse, spurs the question of future outcomes for childfree women. This was explored in the two focus groups comprised of Generation Y and Z. When discussing continuity and change, the responses expressed a generational shift in perspective. The Generation Z focus group were optimistic that the assumption of motherhood would change in the next 10-15 years as they collectively felt their generation has been socialised and educated on the importance of individual choice and believed that in the next decade there would be more normalisation on structures outside the nuclear family. Generation Y participants conveyed a different approach. While there was agreement of societal progression, most felt the direction of change is still inadequate. The participants noted a shift in values in the assumption, as it is no longer “*when are you going to have babies but are you going to have babies?¹*.” However the group perceived little progress in the discourse and respectfulness surrounding the decision. It was agreed that the majority of denigration comes from Generation X, who are parents, which was speculated to be symptomatic of individual regret.

Interviews conducted with Generation X continued this idea, overall believing that change of the childfree assumption was ultimately evolutionary and the next 10-15 years would not exhibit drastic alteration. Melissa Graham admitted that her reluctance stems from her research where 17 year old girls were asked about their future aspirations, all of which answered with the inevitable outcome of the nuclear family.

A factor to consider in the comparison of perspectives is personal experience. The Generation Z focus group admitted that while they felt an assumption of motherhood, they agreed there was no pressure inflicted on their age group. Whereas Generations X and Y definitely experienced pressure to acquiesce to motherhood, relating back to the social fallacy of the ‘*biological clock*’ which inflicts social pressure to have children once they leave their twenties.

The narrative of womanhood is changing. One hundred years ago the childfree choice could not exist. The ability for a woman to have agency over her reproductive health shows tremendous progression. The decision to not have children conveys a heightened awareness over lifestyle, social and economic climates, and future environments. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that couples without children are predicted to be the fastest growing

¹ Focus Group Generation Y- See appendix 10

household type, over taking households with children, by 2031². This proliferating decision represents the role women can have outside of the social construct of motherhood. Despite negative connotations of the childfree choice, it seems that the childfree choice is increasing. In order to normalise this choice it is imperative that stereotypes and stigmas need to be addressed and debunked. This will subsequently result in the childfree choice being seen as valid, rather than a rejection of the mainstream.

² Mills 'Who will look after you when you're old? Living a childfree life (2016)