

## Chapter 2

# Designing a Divorce Biography

Divorce, being a life-changing or as what Giddens (1991) calls it a ‘fateful’ moment, places individuals at the crossroads of their existence where they now need to decide on the trajectory they are going to take. Fateful moments, as described by Giddens (1991), are known as:

times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in his existence; or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences.... Fateful moments are those when individuals are called on to take decisions that are particularly consequential for their ambitions, or more generally for their future lives. Fateful moments are highly consequential for a person’s destiny. (1991, pp. 112–113)

Other scholars have discussed this concept using different terminologies. David Mandelbaum (1973), an anthropologist interested in life history studies, describes such events as ‘turnings’, where they ‘may occur through a single event or experience’, a ‘turning point’, or it may be a gradual shift (1973, pp. 181–182). Norman Denzin (1989), on the other hand, refers to these turning points as ‘epiphanies’, which he explains as ‘interactional moments and experiences that leave marks on people’s lives by altering their fundamental meaning structures’ (Denzin 1989 cited in Humphrey 1993, p. 172). Robin Humphrey (1993), extending Denzin’s (1989) work on interpretive biography<sup>1</sup>, researches the biographies of a group of elderly people living in an ex-mining town in country Durham and describes the discontinuities in his research subjects’ social careers<sup>2</sup> as ‘career breaks’. During such ‘career breaks’, the nature and path of the social career have been altered and individu-

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<sup>1</sup> Norman K. Denzin (1989), in his book, *Interpretive biography*, encourages scholars to collaborate with their research subjects and engage in the production of biographies that ‘will become testimonies to the ability of the human being to endure, to prevail and to triumph over the structural forces that threaten at any moment to annihilate all of us’ (1989, p. 83).

<sup>2</sup> A social career, as Humphrey (1993) has described, refers to the trajectory of social participation over a life course. It makes up of ‘inter-related careers, intersected by transitions, reversals, conflicts and triumphs’ (Johnson 1976, pp. 156–157 quoted in Humphrey 1993, p. 169) that individuals participate in over their life course.

als engage in new courses of action to embark on a different trajectory (Humphrey 1993). Finally, Rachel Thomson et al. (2002) coin a different term, ‘critical moment’ to discuss a similar concept they observe in their studies of the biographies of young, British people living in 5 different communities in the UK.

Regardless of the differences in the terms used to describe this concept, these researchers agree that during such life-altering events such as the death of a significant person, divorce, unemployment, graduation, migration, getting a new job and becoming a new parent, individuals consider their next course of action, contemplate their decisions, weigh the consequences of their particular actions and chart the course of their life path. My research looks at a specific fateful moment—divorce—and examines how it results in the discontinuity of patterns of behaviour and Innarratives of self, and the disruption of personal communities and social relationships, and how it compels divorcees to contemplate and decide on the next move in their post-divorce journey.

I suggest that the divorced individual has to design what I call *a divorce biography* when marital dissolution takes place. The theoretical foundation draws upon 2 main bodies of literature—one, conceptualisations on individualisation and transformation of intimacy; two, subsequent scholarship engaging and extending theorisations on individualisation and providing discussion on increasing diversity of relationship practices. In this chapter, I discuss the main components of my concept of divorce biography: the element of choice and autonomy; the role and importance of personal communities; the pursuit of productivity; and the diversity and complexities of divorce biographies.

## 2.1 Divorce Biography: ‘Do-It-Yourself’

Engaging theories on individualisation and transformation of intimacy is pertinent to my discussion on divorce since one would argue that divorce and the construction of post-divorce trajectories are highly individualised acts. My research supports the thesis that individuals in an individualised society are decreasingly bound by traditions or guided by indisputable, restrictive and standardised codes of conduct (Giddens 1990, 1991; Beck 1992; Lash 1993; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1996, 2002; Bauman 2000, 2001). Instead, they become the master of their own destinies, possess the autonomy to manage their own affairs and exercise choice to determine their life courses. Divorce is one of the life events that individuals make the decision to terminate a marriage when the earlier terms and conditions that were negotiated in the social contract have been violated or are not satisfied.

Ulrich Beck in his accounts of individualisation, observes that post-war industrial societies have undergone dramatic changes. Specifically, there is ‘a kind of ‘metamorphosis’ or ‘categorical shift’ in the relation between the individual and society’ (1992, p. 127). What have happened, according to him and Beck-Gernsheim, are the ‘disembedding, removal from historically prescribed social forms and commitments in the sense of traditional contexts of dominance and support

(the 'liberating dimension'), 'the increasing fragility of social categories as class and social status, gender roles, family, neighbourhood' and 'the collapse of state-sanctioned normal biographies, frames of reference [and] role models' (Beck 1992, p. 128; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1996, p. 24). Giddens (1990) also describes this disembedding process as the 'evaporating of the "grand narrative"—the overarching "storyline" by means of which we are placed in history as being having a definite past and a predictable future' (1990, p. 2). He goes on to conceptualise the process as 'detraditionalisation' and claims that although tradition continues to exist and matter in everyday lives, it plays a less significant role and only matters if it is being reflexively considered and applied (Giddens 1990, 1994). The expected 'rite of passage' through life's transitions is now less evident in post-modern societies (Giddens 1991).

As a result, individuals experience the loss of traditional security with respect to practical knowledge, faith and guiding norms (the 'disenchantment dimension') (Beck 1992, p. 128). While there is 'an indefinite range of potential courses of action (with their attendant risks)' being 'at any given moment open to individuals and collectivities', Giddens maintains that ontological insecurity is the prominent feature of individuals' lives in post-traditional or individualised societies where there is a lack of a 'sense of continuity and order in events' (Giddens 1991, pp. 28–29, p. 243).

Beck (1992) goes on to explain the third part of the individualisation process where there is 're-embedding', which is 'a new type of social commitment (the "control" or "reintegration dimension")' (1992, p. 128). As Bauman (2000) describes, 'the "disembedded" individuals of the "classic" modernity era deployed their new empowerment and the entitlements of autonomous agency in a frantic search for "re-embeddedness"' (Bauman 2000, p. 46). To re-embed themselves, individuals now make sense of the wide range of options provided by the institutions, choose various options to express and assert their individuality, and then determine their own life course. Giddens (1991) has put it aptly:

Personal life has become an open project, creating new demands and anxieties. Our interpersonal existence is being thoroughly transfigured, involving us all in what I shall call everyday social experiments, with which wide social changes more or less oblige us to engage. (1991, p. 8)

The traditional and standard biography has now become the 'elective', 'choice', 'reflexive' and 'do-it-yourself' biography (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1996, p. 25).

The individualisation thesis is meaningful to the discussion of divorce in 2 ways. First, in a highly individualised society, divorce becomes a more readily available, possible, seemingly rational and sometimes, necessary option for married individuals. With personal life and relationships decreasingly guided and regulated by traditional frameworks based on norms and increasingly becoming a DIY project, marriage's role as a social institution regulating behaviour and organising personal life has weakened considerably. It is also no longer seen as a necessary life event that signifies adulthood, maturity or responsible citizenship. Andrew Cherlin (2004) describes the social phenomenon of the declining role of norms in regulating social

behaviour and relationships as ‘deinstitutionalisation’. By deinstitutionalisation, he means:

... the weakening of the social norms that define people’s behaviour in a social institution such as marriage. In times of social stability, the taken-for-granted nature of norms allows people to go about their lives without having to question their actions or the actions of others. But when social change produces situations outside the reach of established norms, individuals can no longer rely on shared understandings of how to act. (2004, p. 848)

This results in ‘a pluralisation of intimate and family practices’ and ‘a growth in reflexivity and autonomy’ (Gross 2005, p. 287). There are now many configurations of personal life that one can choose or create. Unlike in a traditional society where individuals typically choose one configuration (that is to get married and stay married)—individuals in an individualised society can choose to experience different configurations (such as cohabitation, marriage, divorce and remarriage) *all in one lifetime*. Cherlin (1992) explains that more young people today go through all of these events and it is no longer uncommon to have a complex personal life history.

Most young people today won’t pass through all of the events ... but if the levels of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation don’t decrease in the near future, many will. And many more will have family histories only slightly less complicated. In the 1950s someone with a family history this complex would have been rare; in the 1990s it is no longer unusual. (1992, p. 4)

Marriage has not only changed in terms of its role as a social institution but also in the ways it is being maintained in contemporary times. There have been radical changes in the way that people maintain closeness<sup>3</sup> and intimacy in personal relationships, which Giddens (1992) describes as the transformation of intimacy in personal life. Marriage, like other personal relationships, have been transformed from a ‘community of need’ to ‘elective affinities’ where they are no longer guided and regulated by traditional frameworks based on norms, but are instead now loosely structured and open to negotiation (Beck-Gernsheim 1999). It is ‘free-floating’ and ‘reflexively organised’ in individualised societies (Giddens 1991, pp. 88–97). ‘Whereas formerly marriages were held together by external pressures, economic necessity, and fear of social disapproval, now marriages stand or fall according to the strength of the emotional bonds between the partners’ (Amato and Booth 1997, p. 220). Emotional intimacy and bonding are deemed to be the key ingredients of a contemporary marriage.

‘Marriage becomes more and more a relationship initiated for, and kept going for as long as, it delivers emotional satisfaction to be derived from close contact with another’ (Giddens 1991, p. 89). Giddens (1992) describes this kind of personal relationship as a ‘pure relationship’—one which is ‘entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it’ (1992, p. 58). The main features of

<sup>3</sup> Closeness, as anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1992) suggests, ‘summons affective ties, the obligations and duties such ties entail, and the warmth and mutual care with which relationships are sustained’ (Strathern 1992 quoted in Spencer and Pahl 2006, p. 35).

Giddens' 'pure relationship' is the emphasis on the equality of individuals involved in the relationship and that each individual involved in the relationship has the right to pursue the satisfaction of their needs (Jamieson 1998, p. 38). What is 'pure' about the relationship that Giddens (1992) discusses is that the parties involved in the relationship democratically and reflexively participate in the making of the relationship by determining the terms of their social contract, working out its continuation and if necessary, arranging its termination. Beck-Gernsheim (2002) refer to this complex process of negotiation, experimentation, decision-making, evaluation and reinvention as cooperative individualism.

To Cherlin (2004), a practice like that is 'a potential source of conflict and opportunity' (2004, p. 848). It promises opportunities whereby individuals can be creative and assertive, but at the same time, conflicts can arise when the parties concerned in a relationship do not agree with the terms established. Such is the 'normal chaos of love' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Bauman (2003) laments that maintaining a relationship brings 'a lot of headaches' and 'above all perpetual uncertainty' (2003, p. 14). New rules of intimacy have to be negotiated between the couple, but without any standard or clearly defined guidelines to follow. Bauman (2003) indicates that 'you can never be really, fully sure what to do—never certain that you have done the right thing or that you did it at the right time' (2003, p. 14). To Bauman, that is 'trouble and nothing but trouble' (Bauman 2003, pp. 14–15).

Once the symmetry is no longer there, the relationship becomes vulnerable and faces the possibility of dissolution. As Bauman (2003) has described, 'the romantic definition of love as "til death us do part" is decidedly out of fashion—having passed its use-by date' (2003, pp. 4–5). Since individuals in a highly individualised society are compelled to craft their biographies based on conscious choice and come under pressure to justify their actions, the continuation or dissolution of a marriage is also decided in the same way (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Individuals who enter a marriage based on choice are more prepared to end the marriage if they find insufficient reasons to stay in the marriage or find their needs and expectations are not adequately met in the marriage (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Divorce in such a context becomes a personal, logical and at times, essential life decision as part of an ongoing process of constructing a DIY biography (Furstenberg 1989).

Second, theoretical framings of individualisation also contribute to my conceptualisation of divorce biography in this specific way—I propose that the divorced individual under the influence of individualisation has to craft what I call *a divorce biography* to uncouple themselves and work out their post-divorce lives. This theoretical framework is an extension of the 'do-it-yourself biography' conceptualised by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996, p. 25).

In a highly individualised society, individuals experience 'a shift of authority: from "without" to "within"' and 'are themselves called upon to exercise authority in the face of disorder and contingency which is thereby generated', as explained by Paul Heelas (1996, p. 2). The responsibility for taking care of an individual's welfare and needs has been increasingly shifted from social structures to the individuals themselves. When divorce takes place, divorced individuals experience disruptions and discontinuities in their lives and would have to respond, cope and adjust to

these changes. Existential questions such as, 'Who am I now?', 'What should I do next?', 'Where and how shall I live?', 'How do I tell others?', 'How do I manage my relationships with others?' and 'How will my future be like?' confront them as they stand at the intersections of life. Divorcees, like other individuals in a post-traditional, individualised world, engage in what Giddens calls a 'reflexive project of self' to 'make things happen' for themselves and to themselves (Giddens 1991). In a divorce biography, divorcees being the master of their destinies and confronting the crisis of their divorce, would typically have to take charge of their own lives and decide how to deal with the chaos and transformations divorce brings, organise different aspects of their post-divorce lives, navigate changes in personal relationships, negotiate a new identity and make plans for the future. They possess autonomy, exercise choice and assert their individuality to determine their post-divorce trajectories and work out their divorce biographies. Even for those for whom divorce is not initiated by them, they too express their sense of self in designing their divorce biography. The rise of reflexivity, as Giddens (1991) calls it, is evident in divorcees after the divorce.

The process of working out their divorce biographies is what Mandelbaum (1973) refers to as 'adaptations'—where an individual 'must alter some of his established patterns of behaviour to cope with new conditions' and 'changes his ways in order to maintain continuity, whether of group participation or social expectation or self-image or simply survival' (Mandelbaum 1973, p. 181). Divorcees have to tap on their creativity and resourcefulness to steer the course of their post-divorce journey and adjust to 'new forms of socialisation, regulation, and resource allocation, all of which promote particular kinds of individuality' (Howard 2007, p. 1).

With the main project—a DIY divorce biography to work on, divorcees also have other biographies such as career, parenting, family and friendship to maintain. Each one has to fit into the divorced individual's life biography like a jigsaw puzzle. This 'biographical work' involves the articulation of individuality, constant negotiation of rights, investment of time and effort as well as planning and personal execution. As Maria S. Rerrich (1991) aptly pointed out, it also requires hard work, especially when the individual's task is to 'join together what is moving apart' (Rerrich 1991 quoted in Beck-Gernsheim 1999, p. 60). To be able to put together multiple biographies and manage these different biographies well in everyday life, it is a 'balancing act' (Rerrich 1988 quoted in Beck-Gernsheim 1999, p. 60) that requires 'a great deal of preparation', 'rationalisation and calculation' (Rerrich 1993, pp. 311–322 quoted in Beck-Gernsheim 1999, p. 60). It is especially challenging with divorce since divorced individuals having left a conventional, mainstream family arrangement, have no normative guidelines to rely upon for the navigation of post-divorce lives and relationships. How divorcees imagine themselves to be therefore determines the choices they make everyday and shapes their lifestyle as well as their goals and future plans. This identity work, as Mathew Adams (2007) explains is a work of imagination (2007, p. 11).

Such adaptations made during fateful moments impact the individual's life, self-identity and relationships with others (Mandelbaum 1973; Giddens 1991). According to Giddens (1991), these moments offer the possibility of 'reskilling and



empowerment' (1991, p. 142), where individuals have the opportunity to learn new skills and develop innovative coping strategies to handle the outcomes of the fateful moment and settle in the new circumstances.

## 2.2 Divorce Biography: Continuing salience of personal communities

How else do divorcees construct and navigate their divorce biographies? Do divorce biographies reflect solely the individualistic ethic? Are divorce biographies entirely *DIY*?

To address these questions, I turn to theorisations made by prominent scholars in the field of personal relationships such as Morgan (1996), Weeks et al. 2001, Pahl and Spencer 2004 and Smart (2007) and discuss how they engage with ideas of individualisation. Community and family researchers have been attempting to resolve conflicting ideas of individualism and community (Wilkinson 2010). Scholars such as David Morgan (1996, 2005), Jeffrey Weeks (Weeks et al. 2001), Ray Pahl and Liz Spencer (Pahl and Spencer 2004; Spencer and Pahl 2006) and Carol Smart (2007) have predominantly been concerned with how to understand relationships and communities, even as they exhibit increasing fluidity, flexibility, individual choice and personal preference. They have argued in their respective fields of research that individuals do not lead their lives solely based on personal choice and preferences. Instead, their decisions are embedded in meanings they draw from their communities. Personal relationships remain salient in individual lives despite heightened democratisation and individualisation of personal life.

Joining scholars who have challenged the 'polarisation between individualisation and community' (Wilkinson et al. 2012) and who have attempted to reconcile these ideas in order to understand personal relationships (Morgan 1996; Weeks et al. 2001; Crow 2002; Pahl and Spencer 2004; Pahl and Pevalin 2005; Spencer and Pahl 2006; Smart 2007; Gilding 2010<sup>4</sup>; Wilkinson 2010; Wilkinson et al. 2012), I bring all these theorisations to one analytical field and explain the phenomenon of divorce. My research shows that during the process of designing a divorce biography, they do not do so solely based on individual choice and personal inclination but involve their family, friends and other significant members of their personal communities.

One contemporary scholar, Carol Smart (2007), in her book *Personal life: new directions in sociological thinking* (2007), provides a direct critique of the theories

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<sup>4</sup> Gilding (2010) uses his research findings on paternity uncertainty, inheritance and family business to argue that Cherlin's concept of 'deinstitutionalisation', Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's 'individualisation thesis' and Smart's ideas of 'connectedness' and 'personal life' give 'too much weight to reflexivity, no less than the sociology of the family once attached too much weight to convention' (2010, p. 773). He proposes that scholars should focus not just on the 'reflexive reconfiguration' of family relationships and practices, but also consider the role of institutionalisation and institutional resilience in their study of family (Gilding 2010, p. 774).

of individualisation and discusses the role of choice and connectedness in personal relationships. Smart (2007) builds on George Herbert Mead's (1972) idea<sup>5</sup> of 'I' being the active agent of self and 'me' being the socialised and connected part of self; she suggests that the 'individualisation thesis' discusses the active 'I' while the 'connectedness thesis' that she proposes as the antithesis of the 'individualisation thesis' refers to the connected 'me' (Smart 2007, p. 28). She puts forward the argument that individuals are not all that autonomous or socially isolated from others and that 'the very possibility of personal life is predicated upon a degree of self-reflection and also connectedness with others' (Smart 2007, p. 28). She explains that 'to live a personal life is to have agency and to make choices, but the personhood implicit in the concept requires the presence of others to respond to and to contextualise those actions and choices' (Smart 2007, p. 28). To Smart (2007), 'relationality is then a mode of thinking which not only influences decisions and choices, but also forms a context for the unfolding of everyday life' (2007, p. 49).

I observe that this is the case of divorce. As divorce is a decision marked by individual choice, it is commonly portrayed as a selfish and individualistic act made in solitude without consideration of the community. The consideration of both conceptualisations of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1996) and relationality (Smart 2007) are meaningful to my discussion of divorce in so far as my research argues that divorcees do not make life-changing decisions and manage their lives *solely* based on individual choice and autonomy as held central to the theorisation on DIY biography by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996)—but also in close relation to their significant others. While the idea of divorce biography acknowledges the increasing degree of choice, autonomy and reflexivity in determining post-divorce paths and relationships, it goes beyond an assertion of individuality and expression of self-centredness. I suggest that even though divorce is an individualised act, it is not merely a pursuit of individualistic desires and divorcees are not all that self-directed and separate from others. My research findings will show how divorcees' life decisions and biographies are certainly not *all* 'do-it-yourself' but clearly influenced by their personal relationships and embedded in the meanings they draw from the communities.

During the process of constructing their divorce biographies, divorcees consult the 'experts' in their lives—family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours and even others who have experienced similar life-changing situations (Giddens 1991, p. 114) and together with these significant others, they contemplate their next move, discuss solutions and make collaborative decisions. As suggested by Giddens (1991), individuals' relationships are brought to the foreground and become especially salient during fateful moments. Divorcees not only turn to their personal network of kin and friends for advice and involve them in decision-making, but in

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<sup>5</sup> Mead (1972)'s theory on 'I' and 'me' indicates: 'The "I" reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the "me" and we react to it as an "I"... The "I" is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the "me" is the organised set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organised "me", and then one reacts towards that as an "I"' (1972, pp. 174–175).



many instances, develop stronger ties and connections with their significant others during trying periods, rekindle formerly lost or distant relationships and form new friendships with people who demonstrate understanding and acceptance towards their situations.

Since divorce is a quintessential act of terminating a significant relationship based on individual choice, it has been commonly perceived that divorce is an outcome of selfish individualism. It is therefore counter-intuitive to think about the rise of relationship formations during a time when pivotal personal relationships are breaking down. However, I support the position by community researchers such as Morgan (1996), Weeks et al. (2001) and Smart (2007) that the democratisation and individualisation of personal life has opened up possibilities of diverse family configurations. With the old, traditional ways of organising personal life being challenged, new patterns of intimacy and alternative family forms emerge. We now 'do family' and 'do intimacy' differently as suggested by Morgan (1996) in his book, *Family connections: an introduction to family studies*. Individuals define what family means to them and live out their meanings of family the way they want (Weston 1991; Morgan 1996; Weeks et al. 2001). There is now greater space for different imaginations and configurations of family life.

Concurring with Robert E. Goss's (1997) position that 'everyone has the right to define significant relationships and decide who matters and counts as family' (1997, p. 19), I suggest that divorcees reconfigure their family unit and go on to find a new family after losing the nuclear family they had formed with their former spouse and the extended family comprising in-laws. Alternative forms of solidarity and community are developed when divorcees negotiate new connections with their family and friends after the divorce.

Morgan's (1996) proposition of the family to be understood as a variety of family practices, instead of a single institution is helpful in explaining how non-normative family arrangements like divorced families perceive and account for their version of family. Instead of seeing family as 'a thing' and family life tied to the confines of a physical home, Morgan's (1996) 'notion of "family practices" was elaborated to convey a sense of flow and movement between a whole set of overlapping social practices, practices which were both constructed by the observer and lived by the actual practitioners' (1996, p. 199). 'Thus 'family', in this account, is not a thing but a way of looking at, and describing, practices which might also be described in a variety of other ways' (Morgan 1996, p. 199).

Morgan's (1996) emphasises that the meaning and practice of family life is not static or standardised; they are socially constructed on a daily basis and over time by those involved.

The use of the word 'constructed' here takes in 2 meanings. At one level there are perceptions and interpretative work of the actors involved ... But at another level there are also processes of historical construction ... most historical accounts of the development of the family are also accounts of the development and shifts in the usages and meanings of the word 'family' and associated terms ... When we say that family practices are practices which are constructed as such we are referring to these 2 levels and their interaction over time. (Morgan 1996, p. 192)

Mapping Morgan's (1996) theorisation on family practices, I suggest that as part of constructing a divorce biography, divorcees and the members of their new family work out their family life based on their interpretation of family. Through experimentation and interaction over time, they come up with practices and arrangements that make sense to them. There is certainly a 'subjective agency' in the way they choose and create their post-divorce families, in the same manner the respondents of gay kinship studies by Kath Weston (1991) and another group of researchers, Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan (2001). Based on Weston's observation of gay families, she described the nature of such gay kinship as follows.

In the language of significant others, significance rested in the eye of the beholder. Participants tend to depict their chosen families as thoroughly individualistic affairs, insofar as each and every ego was left to be the chooser. (Weston 1991, p. 109)

Similarly, Weeks et al. (2001) showed that non-heterosexual individuals in their study exercised choice and creativity, and demonstrated a high degree of reflexivity to pick the significant others that constitute their 'family of choice' (2001, p. 4).

With the flourishing of new family configurations, several community scholars have gone on to show that personal ties and relationships remain salient and desired despite being constructed and maintained based on individual choice (Morgan 1996; Silva and Smart 1999; Weeks et al. 2001; Pahl and Spencer 2004; Pahl and Pevalin 2005; Spencer and Pahl 2006; Gilding 2010). Morgan (1996) emphasises that while family models and practices are changing to reflect the subjective meanings of family, family practices as he calls it are far from declining in significance in people's lives.

In the first place, in as much as family life remains an important strand in the lives of individuals and a term which they continue to use to convey matters of some importance, family practices continue themselves to be important ... But while there may be good grounds for talking about the decline of any one particular model of 'the family' we can be less confident in talking about the decline of family practices. (1996, p. 199)

Like Morgan (1996), Silva and Smart (1999) point out that 'while there are new family forms emerging alongside new normative guidelines about family relationships, this does not mean that values of caring and obligation are abandoned' (1999, p. 7). They show that these values do not cease to bind people together (Silva and Smart 1999). These scholars argue that individuals in new forms of solidarity continue to demonstrate commitment and obligation towards members of their reconfigured families.

Likewise, my research argues that family life does not diminish but remains important and meaningful in divorcees' lives even when their family practices and arrangements are disrupted by divorce and subsequently reshaped in their post-divorce biographies. The family practices they participate in with the significant others they have selected to be included in their reconstituted family unit contribute to the growing sense of bonding and community amongst them. In some instances, divorcees' personal relationships become more salient in times of crisis and divorcees turn to their personal network for survival and support. Their kin and friends in turn display a strong sense of commitment and obligation to see them through difficult



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