

Chapter 1

Introduction

When Yumei arrived at a pub situated in Clarke Quay, one of Singapore's nightspot districts, her closest girlfriends were eagerly awaiting her. As a bottle of champagne popped, the group of over-excited girlfriends rushed to give Yumei hugs and kisses. The girls squealed with delight, 'Free at last! Yay!' and made a toast to this new milestone in Yumei's life. The mood was clearly celebratory.

But this was not your typical celebration. When Yumei sent out invitations to her girlfriends a few weeks ago, she wrote: 'Help me celebrate the end of my marriage; the start of a new life and an excuse for us all to get together.' Yumei had been married for 11 years to a corporate executive and remained as a full-time homemaker and mother of 2 children during the marriage. In recent years, her husband had become increasingly dissatisfied at work; he would often bring his frustration home and vented it out on Yumei and their children. His domination over them consequently became unbearable. Fights at home were more explosive than before. Amidst the angry blows she received frequently from her husband, she felt she had been leading a life based on her husband's terms and in so doing, had lost her sense of self within the marriage. 'I just didn't know who I was anymore. My voice was completely gone', explained Yumei. The last straw for Yumei was when her ex-husband came home one night reeking of alcohol, with love bites on his neck, and becoming aggressive when Yumei confronted him. He beat her up for 2 hours after locking their frightened children in the bedroom. This abusive and 'dehumanising' treatment, according to Yumei, was what propelled her to leave her marriage with her children.

When the divorce came through, she decided to throw a divorce party, explaining: 'People have parties to celebrate important stages in their lives, like marriage, so why can't I celebrate becoming single again?' The party marked a new life course—one where she would find, in her own words, 'the real me'.

The party was boldly themed after the American television series *Sex and the City* and had as its party anthem songs like *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* and *We are never ever getting back together*. Beyond the fun, she knew she still had 'a long way to go in [her] healing process' and life as a working mother having to raise and

care for her children singlehandedly would be challenging. However, surrounded by her girlfriends and close family at the party, she knew that she would be able to pull through ‘the heartaches’ with the ‘love and support of [her] family and friends’. To Yumei, the divorce party was a symbolic event that marked the beginning of her second chance at life and a new trajectory to reclaim her freedom and individuality.

Yumei’s account of marking the end of marriage by holding a divorce party is not unique. It is one of many stories that proliferate on lifestyle magazines, divorce forums and the private blogs of divorcees. A quick internet search for ‘divorce party’ generates party ideas, party favours, celebration cakes and many videos, stories and pictures of divorce parties. Many party-planning companies have capitalised on this increasingly liberal and accepting attitude towards divorce by providing creative and personalised party-planning services. Advertisement taglines run the gamut of ‘If a bachelor party is the last chance to be naughty, then a divorce party is the second chance to be naughty again’, ‘Create a new chapter in life for yourself’, ‘Get out of your divorce and start partying’, ‘Divorced ... The New Single’, to ‘Bad things happen, have a party and put it behind you’. There are also self-help books and novels featuring the divorce party such as Laura Dave’s (2008) *The divorce party* and Christine Gallagher’s (2006) *The divorce party planner: how to throw a divorce or breakup party* which offers ideas on party themes, games, decorations, entertainment, etiquette and gifts, and shares inspirational divorce party stories.

Divorce parties have become increasingly ubiquitous in many countries such as Australia, the United States of America, Japan and China. For the past 2 years, Singapore has also slowly caught up in modest numbers with this trend of holding divorce parties and ceremonies.

These divorce parties, like weddings, birthday celebrations and other social rituals, symbolise the closure of a life chapter and the beginning of a new stage of life for divorcees. Holding a divorce party appears to be a welcoming ritual for divorcees to put the divorce behind them and move on with their life. For some, the divorce party is also known as the ‘freedom celebration’ where they revel in their liberation from a consuming and painful marriage. Some divorcees also hold divorce parties to express their appreciation to family and friends who have supported them through the divorce process.

The accounts of Yumei and other divorcees who have held divorce parties seem to suggest that they do not perceive divorce as all that disastrous and crippling but, in fact, emancipating. Even among those who do not mark the end of their marriage with a party, the liberation of divorce is felt in other perceptible ways. The exit of an unsatisfying marriage promises a second chance in life as they consider possibilities, decide on their next move, make adaptations and embark on a new life journey. However, beyond the celebratory divorce parties, the post-divorce trajectories divorcees take on are not without challenges, obstacles and tensions. It involves coping with the crisis and changes divorce brings, developing practical and discursive strategies for survival and self-sufficiency, negotiating personal relationships to form a new supportive and intimate network, navigating through the social and policy context divorcees are located, reconciling internal dilemmas and contradictions in the formulation of new identities and rebuilding their lives for the pursuit of

independence and productivity. Divorcees construct what I call a *divorce biography* to embark on a new life journey in uncoupling themselves, becoming individuals and working out their post-divorce trajectories. This book seeks to uncover the diversity and complexity of Singaporean divorce biographies.

1.1 Changing and contesting perspectives on divorce

Though societal attitudes towards divorce have generally improved over the past decades in many industrialised societies, changes are uneven across and within societies and communities with diverse family values, beliefs, norms and policies. There have long been contesting perspectives towards divorce and other unconventional family practices and arrangements. Debates over why marriages break up have been rife in scholarly literature and public discourse.

The idea that marriage could be based on love and companionship began under the influence of individualistic ideals associated with the Age of Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions (Coontz 2007). At the beginning of the twentieth century, an even greater emphasis was placed on love, intimacy and self-fulfilment within marriage. During this period, the notion of individuals falling in love and getting married became acceptable and widely practised. Marriage was not only highly romanticised at the beginning of the twentieth century; it was no longer perceived as a rite of passage or a traditional social obligation (Jamieson 1998). Instead, it is seen as a way of satisfying needs and finding self-fulfilment (van Krieken et al. 2010). Consequently, when an individual's needs and expectations are not met in a marriage, it is dissolved. Marriages may cease when individuals fall out of love or no longer derive happiness from it. Stephanie Coontz (2007) observes that divorce rates in America have increased since the 1920s with more citing their marriage did not bring them love and happiness.

A steep increase in divorce rates throughout the twentieth century to the 1980s is not only evident in America, but also in other Western industrialised societies including Canada, Australia and much of Europe such as Germany (Beck-Gernsheim 1999, 2002; Cherlin 2004; van Krieken et al. 2010). Other than rising divorce rates, family life has also undergone significant transformations with the increased visibility of single-parent, cohabiting, same-sex, blended, 'Living Apart Together (LAT)', 'Living Together Apart (LTA)' families supplementing the nuclear, dual-parent, heterosexual family (de Vaus 2002; Cherlin 2004; Levin 2004; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; Martin et al. 2011). These changes in family practices are also observable in other newly industrialised countries of East Asia, including Singapore.

With rising divorce rates since the Second World War, scholars from various sociological traditions ranging from the structural functionalist (Parsons and Bales 1955), economic rationalist (Becker 1991), moral conservative (Popenoe 1993), social liberal (Berger and Berger 1984) and individualisation (Giddens 1991, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Bauman 2000) to postmodernist (Stacey 1990) have been keenly interested in explaining divorce and the changing landscape of

family life: why it happens, how it happens, why the rates are increasing, and how it affects society and individuals. These sociological perspectives evaluate the state of family as a social institution and seek to account for major family changes.

According to functionalist sociologists, social institutions are all interconnected, forming parts of the social system. These institutions, including that of the family, serve reproductive, economic and educational functions (Parsons and Bales 1955). During the process of industrialisation and modernisation, the family, formerly performed a wide range of functions, became more specialised in its roles. American sociologist, Talcott Parsons (1955) observed that the nuclear family now performed 2 basic functions: 'first, the primary socialisation of children so that they can truly become members of the society into which they have been born; second, the stabilisation of the adult personalities of the population of society' (Parsons and Bales 1955, pp. 16–17). Functionalist sociologists like Parsons believed that the 'high level of divorce rate [in the 1950s] ... is not an index that the nuclear family and the marriage relationship are rapidly disintegrating and losing their importance' (Parsons and Bales 1955, p. 24). Rather, divorce took place because the family was adjusting to massive economic and social changes due to industrialisation and modernisation (Parsons and Bales 1955). Parsons (1955) therefore argued that the moral panic over the decline of the family was uncalled for and suggested that divorce rates would settle down after the family has adjusted to such specialisation of functions.

Meanwhile, economists such as Gary Becker (1991) were concerned with the efficiency of markets and applied economic reasoning to explain family change. Becker (1991) argued that families were market-driven and their practices shaped by economically rational logic. Applying the same economic rationalist perspectives on the rising divorce rates, he explained that the 'growth in the earnings of women during the last 30 years has been the main cause and the result of the growth in divorce rates during this period' (Becker 1991, p. 336). Becker (1991) claimed women simply chose the more economically rational options like work for themselves since these options translated into greater economic gains, higher purchasing power, higher bargaining power at home and higher social status, as compared to being a married homemaker or stay-at-home mother. Therefore, women with higher earnings might choose not to get married and have children or opt out of a marriage when they experience declining economic gain from marriage, according to economists such as Becker (1991).

The most robust debate on the increasing divorce rates and changing landscape of family life is the one between the moral conservatives and social liberals. As divorce rates rose sharply in industrialised countries in the 1960s, the debate between the two opposing camps became more vigorous.

As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, conservative scholars such as Felix Adler (1915) criticised the emphasis on happiness, love and emotional intimacy in marriage. They predicted that such a focus would result in a new set of tragedies where individuals would leave their marriage when they no longer found happiness within it (Adler 1915 quoted in Coontz 2007). Other moral conservative scholars such as Roger Scruton (1980), Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee

(1989), Moira Eastman (1989), Alan Tapper (1990) and David Popenoe (1993) argue that the traditional nuclear family unit made up of a heterosexual, legally married couple with children is essential to maintaining moral and social order. Academics aside, politicians, religious leaders, clinicians and demographers also joined in the fray claiming that marriage demonstrated communitarianism while divorce represented selfish individualism (Coltrane and Adams 2003). They argued that individuals should not be given so much freedom to walk out of their marriages and divorce laws should be tightened to safeguard the institutions of marriage and family. According to Popenoe (1993), the nuclear family unit is 'the most fundamental and most basic unit of the family' and '[b]reaking up the nucleus of anything is a serious matter' (1993, p. 539). Popenoe (1993) warned that the decline in importance of the family as a social institution '... should be a cause for alarm' (Popenoe 1993, p. 527). The 'recent family decline is more serious than any decline in the past because what is breaking up is the nuclear family, the fundamental unit stripped of relatives and left with 2 essential functions that cannot be performed better elsewhere: child rearing and the provision to its members of affection and companionship' (Popenoe 1993, p. 527). Popenoe (1993) resists the widespread individualist ideals and echoes Goode's (1984) moralistic objections against how 'people have become less willing to invest time, money, and energy in family life, turning instead to investments in themselves' (Goode 1984 cited in Popenoe 1993, p. 528). Popenoe (1993) attributes the rising divorce rates and the decline of the family to the phenomenon that 'people are disinvesting in [family life] ... in this age of the "me-generation"' (1993, p. 538), placing their individual interests above family life. His view is that the welfare of children is being overlooked and obligatory ties between family members are weakened with this obsession over individualistic pursuits (Popenoe 1993).

Another pioneer conservative divorce researcher is psychologist Judith Wallerstein who conducted a study in 1971 on 60 divorced families and 131 children in California (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980). In this study she focuses on the negative effects of divorce by portraying children as victims. She has been instrumental in constructing the anti-divorce discourse and effecting social policies that aim to solve the 'divorce problem'. By demonstrating the harmful effects of divorce on children, conservatives defend not only the traditional nuclear family form but insist that the traditional nuclear family form is necessary to protect the welfare of families and children. Conservative policy makers, religious leaders and other lay persons often rely on these research findings, or 'expert opinions', to moralise against divorce and other non-mainstream changes in family forms and practices, proclaiming that it is all for the sake of the children; our future generation (Coltrane and Adams 2003). This position is still being held by conservative politicians, academics and religious leaders today, as is the debate over the state of the family.

Other than focusing on the detrimental effects of divorce on children (Astone and McLanahan 1991; Doherty and Needle 1991; Beaty 1995; Blankenhorn 1995; Glenn 1996; Popenoe 1996; Teachman et al. 1996; Wallerstein et al. 2000), there is also a significant body of literature, including research done by Singaporean family scholars, emphasising the unwelcoming outcomes of divorce for adults and families

(Bloom, White and Asher 1979; Levinger 1979; Verbrugge 1979; Wilcox 1981; McNamara and Morrison 1982; Wong and Kuo 1983; McDonald 1985; McDonald et al. 1986; Spanier and Thompson 1987; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989; Jacob 1989; Cherlin 1992; Kitson 1992; Aseltine and Kessler 1993; Amato 1994, 2000; Brown 1994; Mastekaasa 1994; Ross 1995; Demo and Acock 1996; Lawson and Thompson 1996; Marks 1996; Smyth and Weston 2000; Weston and Smyth 2000; Zagorsky 2005; Clarke-Stewart and Brentano 2006; Coontz 2007; de Vaus et al. 2007; Gregson and Ceynar 2009; Straughan 2009). The unfavourable results of divorce that these research studies have highlighted include issues and challenges faced by divorcees in different aspects of their lives ranging from their economic situation to their emotional and physical health, social relationships and self-esteem. In the area of financial disadvantages, divorcees suffer from a reduction of household incomes, increase of expenses associated with the divorce and single-income household, and loss of property due to the division of assets (Levinger 1979; McDonald 1985; Marks 1996; Amato 2000; Smyth and Weston 2000; Zagorsky 2005; Clarke-Stewart and Brentano 2006). Other research studies reveal that divorcees experience stress, emotional disturbance, separation distress, disorientation, alienation, low self-confidence, unhealthy self-image and feelings of panic, fear, loneliness and helplessness (Weiss 1975; Cherlin 1992; Kitson 1992; Mastekaasa 1994; Demo and Acock 1996; Marks 1996; Clarke-Stewart and Brentano 2006).

While these research studies provide insights into the challenges and difficulties divorce brings to divorcees, their children and families crucial for policy intervention, they undeniably contribute to the construction of divorce as a social problem and support the conservative position that divorce is destructive and disadvantageous (Coltrane and Adams 2003). According to Scott Coltrane and Michele Adams (2003), these conservative divorce experts have been successful in creating much anxiety and panic over the state of the family, which in turn influenced the research trajectory and emphasis in divorce studies. Consequently, divorce studies tended to highlight conservative and disapproving perspectives, shaping not only attitudes towards divorce, but also family policies governing divorce.

At the opposing end, social liberal sociologists such as William J. Goode (1971), Don Edgar (1983), Peter McDonald (1984, 1995), Brigitte Berger and Peter Berger (1984), Edward L. Kain (1990), Carol Smart, Bren Neale and Amanda Wade (1998) and Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998) do not see the increasing divorce rates and plurality of family arrangements as the deterioration of moral standards, instability of societal structures and decline of the family, but rather as changes and adjustments in the way marriage and family are organised and lived out. People enter a marriage with the expectation that their needs for romantic love, intimacy and egalitarian partnership are to be met and when they are not satisfied, they dissolve a marriage that no longer works for them.

According to Goode (1971), individuals increasingly make decisions and life choices based on their needs instead of considering the moral values of their actions. Increasing secularisation and the diminishing influence and control of religious beliefs over social behaviour and relationships, has resulted in individuals

taking charge of their own marriage and determining the life span of their marriage. As Goode states:

Instead of asking, 'Is this moral?' the individual is more likely to ask, 'Is this a more useful or better procedure for my needs?' Sometimes the term 'individualism' is applied to this change, for instead of asking whether one's church or one's community approves divorce, the individual rather asks, 'Is it the right thing for me to do?' (1971, p. 309)

Goode's account of divorce shows that individuals opt for divorce when they think it is 'the right thing' for them to do. Instead of being viewed as an immoral act, divorce is seen as the entry into a new terrain where the possibility of having one's needs and expectations better satisfied can be explored (Goode 1971, p. 309).

In a similar vein, prominent scholars like Anthony Giddens (1991, 1992) theorising about the transformation of intimacy, Ulrich Beck (1992), Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1999, 2002), and Zygmunt Bauman (2003) making use of the 'individualisation thesis' all convey the same notion that family change and rising divorce rates reflect the decreasing influence of traditional frameworks in determining social behaviour and the increasing autonomy individuals have to manage their own lives and relationships. The common tenet in their scholarly work on contemporary organisation of personal life is that marriage and family are less seen as unshakable, lifelong institutions but open to subjective interpretation and negotiation. In a highly individualised society, it is expected that individuals be left alone to make their own decisions concerning their life trajectories and be responsible for their own decisions, so that individual needs and expectations can be satisfied. Hence, these scholars agree that the rise in divorce rates and the emergence of alternative family forms are outcome of the ways in which people exert their individuality to design a family biography that works for them.

Despite the plurality of forms and practices, the significance of family in individual lives does not diminish but is actively worked out by individuals. Instead of one, undisputable family form, McDonald (1995) proposes the concept of 'many families' to reflect the changing and diverse family relationships: 'there is no single, universal definition of a family but that each of us defines our own family and, as we move through life, we change our definition as different people take a more or less important role in our lives' (1995, p. 5). People define what family means to them depending on their own personal circumstances over the course of their life and the changing cultural norms to which they subscribe (McDonald 1995, p. 5). Individuals can lead fulfilling and successful lives in various family forms other than the nuclear, dual-parent family. Sevenhuijsen (1998) also perceives these changes in the family optimistically. She believes that 'the society of the near future will, in one way or another, have to adjust to a plurality of lifestyles and moral orientations and the resultant social and political frictions' (1998, p. 25).

Instead of viewing divorce as an indicator of the social institutions of marriage and family declining in significance, American sociologists, Berger and Berger (1984) suggested that 'divorce is mainly a back-handed compliment to the ideal of modern marriage, as well as a testimony to its difficulties' (1984, p. 181). They explained that, 'people divorce in such large numbers not because they are turned

off marriage, but rather, because their expectations of marriage are so high that they will not settle for unsatisfactory approximations' (Berger and Berger 1984, p. 181).

With the rise of such changing rules and perspectives of marriage, and marital dissolution being more common in many societies, divorce is no longer an event shrouded in secrecy and shame. The individualisation of personal life has made divorce appear personal, reasonable and sometimes necessary (Furstenberg 1989). The increasing occurrences have also made divorce ordinary, acceptable and less stigmatised (Furstenberg 1989; Beck-Gernsheim 2002). This is the 'normalisation of divorce' thesis Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002), a German sociologist, advances in her book, *Reinventing the family: in search of new lifestyles*. The shift in perspectives towards divorce inspires changes to family law legislation pertaining to marital dissolution (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The easing of legal restrictions governing divorce enhances the availability and accessibility of divorce as an option for married individuals to leave their unfulfilling marriage. This relaxation of divorce laws further reinforces the normalisation and destigmatisation of divorce (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Though there have been research studies reporting on the favourable consequences of divorce (McNamara and Morrison 1982; Cherlin 1992; Kitson 1992; Amato 1994, 2000; Marks 1996; Rahav and Baum 2002; Baum et al. 2005; Clarke-Stewart and Brentano 2006; Gregson and Ceynar 2009; Quah 2013b), these studies form only a subset of a field dominated by research focusing on the adverse outcomes of divorce.

Although family studies focusing on the undesirable effects of divorce constitute an important lens through which to study the social phenomenon, it is certainly not the only one. The constructive outcomes also demand attention as they help to move past the moralistic tendency to regard divorce as merely destructive and to be avoided at all costs. Challenging popular and scholarly accounts focused on the negative results of divorce, my work combines both the precarious and productive aspects of the experience to gain a more insightful understanding of marital dissolution without moralising it. I argue that when we consider the experience of divorce as a biographical process where divorcees go through an undulating post-divorce journey comprising both challenges and successes instead of perceiving it as a permanent crisis or life-long tragedy, we will then see the need and urgency to improve existing policy approaches in treating divorcees and support them in moving on from the crisis to a trajectory of self-responsibility, stability and productivity.

1.2 Divorce in East Asia and Singapore

Family trends including divorce rates are hardly uniform across countries in Asia. Each Asian country has her unique historical, policy and social contexts; the diversity in family values, norms, practices, legislations and policies play a part in influencing marital formation and dissolution trends across Asia. Research has demonstrated notable variations in marriage and divorce patterns in the region (Domma-

raju and Jones 2011). In this context of variations in Asian familial configurations, my research specifically explores the case study of Singapore.

Divorce rates in East Asian countries have increased steadily since the early 1980s, hitting a peak in early 2000. Except for China and Hong Kong, the other East Asian countries' divorce rates either declined or stabilised after that (Dommaraju and Jones 2011). The crude divorce rate¹ (CDR) of South Korea remained at 2.3 since 2010, which was a drop from the CDR of 2.5 in 2007 (KOSIS 2014; UNSTAT 2011). In Taiwan, the CDR peaked at 2.88 in 2003, falling to 2.5 in 2007 and remaining at 2.4–2.5 since then; her CDR in 2013 was 2.3 (Department of Household Registration 2013a; Department of Household Registration 2013b). The CDR of Japan has been relative stable too. It remained at 2.0–2.1 since 2004 and was recorded to be 2.0 in 2010 (United Nations 2009; UNSTAT 2011).

On the other hand, the crude divorce rates of China and China-Hong Kong have been on the rise. The CDR of China was reported as 2.0 in 2010, an increase from the CDR of 1.6 in 2007 (UNSTAT 2011). As for China-Hong Kong, the CDR was recorded at 3.27 in 2011, marked by a significant increase since 2006 with the CDR being 2.5 and 2005 with the CDR being 2.2 (University of Hong Kong 2014; United Nations 2009).

Like these East Asian countries namely South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, China and China-Hong Kong, divorce rates have been rising steadily in Singapore for the past decades since 1980. Singapore's crude divorce rate² (CDR) in 1980 was 0.8 divorces per thousand residents and it increased to 1.6 in 1991. It dipped slightly to 1.3–1.4 till it rose again to 1.8 in 1998. It hit 1.9 in 2003 and like South Korea, Taiwan and Japan, Singapore's CDR remained stable at the rate of 1.9–2.0 since 2005 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2012). The latest national statistical report indicates that the CDR in 2013 was 1.9 divorces per thousand residents, unchanged from 2012 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2013).

Though Singapore has witnessed a rise in divorce rates since 1980, she is still lagging behind her Western counterparts like United States (CDR: 3.6 in 2011), Australia (CDR: 2.2 in 2012), Russia (CDR: 4.8 in 2011), Switzerland (CDR: 2.8 in 2010), Sweden (CDR: 2.5 in 2010) and Denmark (CDR: 2.6 in 2010) (AIFS 2014; NVSS 2011; UNSTAT 2011; EUROSTAT 2012).

With divorce being more commonplace, it may be perceived that divorce is generally more acceptable in Singaporean society today as compared to just a few decades ago. However, there is still undisputedly a certain degree of resistance towards this growing social phenomenon in both public and private domains. This book explores the changing and contesting perspectives on marital dissolution in Singapore: the extent of normalisation and acceptance of divorce; how the state, community, individual, particularly divorcee in Singapore view divorce; and how

¹ Crude divorce rate refers to the annual number of divorces per thousand residents (United Nations 2009).

² The crude divorce rates of Singapore include marital dissolutions made under both Women's Charter and Muslim Law Act.

dominant family ideologies, policies, programmes, norms and practices influence the construction of divorce biographies in Singapore.

There have been only a few research studies done on divorce in Singapore (see for example, Tai 1975; Wong and Kuo 1983; Straughan 2009; Quah 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Of these, many are quantitative reports of divorce statistics with few in-depth, qualitative studies of Singaporean divorce experiences. Applying the concept of divorce biography to investigate the breakdown of marital relationships, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 35 Singaporeans who have legally dissolved their marriage or were undergoing the legal divorce proceedings at the point of interview. During the interview, the divorced participants talked about reasons on marital dissolution, legal processes, property settlement, child-related matters (custody, access, care and control), living arrangements, personal relationships with kin, friends and co-workers, financial circumstances, work, self-identity and future plans. The emphasis of the research is slanted towards understanding the Singaporean divorced respondents' post-divorce trajectories and experiences. Out of the 35 respondents, 30 are women. In this book, women's perspectives become the dominant voice. The focus of the book is therefore Singaporean women's divorce biographies. One limitation of this study is that the male divorcee's experience could not be adequately discussed since there are only 5 male respondents. It was not easy recruiting male respondents for this project. Many male divorcees who have declined the interview indicated that they 'do not want to think about the divorce' and would like to 'move on from the divorce'. One of them lamented after he politely turned me down, 'Who wants to be reminded of his failure?' Having felt that they have not succeeded in the role of keeping the marriage and family intact, they experienced 'a loss of face' and would rather not talk about it. Female respondents on the other hand are more forthcoming and enthusiastic in sharing about their divorce experiences and life stories. Many of my female respondents wanted their divorce stories to be used in helping others in similar predicaments. However, the narratives of my 5 male respondents nevertheless provide a glimpse into the divorce experiences and coping strategies of Singaporean divorced men, and these important insights will still be dealt with in the book. Their accounts where appropriate will also be mentioned to emphasise contrast or similarity with the female respondents' divorce biographies.

1.3 About this book

This book primarily presents an analytical framework of divorce biography as an approach in understanding divorce and uses empirical data collected from in-depth interviews with Singaporean divorcees to examine a series of questions that include the following: Do divorcees organise their post-divorce lives simply based on personal choice and preferences? What roles do their personal communities play in their divorce biography? How does the social and policy context they are situated influence their navigation of divorce process and post-divorce trajectories? How do

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