



Emotional Echoes: Young People, Divorce, and the Public Media, 1960-2000

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Abstract

The article introduces the methodological concept of emotional echoing to analyze the cultural formation of individual emotions and demonstrates its utility in an analysis of young people's emotional experience of parental divorce in Denmark between 1960 and 2000. Drawing on recent theorizations within the history of emotions, we posit that emotional echoing is a key element in the historical processes through which emotions are configured. Individuals more or less consciously employ collective templates of emotionality to interpret and convey their own feelings, giving shape to experience and subjectivity in the process. We then present a study of a variety of Danish public media to examine how young people interpreted and described the experience of parental divorce. We argue that a new public emotionality emerged at this time and that this impacted young people's experiences. Growing divorce rates, the breakdown of patriarchal family structures, the rising status of children and youth, and the blooming media market all helped spur this change. Echoing each other's tropes, practices, and images, young people emphasized the difficult and painful aspects of the emotional experience of divorce. During the last decades of the century, they increasingly articulated anger toward their parents, but they also more often emphasized "bad conscience" and signaled the importance of regulating one's own emotions to protect one's parents. Through nonmechanical and creative echoing, young people processed their emotions by digesting and contributing anonymously to the public media.

The divorce of one's parents is arguably one of the most powerful and composite emotional experiences in a young person's life. Parental disputes before, during, and after the divorce; the splitting up of the family; the move from one house or even city to another; and the inclusion of new family members as parents find new partners—these are only some of the changes that can occur. Such adjustments are often accompanied by feelings of fear, loss, longing, jealousy, loneliness, anger, and shame, as well as sometimes by loyalty, relief, excitement, love, and tenderness—often in murky, shifting, and ambivalent combinations.

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The individual's experience of divorce is situated and profoundly shaped by the historical situation in which the process unfolds. It is affected not only by biographical specificities and the particulars of each family situation, but also by legal and economic structures, by public institutions, and by social norms that are all subject to change over time. Perhaps most importantly, individual emotional experience is sculpted by the particular cultural templates of emotionality available in that specific cultural and historical context.

This article examines the emotions of young people related to parental divorce in Denmark in the second half of the twentieth century. Working from the assumption that individual emotional experience is imbricated in culture and subject to continual formation, we first propose that *emotional echoing* is a fruitful way to theorize an important element in the process through which emotions are shaped historically. Through close readings of young people's contributions to various media spanning the years 1960–2000, we demonstrate how echoing in the public sphere helped shape young people's emotions related to their parents' divorce.

While the relative homogeneity of Danish society and the wide-reaching Danish welfare state distinguish this country from many others in the second half of the twentieth century, there are also important resemblances between this and other contemporary contexts. The soaring divorce rate—which meant that a growing number of children and youth experienced divorce in their family—was paralleled in most of Western Europe and North America.¹ Similarly, the dramatic liberalization of social and sexual norms and the breakdown of patriarchal family structures were common features of many countries in this period.

In addition to these societal changes, the public media certainly affected many young people's perceptions and experiences of divorce. In Denmark as in the Western world generally, the second half of the twentieth century saw a surge in media outlets directed at youth, and, as historians have noted, young people became increasingly susceptible to the influence of the media in this period.² It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that the media, insofar as they dealt with questions of family and divorce, also helped shape how young people could interpret, communicate, and, indeed, experience emotions connected to family dissolution.

Of many possible entries, public media forums across this timespan thus constitute useful source material whereby we may gain insight into young people's emotional experiences of their parents' divorce. The media often sought to record and represent the voices of the young people themselves and increasingly so as the end of the century drew near. Danish radio editors invited young listeners to call in while programs were on the air; television producers interviewed children and youth; and newspapers and youth magazines printed letters, poems, and short stories written by their young readers. These contributions allowed for individual young people to communicate their emotional experiences of divorce while offering to other media consumers, as Susan McKay phrases it, "the vicarious opportunity of hearing about the vicissitudes of others."³ For many young people, the descriptions by peers presumably functioned as a kind of mirror and lent them a vocabulary and imagery with which to decipher and classify their own experiences.

In our analysis, we track how young people depicted and debated the experience of divorce through their contributions to a broad selection of Danish public media, particularly youth magazines. The question is how we should interpret these writings and, more fundamentally, how we should conceive of the ontological status of emotionality. We address these theoretical and methodological questions in the first part of the article and suggest that the young people's descriptions of their own emotional experiences were part of a process of *emotional formation*, in which *emotional echoing* played an important role. Rather than searching for untainted testimonies of authentic individual feelings or trying to identify young people's agency, we approach emotional experience as something that is multiple, situated, and processual, continually shaped and reshaped through various social, cultural, and material dynamics. Although they do not offer an exhaustive account of young people's feelings related to divorce, these writings testify to the ways in which emotional experience was fashioned in that particular context.

In the second half of the article, we outline some of the major patterns of how the emotional experience of divorce was fostered in the Danish public media from 1960 to 2000. We argue that this period saw the emergence of a new public emotionality that made it not only possible and legitimate but also desirable to debate one's emotions related to intimate family matters via media outlets. Although young people throughout this period described their parents' divorce as an experience characterized by pain, loss, and longing, this emphasis changed over time. In the mid-twentieth century, divorce was often situated in a context of social dysfunction and vulnerability. The emotional tenor of the earliest contributions by young people was deep agony and desperation. It later became customary to discuss more everyday problems related to parental divorce. Starting in the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, young people more often outwardly expressed anger toward their parents. They also increasingly articulated tenderness and concern for the emotional well-being of their parents and described this awareness of their parents' feelings as an additional emotional burden. These changes, we argue, reflect a broader transformation in societal attitudes toward the family and divorce, a changing emotional culture, and a significant shift in intergenerational relationships. Although some of these elements might be specific to the divorce experience in the Nordic welfare states, other aspects are likely to have been shared and echoed by young people across the Western world and beyond.

Emotional Echoing as Emotional Formation

In their pursuit of the perspectives of young people of the past, historians of childhood and youth have uncovered a variety of source materials and developed various methodologies to enable or facilitate interpretation. Perhaps in part because children's voices and actions are often unusually hard to recover historically, there has sometimes been a tendency to celebrate resistance while downplaying silence, consent, and compliance with mainstream cultural conventions and adult authority. And while several scholars have formulated cogent critiques of "agency," it has nonetheless proven a tremendously resilient category of analysis within the history of childhood and youth.⁴ As Mona Gleason points out, this continued quest to locate children's agency also "reflects a desire to

challenge assumptions regarding their powerlessness, and their inability to effect meaningful change, particularly in their relationships with adults.” This desire, she argues, rests on an interpretive framework of dichotomies such as child/adult and powerful/powerless that carries the risk of rendering invisible the “the messier ‘in between’ of more nuanced and negotiated exchanges between and among children” as well as with adults.⁵

One way to move beyond this “agency trap,” and the somewhat reductive notions of power and subjectivity that are sometimes, though not always, smuggled into the analysis, is to turn to the cultural theories of emotions, which provide a new analytic armory for the attempt to foreground young people’s perspectives. Peter and Carol Stearns have famously argued that we should distinguish clearly between societal standards for appropriate emotions (“emotionology”) and individual emotional experience.⁶ Other scholars posit that we ought to concentrate on the discursive constitution of emotion and relinquish the task of analyzing experience as something prior to or distinguishable from discursive configuration and the relationships of power that they inform.⁷ Seeking to bridge the gap between these two positions, William Reddy has usefully suggested that we conceive of each emotional utterance as an “emotive,” i.e., as a culturally specific expression, which is both constative and performative in nature.⁸

Particularly relevant here is the theoretical recognition that emotions are inextricably linked to cognition, and hence to the cultural constitution of subjectivity and capacity to act. Anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo argues that emotions are “thoughts embodied” or “social practices organized by stories that we both enact and tell.”⁹ Such thinking through the body is deeply contingent upon cultural context: “just as thought does not exist in isolation from affective life, so affect is culturally ordered and does not exist apart from thought.”¹⁰ Although Rosaldo insists that as feeling subjects we are always already shaped by sociocultural structures, she also emphasizes that individual emotion is not merely an automated product of culture. *Interpretation* and *embodiment* are the connecting links between collective modes of feeling and personal experience: “Through ‘interpretation,’ cultural meanings are transformed. And through embodiment, collective symbols acquire the power, tension, relevance, and sense emerging from our individuated stories.”¹¹

All of these interventions have been crucial in pushing the theoretical and methodological approaches to emotions history and have also gained increasing importance in the history of childhood and youth.¹² Yet, questions remain about how children and adolescents acquire and adjust codes of emotional conduct.

Drawing on Rosaldo, Reddy, and Monique Scheer’s Bourdieu-inspired notion of “emotions-as-practice,”¹³ Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander, and Stephanie Olsen have suggested the concept of *emotional formation* as an analytical framework for the nexus between the history of emotions and the history of childhood and youth. This framework helps shed light on the activities of young people without unduly fetishizing their “agency” or conceiving of “the child” or “adolescent” as inherently distinct and ahistorical social categories. Instead of trying to identify how young people spoke and acted to forward their interests or achieve the objects of their desires, we should burrow deeper and examine the root processes through which those interests and desires were shaped in the first place. Emotional formation is ongoing, historically variable, and internally

differentiated, and it is through emotional formation that the feeling subject comes into being.¹⁴ If we accept this premise, it makes little sense to distinguish sharply, as Stearns and Stearns did, between cultural standards and individual experience.¹⁵ Instead, we need to direct our analytical attention toward that never-ending human struggle to interpret, make sense of, classify, direct, and communicate affective experiences: i.e., the process through which emotional experience is given (fleeting) form.

This is the process to which we suggest *emotional echoing* is central. In order to know our emotions, corporally and intellectually, humans of all ages make use of the available cultural schemata of emotionality, and this involves echoing other people's bodily practices as well as vocabulary, topoi, metaphors, and narrative plots. Emotional echoing is not a matter of mechanical and unoriginal copying of the emotionality of others, which indeed would imply some kind of overarching and unchangeable grid of feeling.¹⁶ Rather, it is the process through which individuals try on words, images, and practices borrowed from a cultural repertoire; emotive tools that they thereby help replicate and spread, often by bending their meanings, either subtly or markedly. While in some respects, this resembles Reddy's concept of emotives, the notion of echoing also calls attention to the harnessing of emotional capacities as well as to the ways in which this is entangled in the constitution of subjectivity. Echoing, in other words, has to do with the continuous becoming of the individual subject through exchanges and intertwinements with collective forms of feeling.

The emotional echo also carries within it a potential for change. As Joan Scott writes in her piece "Phantasy Echo," we are inclined to think of the echo as an exact repetition, but this is not really the case: "Echoes are delayed returns of sound; they are incomplete reproductions, usually giving back only the final fragments of a phrase. An echo spans large gaps of space (sound reverberates between distant points) and time (echoes are not instantaneous), but it also creates gaps of meaning and intelligibility."¹⁷ In a similar fashion, emotional echoing involves refractions, slippages, and adaptations. Different emotional echoes are assembled in new combinations; misunderstandings cause semantic twists; and contacts with other emotional formations lead to the import of new emotional practices to echo. Adjustments and displacements gradually lead to the invention of new emotional meanings, comprising different dimensions of emotional formation. Such a process, we posit, can be witnessed in the writings of young people in the public media.

A New Public Emotionality

During the second half of the twentieth century in Denmark, what we call a new public emotionality emerged, which entailed new possibilities for—and anticipation of—young people to vocalize their perspectives and feelings in public. In the first half of the twentieth century, the few existing magazines for children and youth rarely touched upon personal emotional problems, and there were hardly any opportunities for young people to voice their opinions in public.¹⁸ While adult advice columns had a long history, few if any media outlets for young people included such sections.¹⁹

Beginning in the 1960s, there was a steady rise in opportunities for young people in Denmark to participate in public discourse fit for their purposes,

primarily in media directed specifically at youth. Following the youth rebellion of 1968, children and youth were no longer to be merely educated and entertained; they were to participate in public discourse on their own terms. In the new and emerging media, they could share their experiences and ask for advice or consolation in relation to personal and emotional issues. While this reflected and helped cement a new youth culture, it was presumably also linked to the growing societal impulse toward experiencing intimacy and expressing emotions. The breakdown of patriarchal family structures and protests against traditional authorities were not just connected with a pressure to break taboos and disclose secrets.²⁰ They were also accompanied by what one might call an emotionalization of society in Scandinavia during this time: that is to say, by a growing idealization of emotions as carriers of truth and authenticity and an attendant social tendency to share and discuss emotional experiences.²¹

Historians of emotions have pointed out that humans habitually and invariably adjust their emotional behavior to the specific spatial and sociomaterial context in which they find themselves; they align their practices to what is possible, expected, and viable in a given situation.²² This is also true when it comes to the contributions from young people to the public media, which were shaped by the physical formats of the different publications, by genre conventions, by editorial processes, by the promise of anonymity, and by a number of other factors. This is not a methodological problem, however, since we conceive of the writings not as more or less truthful representations of a prior and stable interiority²³ but rather as a part of the formation of experience and subjectivity.

For the purposes of this article, we have studied a range of media. First, we have mined the most important youth magazines of the period: *Vi Unge* (*We Youngsters*) (1963–2000), *Starlet* (1973–94), and *Mix* (1986–2000). The monthlies *Vi Unge* and *Mix* were the most widely read youth magazines in Denmark during these years. The circulation numbers varied significantly over the years, but the average was roughly 35,000, and the number of estimated readers was approximately five times higher, corresponding to between one-fifth and one-third of the population aged between eleven and nineteen years during these decades.²⁴ While circulation numbers for the youth magazine *Starlet* have not been recorded, they are likely to have been lower. Second, we collected and isolated excerpts from each decade between 1945 and 2005 from *Politiken*, one of the nation's largest daily newspapers. This newspaper distributed roughly 140,000 daily issues and had a significantly larger readership.²⁵ Third, we have included a book published in 1985 by a fifth-grade class at a school near Copenhagen, containing drawings and writings on the question of divorce called *5.b's bog om skilsmisse* (*5B's Book on Divorce*). Finally, we analyzed a published selection of contributions to an answering machine kept by the popular youth radio program, *Tværs* (*Across*), called *Det var bare det jeg ville sige, hej!* (*That's all I wanted to say, bye!*). The collection was published in 1985 but included recorded messages going back to 1973.²⁶

These media outlets treated young people as social and cultural agents whose voices, opinions, expressions, problems, and interests were important.²⁷ They contained articles, letters, and comments through which readers could directly voice their opinions and describe their experiences. The extent of this varied according to the general editorial line across the different publications. *Vi Unge* and *Mix* were both owned by the publishing house Aller and targeted

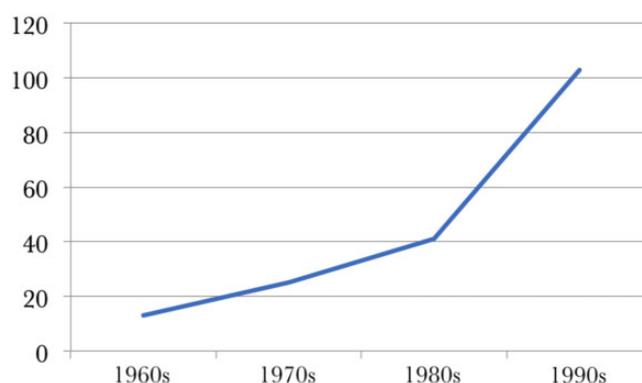


Figure 1. Distribution of the 182 contributions over four decades.

both genders with subject matter ranging from music and films to youth-related content, letters from readers, and advice columns tackling problems relating to puberty and adolescence.²⁸ *Starlet*, a girls' magazine, was owned by the comic book publisher Interpresse, and the major part of the magazine was made up of comics and short stories leaving only a few pages for letters, comments, and poetry written by readers. However, at the request of readers, the magazine included an advice column beginning in 1974.²⁹ *Politiken* was generally directed at adult readers but did on occasion print contributions from young readers. The content of its youth section, "Junior," in many ways resembled a youth magazine, though with greater emphasis on societal issues. Across the different media, the treatment of the issue of parental divorce was generally quite similar: as socially progressive media, they showed a permissive attitude toward divorce, and increasingly so over the decades, but they also thematized the emotional hardship that it might cause young people. The editors of the advice columns were typically psychologists, doctors, or simply writers keen on advising youth. Occasionally, young readers would respond to each other's letters stating their sympathy, sharing common experiences, or even rebuking the editors' answers, thereby creating a dialog that would not only flow between adults and young people but just as importantly, among the young people themselves.

In the selected media, altogether we found 182 published letters, interviews, messages, drawings, and poems from youth dealing with questions related to divorce, with a marked increase over the period (Figure 1). Of these, fifty-two were published in connection with a special call by one of the major newspapers in 1995.

Although the majority of contributions were anonymous, most writers stated their age and gender. More than two-thirds were between eleven and sixteen years of age (Figure 2). No clear pattern emerges in the emotionality according to age. More than 70 percent of the contributions were from girls and young women, and only about 15 percent were from boys and young men. Although the remaining approximately 15 percent did not state their gender, it is likely that a majority of these, too, were from girls or women (Figure 3). That

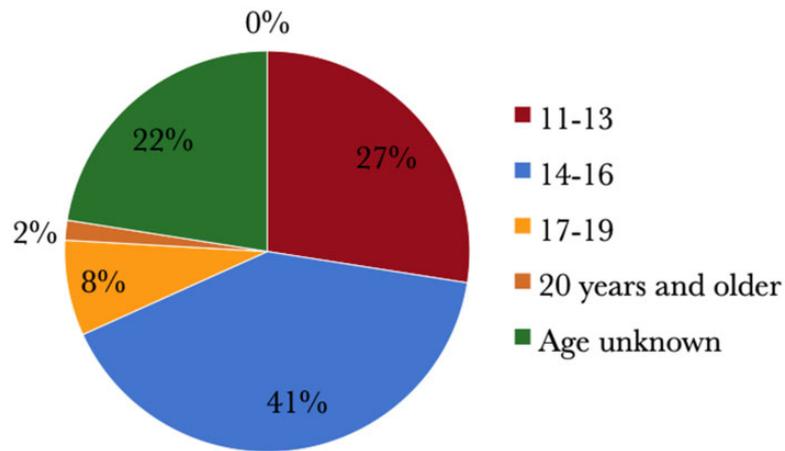


Figure 2. Age distribution.

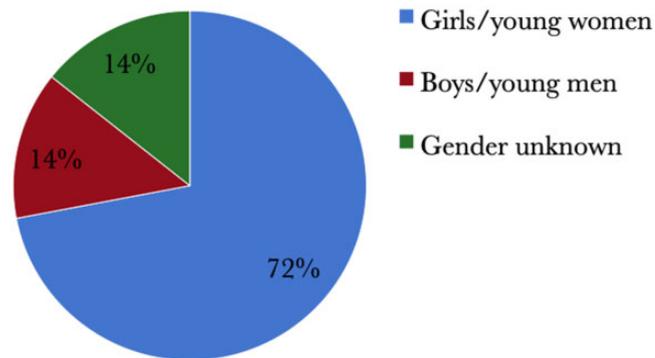


Figure 3. Gender distribution.

more young women contributed to the media on everyday emotional issues no doubt reflects a gendered youth culture in which young women were generally expected to share and discuss feelings, something which is supported by the fact that at least one young man expressed anxiety that his vocalization of agony was unmanly.³⁰ As was the case almost everywhere else, women in Denmark were charged with carrying out the lion's share of the emotional labor in the family context.³¹ The cultural impetus for girls to analyze and share their emotions as well as to lend support to other young people in need meant that the young women actively helped shape the new public emotionality and in turn helped shape gendered emotional subjectivity.

Other scholars have questioned the authenticity of letters to "problem pages," suggesting they might have been edited or even fabricated by the

publishers.³² However, the editors of the magazines we analyzed frequently apologized to readers for being unable to publish all of the texts they received and asked their readers for patience, since it could take several months for a letter to reach the pages of their publications. While it is not inconceivable that some contributions were abbreviated or otherwise edited, the wording and syntax of the writings strongly suggest they were indeed authored by young people.

There is a detectable shift in the sorts of themes young people discussed across the decades. In the 1960s, most of the contributions that mentioned divorce were from vulnerable youth who related severe social problems such as beatings, alcohol abuse, and forcible removal from one's parents by the authorities. From around 1970, as divorce became increasingly widespread in Danish society, and as the growing welfare state made it possible for the great majority of single mothers to live well above the poverty line, young people began to describe more everyday emotional experiences related to divorce. They thereby contributed, one might say, to the normalization of divorce in the public media.

Nonetheless, divorce remained a difficult subject to broach. Throughout the contributions, many stressed that they felt unable to confide in anyone in their immediate circle about these matters. As one young person put it, "I have no one I can really talk to about it."³³ In the media outlets young people could describe what might be seen as compromising details of their family lives without directly exposing themselves. Here, they had to worry neither about coming across as childish or abnormal nor about hurting or burdening their parents, which was a concern for many. The public media consequently, and somewhat paradoxically, became one of the most private and intimate domains for processing difficult thoughts and feelings; a place where they might find assurance that their problems were worth listening to, and that their feelings were acceptable or normal.

Different factors might help explain this development. First of all, these decades were characterized by growing societal attention to the consequences of divorce for children, which accompanied rising divorce rates. As far back as the early 1900s, observers had issued warnings about the negative impacts of divorce on children, and by the 1920s, young people were sometimes heard in custody and visitation rights cases—albeit in no systematic manner.³⁴ However, from midcentury onward, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other experts increasingly emphasized the necessity of hearing children's own perspectives as well as protecting them from the most traumatizing aspects of divorce.³⁵ From the late 1960s, the divorce rate grew rapidly, and by the mid-1980s, around 45 percent of all marriages ended in divorce, so that in the last decades of the century, approximately one-third of all children experienced parental divorce. In tandem with this development, the second half of the century saw an increasing social acceptance of the phenomenon and a slow de-stigmatization of children from "broken homes." Whereas midcentury expert reports on the impact of divorce on children treated divorce as deviant behavior, a couple of decades later, divorce was depicted as a normal, though often difficult, event in young people's lives.³⁶

Many of the young people who contributed to the media on the question of divorce referred to themselves as "*skilsmissebarn*," literally "divorce child" and akin to the English "child of divorce." It appeared in Danish public discourse in the 1930s, and from the outset, it carried negative connotations, much like

“problem child” and juvenile delinquent.³⁷ By the 1970s, young people of divorced parents had appropriated the term to designate themselves, and in so doing, they usually echoed the portrayal of divorce children as unhappy or unlucky children. In 1979, a writer calling herself (or himself) “Putte,” for example, contributed a poem to the youth magazine *Starlet*, called “A better world,” which appears to have been heavily inspired by John Lennon’s “Imagine” from 1971. The first stanza reads:

*I believe in peace
The others say I am a dreamer
Yes, I see a world
without violence or famine,
no one is a divorce child,
no animals are treated cruelly*³⁸

Listing “the divorce child” next to violence, famine, and cruelty to animals, the author left no doubt about its undesirability. Despite its negative emotional connotations, it became a category of identity that children of divorced parents echoed, helping to channel the divorce experience into a specific subjectivity defined by one’s familial relationship.

“It Hurts”

Throughout the last four decades of the twentieth century, the young people who contributed to the media outlets overwhelmingly depicted the experience of going through one’s parents’ divorce as painful and agonizing. In 1981, “Fisken”³⁹ contributed a poem entitled “What is it?” to *Starlet* describing the pain linked with divorce:

*my root has been pulled up,
will the wound heal?
Will it?
No, I don’t think so.*

*But
... You don’t know how much it hurts,
you don’t know how it burns,
the wound that is not healing,
because you rip it up,
you ask about it.
You are ruining my life.
Do you even realize?
You don’t say much,
but you ask,*

ask – *why?*
 Only those who have experienced it,
 only that person can understand,
 no one else.
 My home is destroyed,
 my root has been pulled up,
 will the wound heal?
 Will it?
 No, I don't think so.
 But it does, everybody says so.
 There will always be a scar,
 it won't go away,
 but first of all,
 help me,
 make the wound heal.

...

But what is this, you will say.
 I will answer:
 DIVORCE!⁴⁰

Identifying agony, loneliness, a sense of powerlessness, and anger toward one's parents as dominant elements in the experience, "Fisken" described divorce as a destructive force that caused deep emotional pain. Carrying almost physical properties, this pain left a burning "wound" and a remaining "scar." Descriptions such as these are echoed in other contributions such as nineteen-year-old Anja Storm Nielsen's rather terse comment: "*It hurts*, but we have to learn to live with it. My family was brutally torn apart without mercy or pity,"⁴¹ and in a letter by a fourteen-year-old calling herself "The Miserable": "Three years ago, my parents were divorced (*it hurt badly*), and ever since, I have become poor at everything, and I hate school wildly."⁴² Young writers associated the pain with different aspects of the divorce: witnessing parents' conflicts, the splitting up of the family, and one's own fights with parents, stepparents, or stepsiblings.

For most young people, the experience of parental divorce no doubt involved a host of both unhappy and happy feelings. It presumably also changed as the process evolved, shifting significantly from what one expert in 1959 called the "latent" stages when parents were fighting with each other prior to their separation,⁴³ through the moment when they announced the divorce to the situation several years later when they were living apart, sometimes still in conflict. Moreover, a young person's emotional experience could vary during the course of the day, depending on the specific sociomaterial context; between, for

instance, at home with the family, at school with classmates, when hanging out with friends after school, and at work.

In the public media, however, the emotional template for the divorce experience was one that accentuated pain and misery—a template that was reproduced through the reiteration of fragments such as “it hurts.” Since the young people who were inclined to contact an advice column or otherwise share their experience in the media were those who struggled and needed advice, support, or consolation, this helped solidify a negative emotional configuration of divorce.

As in other European countries, the debates about the significance of divorce for children in Denmark were characterized by “a pervasive ideational framework of ‘harm.’”⁴⁴ The “experts” who responded to the letters frequently also generally emphasized the problematic aspects of divorce for children and youth and even used the expression “it hurts,” which meant that young people’s echoes reverberated against adult echoes. A manifest example of this can be found in the “Junior” section of the national newspaper *Politiken* from 1995. That year, the Danish government was working on an adjustment to the legislation governing custody and visitation rights, and on that occasion, the president of the National Council for Children, Frode Muldkjær, collaborated with *Politiken* to summon junior voices on the question of divorce. He described parental divorce as traumatizing for young people and asked the young readers whether they thought divorce ought to be illegal for couples with children younger than eighteen. “There might be sensible divorces,” he concluded, “but there is no such thing as a happy divorce. Or what do you think? What do you think is *the worst* thing about a divorce, or if you haven’t tried it, what do you imagine to be the worst?”⁴⁵ The call, in other words, clearly encouraged a negative framing of the divorce experience.

It worked. Approximately five months later, Muldkjær, drawing up the balance sheet, noted that *Politiken* had received 164 letters from young people between eight and twenty-two years of age; sixty-three of these were from “boys,” and the rest from “girls.”⁴⁶ Of these letters, fifty-two had been published in the paper in the preceding months, some of them in their entirety and the rest of them in abbreviated but otherwise unedited forms. These widely circulated letters lent readers an emotional repertoire and enabled them to compare and evaluate their own experiences against those of (mostly anonymous) others. The writers evidently found inspiration in each other’s narrative plots, words, and imagery, and at least sixteen of the respondents echoed Muldkjær’s expression “the worst” in their descriptions of the divorce experience. A thirteen-year-old anonymous person commented: “I think *the worst* part of the divorce is that our parents almost can’t talk to each other. When they are done speaking, my mother just slams down the receiver.”⁴⁷ Two young women, who co-authored a letter, wrote: “*The worst* thing about a divorce is probably that you lose your firm basis. Who do you talk to when something happens? You might also lose friends, change school and stuff like that.”⁴⁸ An anonymous fifteen-year-old turned Muldkjær’s question about the worst part of the experience on its head, yet still implicitly answered his question, noting: “*The best* is when your mother finds a new [boy]friend and can become happy again.”⁴⁹

While Muldkjær’s invitation to describe divorce as something undesirable, even destructive, clearly helped frame the ensuing contributions from young

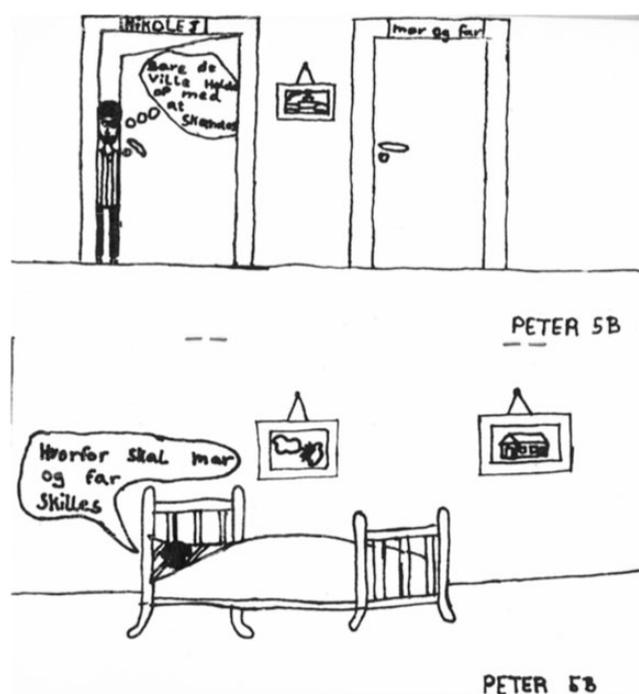


Figure 4. Peter's drawing in 5.b's bog om skilsmisse.

people, it did not exactly dictate the public emotionality relating to the question. As young people echoed bits of sentences such as “the worst,” emotional configurations were placed in new contexts and in combination with different vocabulary. Traveling across time and place, these echoes thus undoubtedly influenced young people’s individual dialog and interpretations of their own situation while also acquiring new meanings in the process.

Fear and Loneliness as Defining Traits

Loneliness and fear were recurring emotional themes in the contributions. Quite often, such emotions were conjured by descriptions of the painful situation of witnessing parents fighting or the sense that no one truly understood what one was going through.⁵⁰

In a lucid example of emotional echoing, Peter and Mia, two fifth graders who contributed to *5.b's bog om skilsmisse* in 1985, both composed drawings of a similar emotional experience. The drawings portray a boy, in one drawing called Nikolej, in the other called Martin, each standing on his own, isolated from his parents, listening to their argument in the room next door. In identical thought bubbles in both drawings, the boys express a desire that numerous young people articulated in their contributions to the media: “I wish they would stop

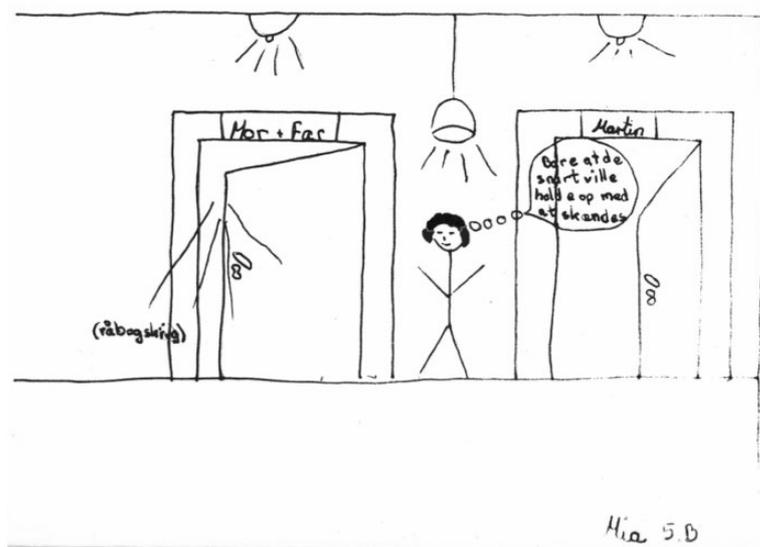


Figure 5. Mia's drawing in 5.b's bog om skilsmisse.

fighting.” Peter’s drawing also contains a picture of a boy lying alone in bed, thinking: “Why are mom and dad going to divorce[?]”

The level of detail in Peter’s drawing is greater than in Mia’s, but we can speculate as to how the flow of inspiration may have transpired between these two classmates. Perhaps they sat next to each other as children often do and copied each other’s images; perhaps they first talked about having to watch their parents argue and then went on to convey this in their drawings. However, ultimately determining the order is unimportant—the search for original emotionality being a pointless endeavor. That the two students both communicated the situation of witnessing parental fights in remarkably similar ways, resorting to similar visual and linguistic devices to portray the experience, suggests that their emotional imagination and experience were infiltrated by those very templates of emotionality. As these templates were put into specific use, they were also brought to life and sometimes slightly modified.

In 1984, a young woman called the answering machine at the radio program *Tværs* and left a message describing her fear that her mother had stopped loving her father and that she was going to leave him permanently. Her mother had left the house recently and her beloved father had “broken down.” “I’d like to know,” she continued,

if anyone else has the same problem with their parents, so that it resembles mine. . .because. . .it’s damned important that you have parents and stuff. . .and I’ve never talked to anyone else about this. . .no one I know is divorced. . .and I’d like to know if there are others [out there] who’ve had this with their parents, and how it’s been resolved and stuff.⁵¹

Seeking both consolation and ratification of her emotions, this young woman conveyed a sense of isolation, of being unable to share and discuss her situation with other people who might understand her. The public answering machine thus became a place to reach out to other young people who had had similar experiences, at once echoing and alleviating fear and loneliness.

Reverberations of Loss, Rejection, and Longing

Some of the most touching media contributions depicted feelings of loss, rejection, and longing associated with divorce. Young people described longing for their life before the divorce, for siblings and for the parent—usually the father—with whom they no longer shared their daily life. Such longing sometimes became particularly intense when parents moved far apart, making it more difficult to stay in touch. In one of the many responses to Frode Muldkjær's 1995 call for letters from young people in *Politiken*, a twelve-year-old girl described how, when her parents had announced their divorce four years earlier she had not been particularly upset. Her parents still had a good relationship with each other, and she would see her siblings in school. But then she and her father moved to a different part of the country: "Now I often miss my mother and my siblings, especially when I look at old photo albums and look at all the things we did together. *The worst* part about a divorce, I guess, is that you can't be with both of your parents at the same time anymore."⁵²

Some young people voiced distress over the other parent's lack of empathy for this hardship. In an excruciating letter to an advice column in 1999, an anonymous writer described how painful it was to live very far apart from one's father and siblings: "... I miss them all the time. I can't stand it, and when I cry, they become upset, and when I cry when I am with my mom, she scolds me."⁵³ Years earlier, another girl experienced a searing sense of loss when her family split across an even greater distance. After her parents' divorce, she moved to Greenland with her mother, while her father and siblings stayed behind in Denmark. Now, she wrote, she missed them dearly.

I would very much like to live with them, but I know my mother cannot live without me. She also misses my two siblings very much, but she can't afford to visit them. ... If my mother knew that I wanted to live with my father, she would let me go and not even mention her own feelings. I am tired of living here, but wouldn't it be egoistic of me to just leave her?⁵⁴

Taking responsibility for one's parents to an extent that almost implied an inversion of the parent-child relationship and balancing the competing desires of wanting to protect the feelings of one's parents with keeping in touch with "lost" family members were thus also themes when young people interpreted and regulated their own sense of loss via the public media.

The loss was often described as connected to a feeling of being deserted, i.e., of losing not only daily contact but also the affection of a parent. One writer, introducing herself as "a fourteen-year-old girl who misses my dad," wrote that after her father had remarried, it was almost as if he was no longer her

father. Indeed, it seemed he had willfully removed signs of his identity as her parent:

When they are on vacation they always write me a postcard, but I can tell she [the stepmother] is always the one who writes. And now my dad has started signing his [first] name instead of 'Greetings, dad.' I cry myself to sleep almost every night. Is it even normal for a 14-year-old girl to miss her dad so much?⁵⁵

Speculation about the normality and moral value of one's feelings as well as the search for a vocabulary to interpret one's own affective experiences was a recurrent theme when young people reached out to the public media.

The loss of love from one's parents could be particularly upsetting if combined with an anxiety that the affection had been transferred to others. An anonymous fourteen-year-old described how a father's new girlfriend had alienated the father from his child and continued: "I sometimes wonder whether my father even has any feelings because I have never seen him cry and when we fight I often end up crying and he hardly even comforts me, he always seems so cold."⁵⁶ In 1978, a thirteen-year-old girl contributed a poem entitled "Divorce Child" to *Starlet* describing similar emotions:

*You exit the car
open the other door
shake hands – good-bye!
Get back into the car
and then drive home to where
you now belong
Your new girl's kids
greet you by screaming
just as you were hoping for peace
They demand something of you
you—their new dad—
you chose it yourself
Use your brains!
Was it the right thing,
what you did back then?
The lady is all right,
but what about the kids
are they also better than before?
Think about the child
who cried when you left
Think about your daughter for a bit
she cares about you, you know*

*she is a child – you are her father
But still you left her*⁵⁷

Depicting the painful moment of farewell, which was a repeated occurrence in many divorce children's lives, the poem captures an enveloping feeling of loss and rejection. At the same time, it communicates a sense of incredulity and injustice or even bitterness at the fact that *her* father now lived with other children, who could lay claim to him as if he were theirs. Enabling both comparison and contrast, such depictions might also help readers to interpret and validate their own emotions.

Many young people reported problems with stepparents and stepsiblings, and some of them openly articulated a feeling of jealousy, associating it variously with shame or anger. A fourteen-year-old girl, for example, described how her stepbrother was given all that he wished for, including plenty of positive attention from her mother and stepfather. "I'm not like really jealous, but of course it can't be avoided that I am a little jealous. He is ooohhh such a lovely young man and I am the black sheep of the family."⁵⁸ Her stepfather kept nagging her and calling her names, yet her mother failed to intervene, she explained. Admitting to jealousy was presumably difficult, perhaps because the feeling was considered morally and socially problematic.⁵⁹

A Breakthrough of Anger

One of the most remarkable changes in the period studied here was the increase in young people's expressions of resentment and anger toward their parents, either for deciding to split up or for handling the divorce in a manner that put the children in an unnecessarily difficult situation. The first instance of criticism came from a writer in 1975, self-described as "a divorce child," who explicitly stated that s/he was happy about the divorce but added:

I don't think the grown-ups should fight when the children are around, because you just lie there and cry when the parents are fighting. They might not think you hear it and maybe they often think that children don't think much about their parents, but in reality you do because they mean a lot to you, right?⁶⁰

As years went on, young people became more direct in their expressions of anger toward their parents' lack of consideration for their feelings. In 1999, a fifteen-year-old wrote a letter to the advice column of *Vi Unge* describing his "big psychological problems": "I feel my parents always fight and are never happy. . . . When they fight during dinner I want to stand up and scream and yell how tired I am of it and why don't they get a damned divorce, but I am just so afraid to become a divorce child and all that."⁶¹

One expression, often loaded with anger, which was echoed frequently in the contributions from the 1980s onward, was "pawn." The connotations of "pawn" are slightly different in Danish than in English. "*Kastebold*" translates literally into "throw ball," which could be said to have a slightly more violent tinge than "pawn." It suggests losing one's grounding, being unjustly tossed around without any influence on one's direction. But as with the English version, the word sounds a bit like an import from adult language, which is indeed

likely to have been the case, since several adult experts in youth magazines and elsewhere used precisely the same image to describe divorce children's situation. The earliest instance we have found of the expression relating to the child is from 1913, when a lawyer who, in a letter to the editor, expressed empathy with divorce children who became "a pawn between the mother and the father."⁶² By the 1950s, child experts were using the term, but it only started appearing in young people's published writings in the 1980s.⁶³

In a 1981 interview in *Starlet*, seventeen-year-old "Jette" said: "My mother and father were divorced, and I became a pawn between them. Even though I would have preferred staying with my father, my mother thwarted it. Today, I hate her. And I think she knows it."⁶⁴ In the following decades, the term "pawn" was reiterated over and over again in young people's writings. For example, fifteen-year-old Louise reminded adults that: "the child is also a human being, who risks feeling like a pawn between the two people whom s/he loves the most."⁶⁵ While young people certainly used the metaphor of the pawn to capture a feeling of powerlessness, it appears to have had quite a bit of elasticity, being used to describe different problems associated with becoming embroiled in parental conflicts: hearing them denigrate each other, being treated as a bargaining tool or being used as a go-between.

The multiple meanings of pawn once again underscore the semantic versatility of emotional echoes. The fact that the echo was not an exact reproduction but rather a flexible device used in a process of individual emotional interpretation is probably precisely what made it so productive; it enabled young people to borrow from a common vocabulary to comprehend and classify their own emotions, making them intelligible while also shaping them in the process. For the writers, and very likely for readers with similar experiences, emotional echoing thus made expressions and tropes into anchors to which they could attach their thoughts and concerns, at least temporarily and in that specific setting.

The resentment and anger embedded in the word "pawn" as well as in contributions using different words are also noteworthy. These feelings surely played a part in some young people's experiences of divorce even earlier in the century. But by the last decades of the twentieth century, complaining about one's parents' handling of personal relationships publicly (if anonymously) became more common. That young people could legitimately criticize their parents—and were indeed even encouraged to do so by other adults—reflected a broader societal transformation. Not only were these decades marked by a questioning of all kinds of authorities and by a redefinition of intergenerational relationships, the family in Denmark as in much of the Western world also underwent "democratization," becoming increasingly child-centered. Children were no longer supposed to be merely raised and educated; their perspectives and feelings were to be taken seriously.⁶⁶ Similarly, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (which Denmark ratified in 1991) stated clearly that children had freedom of expression and a right to be heard in matters affecting them.⁶⁷ Cultural processes of individualization went hand in hand with educational and economic policies that increasingly emphasized the importance of the individual young person.⁶⁸ Divorce children's increasing articulation of indignation and anger might thus also be seen as an expression of the changing cultural and legal status of the young person.

The Burden of Emotional Self-regulation

Witnessing and becoming party to the fights of one's parents was not only associated with discomfort, pain, and fear; according to the testimonies we analyzed, ongoing conflicts also placed upon the young person an emotional burden of negotiating loyalty and finding ways of expressing tenderness toward one parent without hurting the feelings of the other. Another significant change over the period studied here was the increase in young people's expressions of concern for their parents and the growing number of young people describing the experience of becoming finely attuned to their parents' desires, preferences, and apprehensions. "Bad conscience" (*dårlig samvittighed*) was an expression that traveled like an echo across the contributions. This state of mind was usually associated with the conflict-ridden relationship between parents *after* the divorce. For example, in a letter to *Politiken* in 1995, an anonymous high school student described this as a composite experience of guilt, empathy, disappointment, pity, and anger:

You constantly have to take care not to prefer one parent to the other. Constantly take care not to hurt them. Constantly watch over what you tell your mother about your father and your father about your mother. Constantly walk a fine line between them. . . . A constant battle between the bad conscience/disappointment and the battle to make it all work on the outside. . . . I think that as a divorce child you're forced to think more about your parents than 'normal' children [are]. You find out more and more about your parents as individuals and about their marriage. You can no longer live in blissful ignorance. I don't think parents realize what an exercise in diplomacy they subject their children to when they get divorced. It just hurts so badly.⁶⁹

Solicitude for one's parents required attentiveness to one's own emotions; the writer described how the perceived obligation to demonstrate proper emotions vis-à-vis one's divorced parents required close policing, and how the ever-present internal conflicts continually triggered a "bad conscience."

In 1985, it became possible for unmarried and divorced parents to share custody of their children.⁷⁰ Although the conflicts of loyalty stemming from family dissolution were in no way limited to situations of shared custody, it is conceivable that part of the rise in young people's "bad conscience" could be ascribed to the growing expectations of friendly post-divorce relationships in which both parents had a right to attend to the needs of their child and in which the child remained close to both parents.

A fifteen-year-old used the term "bad conscience" in 1995 as she described her emotional relationship with her father: "Even though I have the option of seeing my father often, I don't . . . I don't actually feel good about that, I have a bad conscience, but that is how it is."⁷¹ Employing the same term, a thirteen-year-old whose parents had divorced recently described feeling guilty for being fond of his mother's "new friend":

Well, it's like this, I am with my father every other weekend. But when I am there, I feel that my feelings become false. But I am becoming more and more fond of my mother's new friend. How can it be that I am becoming fonder of my mother's friend and feel less for my father?⁷²

Being a divorce child in an era when emotional authenticity and family intimacy were highly valued thus involved close monitoring and evaluation of one's own emotions, questioning their moral legitimacy, and attempting to align them with what would be considerate to one's parents.

While some young people apparently accepted their bad conscience as an inevitable aspect of being a divorce child, others blamed their parents for causing this turmoil, communicating anger and frustration in addition to love and tenderness. In 1980, when *Starlet* included a section in which young people could publish letters that they did not dare send directly to the intended recipient, a thirteen-year-old girl submitted a letter addressed to her father explaining the emotional difficulties that her parents' conflicts had caused her:

Dear father! . . . Why do you and mom always fight!? You were divorced five years ago and still you speak about each other in such mean ways. . . . You don't know how sad it makes me. It is as if a hundred knives are stabbed into my breast. And it also affects my little sister. It affects her stomach, she gets stomachaches, but she doesn't say anything.⁷³

When her father had asked her recently to come and live with him, it only made her even more torn: "I CANNOT choose! I often think: if I were to leave mom, I also have to leave my little sister whom I have cared for so deeply since she was born. If I stay, I am afraid I will hurt you. I care about both of you."⁷⁴ In addition to the desire to protect and the fear of hurting the people she cared for, this girl voiced frustration and even anger at her father for failing to take responsibility, leaving her to do so instead.

By describing their "bad conscience" and internal conflicts young people pointed to the underside of the contemporary emotionalization of society and the growing belief that proper familial relationships required transparency and the vocalization of emotions. The child was charged with greater emotional duties than before and having to attend not only to one's own emotions but also to those of one's parents could be a heavy burden to carry.

Dissonance and Counter Voices

Although clear patterns emerge in these contributions, they not only changed over time but also sometimes went counter to what one might expect. For example, it was a standard narrative in both juvenile fiction and experts' reports from the last decades of the twentieth century that shame and guilt were integral to the experience of parents' divorce.⁷⁵ In their contributions to the public media, however, young people seldom articulated such feelings, at least not explicitly.

This did not mean that shame played no role in the divorce experience for young people. In spite of the high divorce rates, norms were still set up to accommodate the two-parent family in the 1970s, 1980s, and even into the 1990s, connecting divorce with stigma, especially outside of the urban centers. Moreover, although the Danish welfare state meant that the decline in standards of living after divorce was not as steep there as, for example, in the United States, divorce generally entailed some deterioration of living conditions, something that was presumably often associated with shame. The fact that shame was

rarely mentioned suggests not only that shame was a difficult—even shameful—feeling to name, but perhaps also that many of these forums had a very permissive attitude toward divorce, which might have made shame a misplaced or inappropriate feeling in that context.

Of the 182 contributions, only three described blaming oneself for the divorce. One of these was twelve-year-old Mia who in a 1998 interview in *Vi Unge* stated: “When I cried at night I imagined that if only I behaved a little better or tried to make myself invisible so that they wouldn’t notice me, they would calm down and become friends again, but it didn’t happen.”⁷⁶ In contrast to this, however, several young people stated explicitly that they did not feel guilty about their parents splitting up. One was a fifteen-year-old whose parents had divorced when he was eight years old:

When they told me they were getting a divorce all these ideas came to my mind: Were we going to move? How far? What about my friends? I won’t make new friends. These and many other thoughts toppled into my mind, but I felt neither guilt nor blame, only confusion.⁷⁷

Although some young people undoubtedly did feel guilt and probably expressed it elsewhere, it is telling that for a majority, this was not the most pressing emotion to confide. Indeed, in his 1985 qualitative study of children’s experiences of parental divorce, psychologist Morten Nissen similarly found that the children conveyed a clear understanding that their parents, not they, were responsible for the divorce.⁷⁸

Some young people also actively sought to refute the negative associations that clung to the notion of divorce—and not least to a divorce child. One sixteen-year-old called the answering machine at the radio program *Tværs* in 1977 seeking to correct the general opinion that being a divorce child was necessarily a bad thing:

It’s about that problem . . . being a divorce child. Some people think it’s, like, absolutely awful. But it actually isn’t. I *am* a divorce child and I live with my mother together with my little brother. And my mom, she has been divorced twice, and I actually don’t think you notice much, other than the fact that you don’t have your father at home with you.⁷⁹

Although it is hard to imagine that a young person would “not notice” a divorce, it is clear that this young woman actively sought to provide an alternative to the image of the traumatized or otherwise unfortunate divorce child. In solidarity with a boy who had shared his experience of witnessing his parents fighting and described his anxiety about a potential divorce in the youth magazine *Vi Unge*, another reader wrote:

I am a girl who has had the same problems as the boy calling himself ‘K’ . . . and I would like to give him some good advice and some hope: I was worried my parents would get divorced. I was walking around feeling miserably, because they were fighting all the time. Every time I went to my room and cried. I hated them for it. Now, they have been divorced and I really feel much better. Of course, you can get sad when you see a happy family with both a mother and a father. But don’t let their fights ruin everything for you. Even though it’s hard,

let them take care of themselves. And if they get divorced, you might even feel much better. I hope I've given you some hope.

She signed her letter "The happy divorce child."⁸⁰ Although descriptions such as these showed awareness of the nuclear family norm and did not directly deny that divorce might be a trying experience for the child, they accentuated the potentially positive and relieving aspects of the divorce. As such, they represented an effort to reclaim a narrative for themselves. Some contemporaries might have perceived "the happy divorce child" as an oxymoron, but these young people's interventions serve as a reminder that echoes had the potential to destabilize normative emotional meaning and to challenge particular configurations of subjectivity as much as to recast them. Echoes reverberate, resonate, and even create dissonance, but they also help us understand the messier, composite, and nuanced emotional exchanges between young people and their social world.

Conclusion

Rather than trying to uncover young people's autonomous "agency," it has been our purpose here to develop and demonstrate the utility of a conceptual tool that might enable us to better understand some of the ways in which the capacity to think, feel, and act is formed through historical processes in children and youth as well as in adults. Contending that individual emotional experience is both situated and saturated by culture, we have argued that *emotional echoing* helps theorize a crucial part of the formation of emotions and individual subjectivity in any historical context. The concept emphasizes the co-constitutive nature of cognition and emotion and calls attention to the importance of cultural idioms in making any experience available to us and in forming the individual as a subject. Through emotional echoing, culture seeps into and becomes inseparable from our experience and practices.

We have argued that a new public emotionality became an increasingly important element in the formation of young people's emotional experience of divorce in the last decades of twentieth-century Denmark. This was presumably akin to the development in many other countries in the Western world (and beyond) at the time, even if patterns were invariably locally configured and hence also variable according to the specific cultural, economic, and legal conditions of the context. For young people, the public media emerged as a forum for discussing intimate problems and emotional hardship. Many stressed that this was their only such forum; here they could discuss matters that they did not feel comfortable sharing with friends or family in face-to-face encounters. For the readers, these descriptions offered templates of emotionality through which they might filter their own experiences. As they labored to interpret and describe their emotions, the young people employed similar words, metaphors, and figures of speech in a way that conveyed a fundamental impulse to echo, imprint, and be imprinted by those soundwaves created in the formative process through which we learn and impart codes of feeling. Notably, some also offered words of encouragement as gentle gestures of solidarity with other divorce children, creating a virtual community. Through the echo, cultural idioms that circulated in the public sphere came to function as anchors to which writers—and

presumably readers—could attach their emotions, processing them in a culturally meaningful way.

Certain patterns in this new public emotionality were relatively stable, such as the emphasis on uncomfortable, difficult, and painful aspects of the emotional experience of divorce. Other patterns changed as young people employed new expressions and figures in their portrayal of the divorce experience. A significant shift was in the character of the problems that young people disclosed, from heavy social problems causing desperation to more everyday emotional difficulties as divorce was gradually destigmatized. Another was the growing articulation of anger and resentment toward parents for failing to manage their conflicts and show consideration for their children. The increasing emphasis on the “bad conscience” that accompanied the tenderness they felt for their parents is also noteworthy. Toward the end of the century, divorce children more often described the burden of having to be considerate toward both parents while questioning and in some cases, muting their own feelings. These changes in the processes of emotional echoing, we have argued, tied in with broader transformations in family structures and in the cultural and legal status of the child. They also mirrored and presumably helped stimulate a cultural obsession with emotional intimacy and authenticity, which charged both parents and children with the task of establishing and maintaining close and mutual emotional bonds.

Emotional echoing was by no means a mechanical process implying an exact reproduction of the emotions of others. Rather, it meant engaging with the emotionality of others and actively seeking to understand and interpret one’s own experiences by accessing the available cultural repertoire of emotionality. New echoes emerged over time, and young people echoed different words and images, deploying them in shifting combinations, giving new meaning to the echoes themselves. As such, reiteration entailed instability. Some young people also deliberately contested the overwhelming focus on the negative aspects of the divorce experience. As an analytical tool, the emotional echo thus captures the open-ended, porous, malleable, and situated quality of both emotions and subjectivity. An individual’s emotional experience is never quite unique or original, nor is it ever identical to anyone else’s; but it is through the continual engagement with ever-evolving cultural vocabularies that our experiences are shaped and acquire meaning.

Endnotes

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1. Mogens Nygaard Christoffersen, *Familiens udvikling i det 20. århundrede: Demografiske strukturer og processer* (Copenhagen, 2004).
2. Helle Strandgaard, *From Superman to Social Realism: Children’s Media and Scandinavian Childhood* (Amsterdam, 2017), 14; Stuart R. Poyntz and Jennesia Pedri, “Youth and Media Culture,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education* (2018).

3. Susan McKay, "Advice Columns as Cultural Intermediaries," *Australian Journal of Communication* 35, no. 3 (2008): 93–103. McKay makes the point in relation to advice columns, which constitute the majority of our source material; however, the point applies equally well in relation to other formats describing the experience of divorce.
4. Mary Jo Maynes, "Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 114–124; David Lancy, "Unmasking Children's Agency," *SSWA Faculty Publications* 1, no. 2 (October 2012); Susan Miller, "Assent as Agency in the Early Years of the Children of the American Revolution," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9, no. 1 (2016): 48–65; Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander and Stephanie Olsen, "Against Agency," *Features* (October 23, 2018), <http://www.shcy.org/features/commentaries/against-agency/?fbclid=IwAR1B-BkKBJ2EB0I6coqjd7uKhhPHIS2nNX153nwLw83R0HMJdzCAXCmqVEc>.
5. Mona Gleason, "Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education," *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (July 2016): 446–459.
6. Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813–836. See also Peter N. Stearns, "History of Emotions: Issues of Change and Impact," in *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett (New York, 2008), 17–31. In his many important contributions to the history of childhood, however, Peter Stearns focused predominantly on the former.
7. For such an approach, see, e.g., Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine A. Lutz, "Introduction: Emotion, Discourse, and the Politics of Everyday Life," in *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine A. Lutz (New York, 1990), 1–23.
8. William Reddy, "Against Constructionism," *Cultural Anthropology* 38, no. 3 (June 1997): 327–351; William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* (Cambridge, 2001).
9. Michelle Z. Rosaldo, "Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling," in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion*, ed. Richard A. Shweder and Robert Alan LeVine (Cambridge, 1984), 143. Rosaldo uses the concepts of affect, feeling, and emotion synonymously.
10. Rosaldo, "Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling," 137.
11. Rosaldo, "Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling," 141. Similarly, anthropologist Geoffrey M. White suggested the concept of "emotive institutions" to identify the "socially situated discursive practices that variously evoke, represent, and transform emotional experience." "Emotive Institutions," in *A Companion to Psychological Anthropology: Modernity and Psychocultural Change*, ed. Conerly Casey and Robert B. Edgerton (Hoboken, 2008), 241–254, 248.
12. Karen Vallgård, "Emotions," in *A Cultural History of Youth in the Modern Age* (London, forthcoming).
13. Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 193–220.
14. Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander and Stephanie Olsen, "Emotions and the Global Politics of Childhood," in *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History*, ed. Stephanie Olsen (London, 2015), 12–34. The concept does not, as Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer erroneously suggest, configure children as primarily reactive to the initiatives of adults. Hester Barron and Claire Langhamer, "Feeling Through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children's Writing," *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 1 (Fall 2017): 101–

123. If we were to stick to their terminology of active and reactive, human activity is necessarily always both at the same time. However, the idea that “emotional formation” is about determining who is active and who is reactive relies on a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept and its theoretical underpinnings.

15. Stearns and Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards.”

16. This is, e.g., Brian Massumi’s critique of poststructuralist theory; that is, the notion that every human activity is supposedly determined by an “ideological master structure.” Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation (Post-Contemporary Interventions)* (Durham, 2002), 3.

17. Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham, 2011), 52. Scott’s “echo” bears some resemblance to Judith Butler’s notion of performativity and citationality and reiteration, although Butler’s emphasis is more distinctly on embodied practices. See, e.g., Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, 1993).

18. Torben Weinreich, *Historien om børnelitteratur. Dansk børnelitteratur gennem 400 År* (Copenhagen, 2006).

19. McKay, “Advice Columns as Cultural Intermediaries.”

20. See Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: The Things We Tried to Hide* (London, 2013), for this point in the British context.

21. Helena Bergman, Christina Florin, and Jens Ljunggren, eds., *Känslornas Revolution. Kärlek, Ilska Och Lycka På 1970-Talet* (Stockholm, 2017); Harriet Nielsen Bjerrum, *Feeling Gender: A Generational and Psychosocial Approach* (London, 2017).

22. Barbara Rosenwein, “Worrying About Emotions in History,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (February 2002), 821–845; Barbara Rosenwein, “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions,” *Passions in Context: International Journal for the History and Theory of Emotions* 1 (2010): 1–32; Benno Gammerl, “Emotional Styles - Concepts and Challenges,” *Rethinking History - The Journal of Theory and Practice* 16, no. 2 (2012): 161–175; Karen Vallgård, “Divorce, Bureaucracy, and Emotional Frontiers: Marital Dissolution in Late Nineteenth-Century Copenhagen,” *Journal of Family History* 42, no. 1 (2017): 81–95.

23. See also Laura Kounine, “Emotions, Mind, and Body on Trial: A Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 2 (Winter, 2017): 219–230.

24. The numbers on age cohorts are only available from 1980 to 2000 by Statistics Denmark, and the relative size of the readership to the number of youths has been based on these numbers only. Statistics Denmark: statistikbanken.dk/HISB3; Statistics Denmark: statistikbanken.dk/FOLK2. For circulation numbers, see Oplagskontrol, *Oplagstal og markedstal, Circulation Data and Marketing Data* (Copenhagen, 1974); Dansk Oplagskontrol, *Oplagstal og markedstal, Circulation Data and Marketing Data* (Copenhagen, 1994); Dansk Oplagskontrol, *Oplagstal og markedstal, Circulation Data and Marketing Data* (Copenhagen, 2000).

25. Ibid.

26. While we would have preferred to use the actual broadcasts, they have not been systematically digitized or made available to the public.

27. Finn Wiedemann makes this point with regard to *Vi Unge*, but it pertains to all the outlets studied here. “Vi Unge: Mellem sjov og alvor,” *Tidsskrift for Børne- og Ungdomskultur* 53 (2008), 157–182, 159.

28. From the late 1990s *Vi Unge* narrowed its focus, targeting only girls 13–18 years, and this was made clear by the added “Just for girls” to the magazine title. See Wiedemann, “Vi Unge: Mellem sjov og alvor,” 157.
29. “Hej alle Starlet læsere!” *Starlet*, no. 3 (1974): 3.
30. “Bange for at de skal skilles,” *Vi Unge*, no. 2 (1999): 41.
31. Francesca M. Cancian and Steven L. Gordon, “Changing Emotion Norms in Marriage: Love and Anger in U.S. Women’s Magazines Since 1900,” *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (September 1988): 308–342, and Kristin Celello, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill, 2009) have demonstrated this tendency in the US context.
32. Shurlee Swain, “Dear Problem Page, I’m Single, I’m pregnant and...,” *Lilith, A Feminist History Journal*, no. 7 (1991): 100–112.
33. “Min far er rejst hjemmefra,” *Vi Unge*, no. 12 (1970): 54–55. See also “Ung i dag: Jeg hader min mor,” *Starlet*, no. 8 (1981): 27–29; Karsten Sommer, ed., *Det var bare det jeg ville sige, hej!* (Copenhagen, 1985), 30. Contemporary studies also suggest that children of divorced parents often missed having someone to talk to about their problems. See, e.g., Morten Nissen, *Børns oplevelse af skilsmisse*, (Copenhagen, 1984), 32.
34. Cecilie Bjerre and Karen Vallgård, “Childhood, Divorce, and Emotions: Danish Custody and Visitation Rights Battles in the 1920s,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 9, no. 3 (2016): 470–488.
35. See e.g. Gudrun Brun, *Børn og skilsmisse* (Copenhagen, 1959); Morten Nissen, *Børns oplevelse af skilsmisse*; Ingrid Leth, *Skilles - Hvad med børnene?* (Copenhagen, 1987); Morten Nissen, *Delebørn - En salomonisk løsning* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 1994).
36. Nissen, *Børns oplevelse af skilsmisse*, 11.
37. “Skilsmissebarn,” in *Ordbog over the danske sprog* (1940).
38. “En bedre verden,” *Starlet*, no. 9 (1979): 12.
39. “Fisken,” means “The Pisces” in the singular.
40. “Hvad er det?” *Starlet*, no. 8 (1981): 12–13. All translations are by the authors. In translating the young people’s writings, we have tried to stay true to the originals, avoiding correcting or perfecting the language.
41. “Skilsmisser er noget lort, men...” *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 15, 1995, 7. See also “Jeg vil væk fra mor!” *Mix*, no. 4 (1998): 56; “Selvfølgelig har jeg ar [Marie Louise Holmegaard],” *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 15, 1995, 7. Our emphasis.
42. “Jeg er så ulykkelig,” *Mix*, no. 4 (1997): 59. For other examples echoing these expressions, see, e.g., “Selvfølgelig har jeg ar,” *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 15, 1995, 7; “Børns syn på skilsmisse [Den anonyme gymnasiast],” *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 29, 1995, 7; “Klar melding,” *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 22, 1995, 7; “Børns syn på skilsmisse [K],” *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 22, 1995, 7; “Han har ødelagt livet for os [Agnieszka Bira],” *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, February 26, 1995, 7; “Min far er rejst hjemmefra,” *Vi Unge*, no. 12 (1970): 54–55.
43. Brun, *Børn og skilsmisse*, 111.
44. Carol Smart, Bren Neale and Amada Wade, *The Changing Experience of Childhood: Families and Divorce* (Cambridge, 2001).
45. “Far og mor skal skilles,” *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 8, 1995, 7.

46. "Vi skal tale mere sammen," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, June 4, 1995, 8.
47. "Klar melding," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 22, 1995, 7. Our emphasis.
48. "Børns syn på skilsmisse," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 29, 1995, 7. Our emphasis.
49. "Børns syn på skilsmisse," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 29, 1995, 7. Our emphasis.
50. See e.g. "Skilsmissebarn," *Politiken, 2. sektion*, August 17, 1975, 13.
51. Sommer, *Det var bare det jeg ville sige, hej!*, 30.
52. "Klar melding," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 22, 1995, 7. Our emphasis.
53. "Hej Mix," *Mix*, no. 5 (1999): 56. See also "Kender ikke min far," *Mix*, no. 10 (1992): 58; "Må ikke besøge sin far!" *Starlet*, no. 6 (1981): 77; "Jeg må ikke se min far," *Starlet*, no. 3 (1983): 81.
54. "Hej Starlet!" *Starlet*, no. 10 (1979): 77.
55. "Savner min far," *Vi Unge*, no. 12 (1997): 60. For a similar example, see "Hvad skal jeg gøre?" *Mix*, no. 11 (1998): 47–48.
56. "Hvad skal jeg gøre?," *Mix*, no. 11 (1998): 47–48.
57. "Skilsmissebarn," *Starlet*, no. 12 (1978): 14. For another example, see "Min far er rejst hjemmefra," *Vi Unge*, no. 12 (1970): 54–55.
58. "S.O.S." *Mix*, no. 3 (1999): 43. See also "Skilsmissebarn," *Vi Unge*, no. 3 (1967): 59, which also described sibling rivalry and jealousy. This was the first letter that described "common" problems related to divorce; to this point, emphasis had mainly been on violence, abuse, alcoholism, or forcible removal.
59. On the cultural problematization of jealousy and sibling rivalry in the twentieth century, see Peter N. Stearns, *Jealousy: The Evolution of an Emotion in American History* (New York, 1990).
60. "Skilsmissebarn," *Politiken, 2. sektion*, August 17, 1975, 13.
61. "Bange for at de skal skilles," *Vi Unge*, no. 2 (1999): 41. For other descriptions of the painful parental disputes: "Interview med et skilsmissebarn," *Politiken, 2. Sektion*, August 10, 1975, 11; "Nu skændes de igen," *Starlet*, no. 11 (1978): 11–13; "Det værste var skænderierne," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 15, 1995, 7; "De voksne," *Politiken*, February 19, 1995, 1; "Det vigtigste er, at børn har et godt hjem," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, February 19, 1995, 7; "Skilsmisse," *Vi Unge*, no. 5 (1996): 46–47; "Ikke flere skænderier," *Vi Unge*, no. 2 (1998): 50–51; "Det store brud," *Vi Unge: Kun for piger*, no. 4 (1998): 3–4; "Mine forældre skændes," *Vi Unge*, no. 5 (1999): 23; "De skændes hele tiden," *Mix*, no. 5 (1996): 36; Sommer, *Det var bare det jeg ville sige, hej!*, 29–31.
62. Plutus, "Ægteskab og Skilsmisse," *Politiken*, November 2, 1913, 8.
63. Brun, *Børn og skilsmisse*, 9; Leth, *Skilles - Hvad med børnene?*; "Ung i dag: Jeg hader min mor," *Starlet*, no. 8 (1981): 27–29; "Ikke flere skænderier," *Vi Unge*, no. 2 (1998): 50–51.
64. "Ung i dag: Jeg hader min mor," *Starlet*, no. 8 (1981): 27–29.
65. "Det værste var skænderierne," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 15, 1995, 7. See also "Klar melding," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 22, 1995, 7.

66. Mai Heide Ottosen, *Delebørn. Det vi ved, vi gør – og det børnene siger* (Copenhagen, 2016), 27–28.
67. Noa Jankovic, "FN's Konvention om Barnets Rettigheder," *Den Store Danske*, [http://denstoredanske.dk/Samfund , _jura_og_politik/Jura/Internationale_domstole_og_institutioner/FNs_B%C3%B8rnekonvention](http://denstoredanske.dk/Samfund,__jura_og_politik/Jura/Internationale_domstole_og_institutioner/FNs_B%C3%B8rnekonvention). On the early focus on children's conditions and rights in the Nordic countries, see, e.g., Reidar Aasgaard, Marcia Bunge and Merethe Roos, eds., *Nordic Childhoods 1700-1960. From Folk Beliefs to Pippi Longstocking* (New York, 2018).
68. Sven Mørch and Helle Andersen, "Individualization and the Changing Youth Life," in *A New Youth? Young People, Generations and Family Life*, ed. Carmen Leccardi and Elisabetta Ruspini (London, 2006), 63–84.
69. "Børns syn på skilsmisse," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 29, 1995, 7.
70. Linda Nielsen and Annette Kronborg, *Skilsmisseret – de økonomiske forhold*, 3rd ed. (Copenhagen, 2017), 46.
71. "Selvfølgelig har jeg ar," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 15, 1995, 7.
72. "Min mors ven, min far og mig. . ." *Mix*, no. 9 (1997): 55.
73. "Kære far!" *Starlet*, no. 1 (1980): 69.
74. "Kære far!" *Starlet*, no. 1 (1980): 69. For another example, see "Jeg går og er så trist," *Mix*, no. 9 (1992): 50.
75. Juvenile fiction: Hans Christian Hansen, *Lindys Ven* (Copenhagen, 1985); Carolyn Nystrom, *Er det min skyld* (Tranby, 1988); "Mor og far skal skilles," *Starlet*, no. 3 (1974): 14–24; Experts: Anonymous, "Skilsmisse-børn ikke problem-børn," *Politiken*, February 25, 1955, 7–8; Brun, *Børn og skilsmisse*; Leth, *Skilles - Hvad med børnene?*; Jens Branner, *Skilsmisse, Portræt af et samfundsproblem* (Copenhagen, 1987).
76. "Det store brud," *Vi Unge: Kun for piger*, no. 4 (1998): 3–4. See also "Det vigtigste er, at børn har et godt hjem [Møghunden]," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, February 19, 1995, 7, and "Junior [Marianne]," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, February 12, 1995, 7.
77. "Klar melding [Morten Lange]," *Politiken, Sektion: Magasinet*, January 22, 1995, 7.
78. Nissen, *Børns oplevelse af skilsmisse*, 72.
79. Sommer, *Det var bare det jeg ville sige, hej!*, 33. Original emphasis.
80. "Det skal nok gå," *Vi Unge*, no. 4 (1999): 22. See also "Interview med et skilsmissebarn," *Politiken, 2. sektion*, August 10, 1975, 11, and Sommer, *Det var bare det jeg ville sige, hej!*, 34.