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The purpose of this study was to see how the portrayal of divorce has changed in children's chapter books from 1970 to 2004. Specifically, the question was "Has the portrayal of divorce changed from 1970 to 2004?" Forty books were used in the study, ten for each decade. In order to keep the findings consistent, ten books were used for 2000-2004. By using content analysis, themes were determined and counted in each book and then compared across and within decades. The themes were put in three categories: coping with the divorce, response to the divorce, and trends in divorce. Quotes from the books were provided in order to gain an understanding of the themes. Graphs counting and plotting the themes were also provided. Findings show that though there were differences across decades, many of the themes remained constant.

Headings:

Children's Literature

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DIVORCE IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A LOOK AT CHAPTER BOOKS FROM
1970-2004

by
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Introduction

The idea of divorce has changed considerably over the last 30 years. For a long time, divorce was considered to be a taboo subject and couples were likely to be shunned if the topic was even brought up. Over the years, the idea of what is appropriate has changed. Recently, divorce has become more accepted in our society and does not carry the stigma that it used to. Unfortunately, with that acceptance has come an increase in divorce. Couples that marry today now have a 50/50 chance of either remaining married or filing for divorce (qtd. in Coleman and Ganong 268). Due to this, couples that are planning to marry need to know each other and what they are getting themselves into.

Since divorce is on the rise, the number of people and families now dealing with this issue has increased drastically. Therefore, it is important that professionals understand the literature out there and are sympathetic to those involved in a divorce. Understanding the issues of divorce and the process is extremely important. Specifically, it is imperative for those people dealing with the children to understand the type of material involving divorce that is out there for children to read. In order for people to have a better understanding of what is available, this paper will focus on children's literature and divorce over the last 34 years.

By studying this topic, there would be an understanding of the types of problems that children go through and the thoughts and feelings they have. These books also have

a variety of different coping mechanisms that the children can use. This could give professionals a sense of how these children deal with the problem, whether or not it is productive, and if it would be appropriate for children to use in their own lives. People that can help them include counselors (both school and private), church officials, parents, teachers, guardians, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends of the family. They could use the books in this paper as a starting point for discussion with children who are finding it difficult to adjust.

Literature Review

In order to have a broad understanding of the background of divorce, I felt it was important to take the majority of my literature from the field of counseling and family relations. Specifically, the literature I selected focuses on the trends, response, coping mechanisms and parental reactions that are most influential on how children deal with divorce.

Trends in divorce

Though considered a social stigma in the early half of the twentieth century, divorce took a dramatic increase after the 1960s. In fact, according to Cherlin, the divorce rate doubled between 1966 and 1976 (7). Specifically,

The divorce rate reached a peak in 1980, [and] then declined modestly. Currently, the rate of divorce is about 20, which means that about 2% of all marriages end in divorce $[(20/1,000 \times 100)]$ every year. Although the 2% figure may seem low, it is based on a single year. By applying duration specific probabilities of divorce across all years of marriage, it is possible to project the percentage of marriages that will end in divorce. (Coleman and Ganong 268)

“Using this method, demographers estimate that about one half of first marriages, and about 60% of second marriages, will end in divorce.” (qtd. in Coleman and Ganong 268)

In looking at the 2000 Census report, currently 1.8% of all males are separated and 8.6% are divorced and 2.5% of women are separated and 10.8% are divorced.

What has caused this dramatic increase in divorce? The most obvious reason involves an increase in acceptance by the public (Cherlin 46, Coleman and Ganong 269).

According to this view, much of the stigma previously associated with being a divorced person has faded; a divorce is no longer seen as a mark of failure or disgrace. Consequently, married persons are said to be more likely to resort to divorce than they were a few decades ago. (Cherlin 46)

Another reason involves a change in the purpose of marriage. Dickinson and Leming state, “historically, Americans married for instrumental reasons—a man and a woman needed each other to meet the subsistence requirements of life.” (393) Today, there is more of a need for love, affection, and mutual support.

With personal fulfillment becoming the main criterion by which people judge their marriages, spouses tended to seek divorces when they became unhappy with their relationships, even if the marriage did not include serious problems such as abuse. (Coleman and Ganong 270)

Dickinson and Leming go on to state that people may have unrealistic expectations for their marriage. According to the two authors, there are two types of assumptions people make. First, that the partner is their soul mate. The second is that they are on the road to developing similar goals, so when one strays from expectations, it is a reason for divorce (393). Other reasons for the increase in divorce include an increase in married women in the workforce, which gives them more financial independence (Chernin 49). There has also been an improvement in contraception since the 1960s; meaning less people will marry because of an unwanted pregnancy (Chernin 56-57).

What implications does this increase in divorce have for children? Research has changed in its views of two-parent versus divorced households.

Congruent with popular opinion, most family scholars in the 1960s assumed that children who grew up without two biological parents in the household were prone to a variety of emotional, behavioral, and academic problems. (Coleman and Ganong 270)

It was only during the 1970s that researchers began to view divorce and its effects in a less negative light. In fact, most research went against the initial idea that divorced households caused delinquent children (Coleman and Ganong 270-272). Though children are not necessarily delinquent after divorce, it does not mean that it is not a difficult time.

They may feel responsible for their parents' divorce, and they may also feel emotionally abandoned by one or both parents, as one parent physically leaves the home and both parents become preoccupied with the process of personal adjustment to divorce. (Dickinson and Leming 408)

According to Karen Appel, three roles emerge as the child deals with the divorce: the placater (acts like the adult), the adjuster (will do whatever they can to cope with the divorce), and the troublemaker (will act out to seek attention) (qtd. in Dickinson and Leming 409). "Each of these roles indicates that the child is attempting to cope with loss, and, at the same time, adjust to changes in family living." (Dickinson and Leming 409) In order for the children to appropriately cope with the divorce, it is necessary that parents allow the children to validate their feelings, openly discuss the divorce and its reality, make them feel like they are loved, and keep the child from withdrawing (Dickinson and Leming 409). The children of divorce will be at risk for many problems, but with support from their family, they will be able to adjust and eventually accept what is happening in their lives.

Response to the divorce

It is important to understand how children perceive the process of divorce. Amato in particular sought to understand how the child's point of view differs in various types of family systems (i.e.-divorced, single parent, and remarried parents). Up until this point, he stated that all studies came from the parent's point of view, which does not allow for a complete idea of what occurs in both separated and intact families. In his study, the children and parents in each family were interviewed. It was found that "neither divorce nor remarriage appears to affect children's perceptions of support from their mothers." (Amato 336) This was not the case for fathers, who were not as involved after divorce.

In intact families, the father was around more and very supportive. This study found many differences between one-parent and intact families, especially in terms of household responsibilities (more for one-parent families), sibling relations (less relations in one-parent and stepparent families), and family cohesion (higher in intact families).

Another study by Amato studying marital conflict found that a father's disappearance could have a major impact on the ability of the children to cope.

Marital conflict was associated with a desire on the part of sons and daughters at both age levels for more time with their fathers, suggesting that decreased father involvement in high-conflict families is due to father withdrawing rather than children rejecting their fathers. (409)

Understanding how different types of families function allows professionals in fields such as counseling and social work to sympathize with those children who are going through the painful process of divorce and help provide answers to questions about what is to come.

The research involving the divorce process focuses more on how the process affects children and their communication with their parents. Amato and Fowler state that:

Support, monitoring, and discipline are central dimensions of parental behavior that are linked with children's adjustment, development, and wellbeing. Parental support is reflected in behaviors such as helping with everyday problems, praising children's accomplishments, and showing affection. (703)

Therefore, when the divorce process does begin, it is important that parents make the effort to stay involved in what is going on their children's lives. According to the same study by Amato and Fowler, it is important for parents not to inflict harsh punishments on their children because it is associated with an increase in behavioral problems, substance abuse, and general mental health. The less often the corporal punishment occurs, the better adjusted the child becomes. Furthermore, Portes states "in addition to the effect relationships can have on development of social competence, there is also evidence that high levels of support from family members can help mediate the effects of stressful events." (4) By allowing the children to express their feelings and supporting their statements, parents can help them learn to deal with stressful situations in a healthy and appropriate manner and increase the child's self-esteem (Portes 4).

Coping with divorce

Research on divorce also studies how children cope with the difficult times that occur during and after the divorce. Morrison and Cherlin found that though there is an issue with disruption of the family, financial hardship is one area in particular that affects how the family is able to function. Going from a dual income to a single income life is very difficult, especially for women. Women tend to receive less money for their

services than men, which creates a more difficult situation for them after the divorce. Women also more often have custody of the children, so they have to tend to their day-to-day needs. This means an increase of output in money with less input. This causes a great deal of stress among divorced mothers, which leads to “diminished maternal warmth and patience.” (Morrison and Cherlin 803) In fact, Morrison and Cherlin particularly wanted to study:

What it is about the experience of disruption that harms children? Our contention was that divorce entails a process of family disorganization and reorganization and that child must adjust to changes in tangible and intangible aspects of their day-to-day life [...] We found that, overall, declines in economic circumstances appear to be linked to the experience of behavior problems among children of divorce. (808)

The study further states “even if the acute post disruption effects abate after a few years, disruption still could produce long-term effects that are not apparent until adolescence or young adulthood.” (Morrison and Cherlin 810) According to the authors, this could lead to early pregnancy or marriage, disruptive behavior, or completion of fewer years of school (810). Kelly and Emery also stated similar ramifications of divorce. “Parental divorce has been viewed for 40 years as the cause of a range of serious and enduring behavioral and emotional problems in children and adolescents.” (Kelly and Emery 352)

Specific stressors involved in divorce according to Kelly and Emery are the stress of the initial separation, parental conflict, diminished parenting after the divorce, loss of important relationships, and economic opportunities. Furthermore, in order to reduce the risks divorce can create for children, it is important to have competent custodial parents and parenting, nonresident parents visiting, and diminished conflict between parents following the divorce (352). It is also important to find a solution that works for the child so that long term problems associated with divorce are avoided.

With so many terrible things going on in their families, how is it that children deal with the situation? In one study by Sandler et al., the researchers examined how coping efficacy alleviated some of the stress caused by the divorce. For the study, coping efficacy was defined as

A global belief that one can deal both with the demands made and the emotions aroused by a situation. Coping efficacy includes the belief that one has dealt well with stressors in the past and can deal effectively with stressors one is likely to encounter in the future. (Sandler et al. 1099)

The study focused on how three different models using coping efficacy and coping efforts affected the outcome of psychological problems. In the end, it was found that “coping efficacy is a mediator of the relations between active coping efforts and psychological problems of children of divorce.” (Sandler et al. 1113) Kubler-Ross laid out a set of stages that people go through during death that can also be applied to divorce. The first stage is denial, which means the child attempts to deny the divorce will happen. The child then goes through anger, which can be at the self or the parents. After this, the next stage is bargaining, which involves the child trying to offer things to parents, God, or anyone else that can help in order to stop the divorce. The fourth stage is depression because the child realizes the divorce will continue whether or not they want it to. Finally, there is acceptance of the divorce (Dickinson and Leming 436).

Bibliotherapy

Using children’s literature as a form of bibliotherapy during the divorce process allows children to understand that they are not alone, to learn coping skills from the characters in the book, and to hopefully gain a better grasp of their beliefs and ideology. Bibliotherapy is a way to “help children get in touch with feelings of fear, guilt, or shame

related to the family changes that some children experience.” (Kramer and Smith 89)

Specifically, there are two types of bibliotherapy according to Kramer and Smith. First, there is clinical bibliotherapy where a counselor is involved. Second, there is developmental bibliotherapy, where the therapy occurs in a classroom with a teacher.

Using literature allows children

To gain a clearer understanding of the situation in which they find themselves and provide them with a perspective from which to function. They can provide comfort to children, help them interpret adult motivation, and assist them in the realization that whatever feelings they possess concerning a family breakup are normal and that guilt for parental problems does not lie with them. (Bartch 576)

When practitioners use literature to help children, it is important that the facilitator understand the type of child they are working with and then select an appropriate book based on what they do know (Kramer and Smith 92). It is important not to force a child to deal with the issues when they are not ready and to understand that they are going through a difficult process and will hopefully achieve peace with the divorce in their own time.

Methodology

Book Selection

The question I wanted to answer in this research paper is “Has the portrayal of divorce changed from 1970-2004?” In order to do a content analysis of chapter books involving divorce, I first tried to decide where I could find books from all the decades I planned on studying. First, I went to the Chapel Hill Public Library catalog and entered divorce-fiction as a subject heading. I limited my search to children’s materials. I created a list of books from the 1970s-2000. I was able to locate two books from the

1970s and was able to locate ten books from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000-2004. To find the remaining eight books from the 1970s, I went to amazon.com and entered in “divorce-fiction from the 1970s” to find a list. It did not work well, so I just entered divorce-fiction and sifted through the lists that were provided. I found approximately 20 books, which I then entered into the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill catalog to see if they were available anywhere on campus. I found three books through this method and then ordered the last five through amazon.com. I randomly chose the books from the lists that I created. I tried to pick books that spanned the entire decade, so that I would have a better representation.

I read forty books in total and as I did so, took notes of the themes that emerged. I categorized the themes by decade in an Excel spreadsheet and noted how often they appeared in each book. I then created the categories of trends, response to the divorce, and coping skills and matched the themes to each according to the research in my literature review. After each decade was sorted, I went through to see what themes were most prevalent. Then, I looked across decades to see what emerged, what disappeared, and what themes remained the same. I created graphs to have a better understanding in regards to how the themes differed, which allowed me to do a deeper comparison of the topic.

Definition of themes

Category: Coping

Denial/Repress Emotions: Simply the child refusing to believe the divorce will occur

Confusion: Having no understanding of why the divorce is going to happen

Worry: Concern about what life is going to be like after the divorce

Scared/Shock: Shock as the first reaction to the announcement of the divorce because it is usually unexpected. Scared after the announcement because life as the child knows it is ending

Avoidance: Avoiding the situation (home) and people involved because of the pain it causes

Anger/Resent: Having ill will towards the parent because the child's life has to change

Sad/Grief: Reaction to losing what they know and have grown up with

Dealing with changes: The child finding ways to accept the divorce and the new life

Overall acceptance: Finally conceding that the divorce will happen no matter what the child does

Depression: Severe sadness caused by the divorce; the child thinks nothing will ever be right again

Realization: The child realizing that the divorce is going to happen, though they have not reached acceptance

Indifference: The child pretends they do not care about the divorce at all (which is not usually the case)

Hurt: The child feels like the parents do not care about their livelihoods and it pains them that they do not have a say as to what happens to them

Category: Response

Blaming self: The child thinks they did something to cause the divorce

Not wanting to get married: The child feels like they never see happily married people, so why should they want to get married?

Not liking parents dating: They are jealous that their parents are doing something without them, but they also are sad and angry because they realize their parents probably will not get back together

Belief that child can stop the divorce: The child thinks they can do something that will prevent the divorce from happening (get in trouble, run away)

Getting them back together: The actual plan the child comes up with to reunite the parents

Dealing with parent's emotions: The child has to listen to their angry or sad parent and be the grown-up in the situation

Wanting things the same/Disliking change: The child does not like where things have gone since the divorce and wants to go back to the past

Hope: Wish that their parents would get back together

Questions: The child wonders about such things as what will happen, who will they live with, and where will they move

Feeling lost: The child does not think they have a place in the world anymore because they feel like they have no one to talk to or who understands

Remembering the past: The child thinks about the good times the family had

In the middle of parent's fight: The parents using children as a means of communication or the parent's talking poorly about each other in front of the children

Wanting parents together: They want their parents to reunite, but have not reached the point where they have concocted a way to make this happen

Hating parent: Involves anger towards the parent who walked out or initiated the divorce

Hard to deal with changes: They do not know how to cope with the loss

Keeping things from each parent: The child does not talk about the fun they are having with the other parent or whether that parent is dating

Using the divorce to get what you want: The child plays the divorce card to get something they have always wanted

Unhappy: The child is not satisfied with life after the divorce

Anxious: The child feels nervous because of all the changes and because things have not yet gotten back to normal

Disbelief: That even with all the fighting between the parents in both the past and the present, the divorce is going to occur

Rejection by parent: The parent leaves the child and does not communicate; in a sense, pretends the child does not exist

Category: Trends

Being the adult: Having to take on the role of parent because either the real parents are not able to function or they have to take on extra jobs to make ends meet

Running away: In order to get their parents to talk or because the child is unhappy, they leave

Acting Out: Misbehaving because of anger or because the child wants their parents to talk

Misses other parent: The child wishes they could see the parent not living at home or the parent they rarely see

Fearful of taking sides: When the parents are using the child as a pawn, the child worries about showing loyalties

Spending enough time with both parents: The worry that the child is not spending equal amounts of time with each parent

Feelings of abandonment: Comes when a parent leaves a child and rarely includes them in their lives

Reconciling with parent: Both parent and child coming to terms with their relationship and setting up boundaries

Blame parent: The child thinks one parent is the cause of the divorce

Acting perfect: The child tries to make things better by not causing trouble

Results

The 1970s

The 1970s began with a higher trend of divorce and, concurrently, books about divorce began to enter the market. I had a hard time locating ten books, but that could also be due to the fact that books were out of print. In looking at the themes that developed through reading the ten books, I found that overall they represent reactions that are expected from children in this situation. Out of the 20 themes I identified for this decade, seven were identified as coping (35%), nine as response to the divorce (45%), and four as trends of divorce (20%).

In the area of coping, being sad and lonely was the most prevalent in the ten books, appearing in eight (80%). There are many reasons that the children feel sad. One occurs when they are unable to see the parent who moved out as frequently.

Jeffrey listened as his dad said, 'We'll make up for it next Sunday,' and he answered, 'Sure, Dad,' and tried to make his voice smile, but when he hung up he could hardly keep the tears back. Another whole week. It had been a long time since last week. (Blue 31-33)

This is also seen in Out of Love: "Amour, I thought sadly. Love. Because of *that* Daddy wasn't home with us, where he belonged." (Wolitzer 17) For the most part, the father is the one who leaves and who the children do not see as often. In an article by Amato, "Marital Conflict, the Parent-Child Relationship and Child Self-Esteem," he discusses the fact that children want and need more interaction with their fathers. This is necessary for the positive adjustment of the child (409).

Another way the theme plays out in books is when the child finds out about the divorce. In It's Not the End of the World, Karen's mother takes them to a restaurant to let them know about the divorce. Not only does Karen have to deal with the sadness of the divorce, but it also occurs in front of a crowd of customers, which can be embarrassing and humiliating (Blume 30). Finally, the sadness can occur when the child sees families around her. "I kept watching them, and then for no reason I got this lump in my throat and I sort of started to cry." (Okimoto 24) The pain is very fresh and it is hard for these children to see happiness around them.

Another prevalent theme in these books was that of anger, which was found in seven of the ten books (70%). There are a variety of reasons for this anger. The first is because they feel one parent made the other leave.

'I hate you,' he screamed. 'You made me move and you took away my daddy [...]' 'You're not my mother anymore,' he yelled, and he ran from the room, slammed the outside door as hard as he could, and rushed into the waiting elevator. (Blue 44)

Another reason children are angry about the divorce is the reaction of the parents.

'She's fast asleep,' he said, 'in the middle of the day!' 'That settles it, then,' Carrie said, as if there had still been an element of doubt in her mind. 'We'll do what you said. It's ridiculous living like this. In fact, it isn't living at all.' Getting mad about it made her feel better, as if what they were going to do really were the only solution. (Clewes 57)

Finally, there is always anger about why the parents are divorcing in the first place.

"Mom, 'I said, 'sometimes I get so mad that you and Daddy won't be together that I just want to yell and wreck stuff and everything.'" (Okimoto 34) It is a legitimate feeling because the parents have wreaked havoc on their children's life. In this decade, most of the children in these books did not know that their parents would get a divorce, even with the fighting. The prevalence of divorce had not yet reached its peak, so the expectation that an unhappy marriage would just end was not there.

In the section involving responses to the divorce, I found the most prevalent theme involved questions from the children to the adults (90%). The main reason children ask questions are because they want to know why the divorce is occurring. "Why couldn't you two get along like millions of other married people? Why did it have to happen to us?" (Christopher 28) More specifically, children want to know how drastically their lives are going to change. "What will happen to me if they get divorced? Who will I live with? Where will I go to school? Will my friends laugh?" (Blume 34)

Questions that also appear involve when they will see the other parent after they find out he or she is leaving.

'Will we ever get to see Daddy again?' I was really worried about that because I knew this one person in my class who was divorced and their father moved to Alaska... 'When is Daddy going to get this apartment?' [...] Well, anyway, when can we see Daddy?' (Okimoto 16-17)

Finally, the reason children ask questions are because they do not understand why the parents try so hard. "Why'd he have to do that, Mom? Why'd he have to act like that?"

Going to all those places? Making me try and have fun all the time.’” (Blue 18)

Children want something that resembles their normal life and having their parents try so hard does not achieve that goal.

Another theme that is seen in response to the divorce is hope. Out of the ten books, six had themes of hope (60%). Children always hope their parents will get together and will once again be happy under one roof. “‘Listen mom,’ I said, ‘after he reads my contract, I’ll get Dad to bring me home. And then he’ll *be* home. And that’ll be the end of it.’” (Mann 16) Unfortunately, things never turn out that way and the children end up being disappointed in themselves as well as their parents. Sometimes these feelings of hope are something that never really leaves. “In my heart of hearts I always thought he would come back someday, as soon as he ‘got over it,’ as if he had a sickness instead of being in love with Shelley.” (Wolitzer 4)

The final theme that is seen often in the books of the 1970s is the child missing their parents. I classified this as a trend and found it in seven of the ten books (70%). Once a parent moves out, the child sees them less and less often, especially when parents start dating or even remarrying. In Uncle Mike’s Boy, Pudge’s father suffers from mental illness, which caused the divorce. He was put in the hospital, so Pudge was unable to see him. Due to this, he sought out his Uncle in order to fill the void that occurred when his father left and his mother started dating again. The theme of missing a parent also occurred in Me and Mr. Stenner.

Well, now I had a separation, too, and I didn’t like it. I mean, I was glad Mr. Stenner hadn’t turned out to be the kind of man who beats his stepchildren on television or anything like that, but I missed my father, and I wanted Mom to go back to him. As far as I was concerned, ‘the separation’ was responsible for any and all of the ills plaguing my life. (Hunter 28)

Though she is able to see her father, she has to spend the majority of her time with her mom and Mr. Stenner. Though not an overwhelming idea in the book, I could tell that Mr. Stenner did not approve of having Abby around all the time and felt that she was a hindrance to his relationship with her mother. This also influences how happy Abby is with the situation between her parents and herself.

There were two unique themes that emerged in the 1970s. The first theme was the child thinking they will never get married. The second was the expectation that the child behave like an adult. Though only found in two books (20%), the idea of not getting married is not a surprising one. The child has mostly seen fighting and has not been able to observe a positive relationship.

I don't think I'll ever get married. Why should I? All it does is make you miserable. Just look at Mrs. Singer. Last year she was Miss Pace and everybody loved her. I said I'd absolutely die if I didn't get her for sixth grade. But I did—and what happened? She got married over the summer and now she's a witch! Then there are my parents. They're always fighting. (Blume 1)

When they do not see anything positive, it seems like a logical idea not to marry.

Growing up early is also another theme that is not a surprise (20%). When parents divorce, there are not as many hands in the family, so children have to take on the extra responsibility. That can be hard because they are dealing with other changes and may wish that they could just stay young.

Chris was always having to defend herself against her mother lately, ever since their father had left the house. It was bewildering, the way her mother acted now, as if she expected Chris to be an adult responsible for herself, for Jackie, and for everything in the house as well. (Adler 10-11)

The child feels like they are left holding the bag and are not allowed to do anything for themselves. That adds to the level of frustration and hurt from the situation.

The 1980s

The 1980s represented a peak in the level of divorce. Once again, I found themes that were representative of what children were going through. Of the seventeen themes I identified, four dealt with coping (24%), nine dealt with response to the divorce (53%), and four dealt with trends (23%).

In the area of coping, anger, sadness, and acceptance were equal. Each theme occurred in five of the ten books (50%). Anger is seen in many different ways. The first, most obvious way is through anger at the parents. “I am filled with wrath. I am mad at Mom for divorcing Dad. As she says, it takes two people to get a divorce, so I am mad at two people.” (Cleary 64) There are so many reasons to be angry, that the child often cannot verbalize what exactly has hurt them. Sometimes they act out in mean ways, like Martin does in Thin Ice. He is in charge of giving his sister her insulin and one day, jabs the syringe in her thigh because he is angry about his father leaving and his mom dating his teacher (Talbert 98-99). A final way that anger shows itself in these books is through jealousy. In the same book, Thin Ice, Martin becomes jealous of his teacher, Mr. Raven, who begins giving Franny her shots (Talbert 162). Martin also become enraged when he thinks that his mother and Mr. Raven have slept together after he finds Mr. Raven in the kitchen one morning making pancakes (Talbert 179-80). Children of divorce are introduced to many new things all at once, which is why anger is the easiest emotion to turn to. It does not show how hurt or confused they are; it provides the easiest outlet for the influx of emotion.

The second major theme, sadness, is mostly seen in response to the parent leaving and never keeping in contact (50%). “Harold missed his father. His stomach still felt

like he'd swallowed something hard when he thought of him. Why hadn't his father at least called him or sent him a postcard?" (Roy 2) The sadness is also in response to the idea that a parent does not love them because they do not make an effort in being part of their lives. "I still feel terrible. If Dad loves all those things so much, why can't he love me? And maybe if I hadn't been born, Mom might still be riding with Dad. Maybe I'm to blame for everything." (Cleary 64) Finally, as pointed out in the last quote, the sadness appears because they feel they are to blame for their parent's divorce.

The final prevalent theme in the coping section is acceptance (50%). Acceptance played out in three different ways: accepting the divorce in general, the child accepting the responsibilities of life after the divorce, and the parent accepting life after divorce. In De De Takes Charge, De De "no longer had daydreams about her parents getting back together. A year ago she had felt differently." (Hurwitz 71) She knew that her parents would never get back together, so she tried not to set herself up for disappointment by hoping something different. Along with the acceptance of divorce comes the acceptance of what is necessary for the child to do in order to keep up happy relations with both parents.

I'm going to the wedding. Dad thought I should go. So did Mindy. And Rosie. And Dave. Even I think I should go. After all, how many times will I get the chance to go to my own mother's wedding? [...] I hope only once [...] I don't feel entrapped anymore, with no place to go. I have both of my parents' places [...] and I'm learning to have my own place in the world. I've learned something else too. If you take the letters in the word DIVORCES and rearrange them, they spell DISCOVER. (Danzinger 147-148)

The last area of acceptance involves when the parent finally accepts the divorce and does not take out their frustrations on the child. This occurs in the Chimpanzee Kid.

She took a deep breath, then let it out. 'You were right. I guess I've been trying to stay away from here. Everything reminds me of your father. Even you' [...]

'You've grown to look like him. Your hair, the glasses, everything.' She smiled, looking embarrassed. 'But I never really thought about any of this until last night. I'm sorry I yelled at you. And for a lot of things.' (Roy 144)

Having acceptance and understanding is necessary, as indicated in the Amato and Fowler article, which stated such behavior can help during times of stress (4).

In the category of response to the divorce, the theme that occurred most often was hoping the parents would get back together. This occurs in five of the ten books (50%). That is one of the initial responses that occur when the announcement is made that the parents are divorcing. It is also one that seems to stick around for quite awhile because there is always hope that things can be happy again. "I wonder if I'll ever get used to it and it won't hurt so much. I hope so." (Danzinger 23) Sometimes, children think that by acting up, they can give their parents a reason to talk to each other and hopefully rekindle any love that had been lost. "My parents started to see each other to talk about the problem—ME. For a while, I thought that maybe they'd even get back together. They didn't." (Danzinger 4) The idea also occurs when the child sees people's parents all around her. Laurie, in Dear Dad, Love Laurie, feels that way when her mother comes to visit her at camp. "I liked it when you and Mom were still married, but I guess you did make me do my homework." (Pfeffer 3) Though she jokes about the divorce, it is evident that desire for reconciliation is still there or she would not have brought it up.

The final category, trends, sees a change from the 1970s to the 1980s. Instead of missing parent being the major theme, there is a change to being fearful of sharing time and taking sides (40%). In Rat Teeth, Cliffie hates having to go from house to house. "'I was running away.' She looked at him, her eyes filling. 'How come, Cliffie, how come?' She raised her hand in the air. 'Don't tell me. I know. It's this living back and

forth between your mother's apartment and my house.'" (Giff 123) He feels like he cannot make everyone happy, including himself, which is often seen in children of divorce. Having to cart things back and forth and feeling like they do not have a place of their own is very hard. This is also seen in Alias Mrs. Doubtfire, where the children are made to feel guilty by their parents about spending time with the other (Fine 16-18). Furthermore, it can be difficult for the child because they do not want to appear to be taking sides.

'He thinks he's not supposed to want to live with his mother and sister and stepdad. He thinks that a manly guy would want to be on the road all the time, with his real dad.' Cee Dubyah paused, gathering up his words. "But deep down, he knows he belongs in one place, at his mother's, during the school time, and I reckon he loves his mother. What the kid doesn't know is that, sure it's okay if he loves his mother, even if I don't." Tag said, "How come all those hours in the truck, you never said that before?" "Couldn't trust myself to say it and not drive off the road." (Ruby 153-154)

Once Tag had the idea that it was okay to love both parents, he was happier. It did not feel torn between the two different sides.

In terms of unique themes shown in these books, growing up quickly appears again, but only in one book (10%), The Divorce Express. "I'm not a fantastic cook—or even a good one. In fact, I'm a pretty lousy cook. I've been trying, but it's not easy. Before the divorce I helped out in the kitchen, but helping out is not the same as making an entire meal." (Cleary 18) Since it is just Phoebe and her father, she finds there is quite a difference between life before and after the divorce. She has more responsibility at home because her father is working hard as an artist.

Feeling lost is a theme that appears in the 1980s (20%). "Martin felt as lost as a moth in space. He'd felt that way the night his father left. He and Franny had cried. His father hadn't. Neither had his mother—until later, when everybody was in bed." (Talbert

68) This feeling of being lost can come not only from the divorce, but also constant change.

The tears were rolling down Phoebe's face. 'I just got used to Dad and me in Woodstock and then he started to spend all that time with Mindy and I felt left out. And my mother married Duane and I felt like she didn't have much time for me. Then when we went to Canada, you met Jason and didn't have time for me.' (Danzinger 126)

Feeling like no one loved her or wanted her around gave Phoebe the feeling that no place felt like home. Because of this, she just kept running around in search of what ended up being in front of her in Woodstock.

The 1990s

During this decade, divorce was still high, though it had leveled off. I was able to locate many books from the 1990s, so I did not have to worry about meeting my ten-book limit. Of the eighteen themes that I encountered in the books, I found seven that dealt with coping (39%), seven that dealt with response to the divorce (39%), and four that dealt with trends (22%).

In the area of coping, the themes of sadness and anger remained at the top. Each appeared in seven of the ten books (70%). Sadness appears through a variety of different ways, but it mostly involved being sad about the divorce.

'Why'd you have to do it?' I sobbed. 'Why?' Dad didn't answer. It was all coming back again, all the terrible feelings I'd had on the worst day of my life. That was the day my parents sat me down in the kitchen and told me straight out that they didn't love each other anymore. The next thing they said was that they couldn't go on living together. In that couple of minutes it seemed like my whole world was torn apart. (Smith 44)

There is also sadness in the entire family when they are dealing with such drastic changes.

'I've felt sick everyday since Daddy left,' she said. 'Even at day camp. Even when I'm swimming.' Their mother ran her fingers through Rosie's hair. 'It's difficult, Rosie,' she said sadly. 'But it's important for us to be cheerful.' 'Why is it important to be cheerful?' Liam asked. "I don't feel cheerful, and I don't see any reason to pretend I do. In fact, I feel miserable.' (Shreve 41-42)

Everyone is unhappy and no one wants to be told that they cannot grieve. They are feeling "emotionally abandoned" (Dickinson and Leming 408) and need parental support to cope (Portes 4). The child also feels emotionally abandoned when they are made to choose between parents.

I didn't know Mom left us until Dad told me [...] He said, 'Your mother is leaving and she's not coming back.' At first I thought he meant she was leaving to go to the store or to Grandma's, but when he said I'd have to choose, him or her, it was like he poured cold water on my head. Mom or Dad. How could I choose? It's not like I had a lot of time to think it over. Dad sat on the side of my bed and stared down at me. His eyes were like black empty holes. I swallowed down the terrible taste in my mouth. 'You' was all I could say. He nodded and said OK. I squeezed my eyes shut so he wouldn't see the tears. I didn't want him to think I was sorry about choosing him [...] Mom was gone too; gone for good [...] She didn't want me and Dad anymore. (Franklin 10-11)

Finally, many children are sad because they feel that announcing their parent's divorce will cost them friendships. They no longer feel like they fit in and because of that just assume that they do not. 'I'm sorry I kept it a secret from you. I didn't mean to. I just couldn't talk about it.' Eileen looked at Stephanie. 'Do you hate me for not telling you?'" (Napoli 128) Admitting it is true is hard to do and once it is said out loud, it becomes final.

Anger is also another theme that is once again apparent in the 1990s (70%).

Anger appears when the child remembers how much has changed.

My old life was over, face it. I kept thinking that, turning it around and around in my head. I'd never live in that great house again. My dad would never live with me and Mom again. I'd never see my old friends again. I opened my mouth and let out a yell: BLLLAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!! Then I banged my fist down so hard on the table, the empty milk glass bounced and fell over on its side. Then I

thought of every curse word I knew and said them aloud. It didn't make me feel any better. (Smith 17)

The final area that anger appears is when the child resents the parent's withdrawing.

“HOW CAN I TELL YOU ANYTHING WHEN YOU'RE NEVER AROUND?” I shouted back. I felt the blood filling up my head like it was a balloon.” (Franklin 153) As stated by Portes, it is necessary for parents to support their children in order for the child to handle the stressful situation with some ease (4).

In the category of response to the divorce, the theme of the child in the middle of both parents was seen most often (60%). This theme can occur when parents send messages through the child or when they talk poorly about the other parent. It puts the child at an awful disadvantage because they do not know who to turn to or to trust. In the books I studied, one of the ways this theme occurs is when the child feels they cannot miss the other parent.

I haven't shown it to anyone else yet. It's like it was my own little secret, my own little private special thing. There's no way I can show it to my mom. I don't think she's going to like it. There's no way I can show it to Max, the guy my mom is going to marry. I don't think he's going to like it either. I think he's gotten used to being the only grown-up guy in my everyday life. (Danzinger 9)

Another reason children feel in the middle is because parents are constantly asking questions about how they feel about the divorce or how the other parent is.

What was I supposed to answer? They're always at you to tell the truth, but what was I supposed to say? 'No, I'm not all right. I hate this, and it's stupid! I don't care how much you and Mum quarrel [...] I just want things back the way they used to be.' (Fine 37)

Finally, children sometimes feel the pressure to hate the other parent. “It almost seems like she wants me to be mad at Dad, too. Maybe she's afraid that I'll end up liking him

more than her. So when I'm at home with Mom, we just go about our everyday lives, pretending that Dad doesn't exist." (Siebold 44)

For the trend section, missing their parents happened most often: three of the ten books (30%). It reappears as the primary trend after moving down in the 1980s. In the books where this trend appeared, the child misses the parent because they never get to see them. "I missed my mom, even if she had left us, even if she hadn't said goodbye."

(Franklin 51) Children also miss the parent enough to pretend that they are still around.

'I think Mum thinks that I've forgotten him,' he told them. 'I never mention him at home. But even though I know he can't still be living there, I always secretly sneak his name and our old address on all the forms that Mum's filled in for school, to show he still matters and he's still my dad.' (Fine 65)

Denying love for a parent never works, but sometimes it is best for the child to hide things from the other parent in order to hold onto ideas from the past.

Two areas that are unique to the 1990s are the emergence of feelings of abandonment (10%) and reconciling with parents (20%). Feelings of abandonment can occur when a parent feels that they are no longer capable or willing to take care of the child.

She probably would miss me when she remembered to. Or when she'd had a little too much to drink. But she was relieved to have me off her hands. I was a constant responsibility that didn't go away (for fourteen years) till now. She was free of me. (Klass 115)

Another new area in the 1990s involves reconciling with parents after the divorce. In Lone Wolf, Perry finally speaks to his mother after three years of ignoring her letters. He was doing this because he thought it was what his dad wanted. However, once he heard her voice, he realized he had made a mistake and was glad to have her back in his life (Franklin 214-215). Another time reconciling with a parent occurred was in Rope Burn

when Richard's mother realizes she has been preventing him from having a happy relationship with his father, which in turn has affected his relationship with her.

'I haven't exactly encouraged you to talk about your father,' she said. 'You should be able to have a good time with him and tell me all about it.' Mom paused and looked back up at me. 'I really am glad that you two get along so well. I've just been selfish. I should have paid more attention to your feelings. I'm really, really sorry, Rich.' (Siebold 81)

Once she realized how her actions affected Richard, they were able to have an open relationship, which is what they both wanted.

2000-2004

The new millennium started with divorce statistics still high, but again, leveled off. In order to keep my findings consistent, I read ten books for the last four years. Many of the themes remained the same, but there were introductions of a few new ideas. Of the nineteen themes that I found in the books, five dealt with coping (26%), eight focused on response to the divorce (42%), and six dealt with trends (32%).

In the area of coping, anger once again was found in the highest number of books (80%).

'I understand your parents are recently divorced. Tell me about the divorce, Celadon.' The sloshing mess exploded. Blew up like a homemade bomb out of a chemistry set. Lifted me off my chair. I opened my mouth and instead of puking on Mr. Billet this time I—words came out, sick words that burned my throat. Loud sick words. I can't tell you what I said to him. It was bad. My face was hot and cold and wet and I was shaking and the words kept spilling out of my mouth. (Springer 22)

Celadon had no outlet for her anger, so it just built up and came out at inappropriate times. There is also anger because the child does not understand the reason for divorce.

“What are you doing? Divorcing him, like you divorced Dad? If you don't like

someone, you just throw them out of your life, don't you?' I said angrily." (Hurwitz 79)

He was never really told why his parent's divorced, so he had no reason to assume that there were other reasons than his mother did not like his father. The final way anger shows itself is because the child feels the parent does not care.

'You should pay more attention,' Sidney yelled angrily after his father. He wiped at his eyes with his shirtsleeve. 'You should care more,' he said so softly that he could barely hear it himself. (de Guzman 54)

Liz was right. Dad didn't make room for us. I suddenly wished she were here in this stinking seafood restaurant with me. She'd have made it less awful. (Koss 80)

'I tried and tried to make it all right,' I said. 'I tried so hard. You weren't even there half the time. You're still not there for me. You're so busy planning for tomorrow, you don't know when today's just about gone [...]' All I am for you is trouble. Ever since I was born, I've been nothing but trouble.' (Krishnaswami 159)

These children not only have an idea that they are to blame for the divorce, but they also feel like they have no one to turn to because of it.

Sadness was also very high again in this category (60%). The child feels sad when they find out about the divorce and they continue to feel the same way afterward. "When she stuffed her cold nose into Charlie's hand he felt like crying, like bursting right out and crying." (Hobbs 6) They also feel sadness in reaction to the parent who is going through the grief of the divorce. In *Spindrift*, the sister is actually the one going through the divorce and Cassie has to help her overcome the sadness of her husband leaving (Rodowsky 54-55). Finally, the sadness is ever present; invading when least expected.

To me divorce is a wound that won't close up the way it's supposed to, like an itch from a scab that has not quite healed. How can you leave something behind when it's been hidden so carefully from you that you never even knew what it was until it was too late? (Krishnaswami 40)

Maya has held onto the repression of her emotion until she comes to India and is confronted with it head-on by family and friends.

The final theme in coping that is seen often is acceptance of the divorce (60%). The children have accepted that it is going to happen and that the parent has left. “I guess I’m kind of getting used to dad being gone.” (Moss 34) There is also acceptance regarding what their parent’s are really like and acceptance on the part of the parent about what their children need.

Soon it was time. Dad was stuck in his chair, so the good-bye was up to me. I decided, What the heck, and went over. I handed Dad back his remote, then knelt down and gave him a hug. Dad thumped me on the back a couple of times, then grabbed me and hugged me back for real. (Koss 117)

Finally, there is the acceptance of what is the truth. “[...] a lot went on. Some good, some not so good [...] my sister is getting a divorce and that means Mickey’s gone—out of our lives, anyway.” (Rodowsky 136) Though she had positive feelings about Mickey in the beginning, the more she found out about him, the more she accepted her sister leaving him.

A prevalent theme in the category of response to the divorce is once again hoping their parents will get back together (60%). At first, the child hopes that it will not happen. “At first when I heard about the divorce, I kept hoping it was temporary.” (Hurwitz 10) There is also the idea that they can just be married, whether they want to be or not.

Why not ask Papi to come up and stay with them instead? Miguel wants to suggest. He doesn’t really understand why his parents can’t stay married even if they don’t get along. After all, he doesn’t get along great with his little sister, but his mother always says, ‘Juanita’s your familia, Miguel!’ Why can’t she say the same thing to herself about Papi? (Alvarez 3)

Finally, the child hopes that by getting them together, they will suddenly decide they should not have divorced. “[...] when Dad came to pick me up on Friday for the weekend he’d stand there gaping at the work we’d done and remember all the reasons he shouldn’t have left Mum.” (Bateson 32)

The trend that emerges once again as a lead is that of missing their parents (30%).

The child misses having their parents around.

And then sometimes I miss him so sharply it’s like an ice-cream headache, the sort you get when you eat really cold ice-cream on a hot day. I miss hearing him come home after work and I miss hearing them talking at night. I miss Sunday mornings when he would cook great big breakfasts of pancakes, bacon or banana fritters. (Bateson 9)

The child misses the parent so much they want something there to remind them that they even have a parent. “I was thinking I should try inventing a robot dad [...].” (Moss 29).”

Then they would feel like they had someone participating in their lives.

There are many themes that are unique to this decade. The first is the appearance of the child using the divorce to get what he wants (10%). This only occurs in one book, One Small Dog. In response to a question by his mother about what would cheer him up, he uses the divorce as a ploy to get a dog. It is what he has always wanted and is able to guilt his mom into saying yes (Hurwitz 15-17). Another theme is the idea that the child has to be perfect to keep everyone happy (10%). Karen Appel talked about the idea of the placater (qtd. in Dickinson and Leming 409), who acts more like an adult to keep order in the family. “So Operation Save Donni is up to me. More work for intelligent, sensible, dependable, responsible big-sister Trisha.” (Springer 25) Trisha does not necessarily want to be this way, but she does not think she has any other choice. The final theme that is unique is the reappearance of running away (30%). The books that I read

had not mentioned it since the 1970s. In Melonhead, Sidney runs away because he wants stability and he thinks neither one of his parents wants him. He ends up at his estranged grandmother's house and chooses to live with her. In Charlie's Run, Charlie decides he should run away in order to keep his parents from divorcing.

'Dear Mom and Dad,' he wrote at the top of a piece of lined school paper. 'I am going away. It is just too sad to stay here right now with the way things are. Don't concern yourself about me too much. I will be fine. Perchance you will change your minds and I can come back home to live with you again. Your son, Charlie.' (Hobbs 34)

Unfortunately, Charlie learns the hard way that running away does not solve problems, nor does it prevent his parents from divorcing.

Discussion

Within the decades, there were many themes that were the same. The children were sad because they were not able to see their parents, which usually meant the father. This is representative of the Amato study "Marital Conflict, the Parent-Child Relationship and Child Self-Esteem." In his research, Amato discovered that children did not want to reject their fathers; they were just not able to spend as much time with them (409). This loss was seen in all four decades of this study and specifically found in 26 of the 40 books read (65%). Another theme that was extremely prevalent in this study was anger. Out of the 40 books that I read, 27 had the theme of anger (68%) and it crossed all four decades. There is anger from the parent about the loss of the spouse, which correlates with what was found by Dickinson and Leming (408). According to the researchers, the parents are both preoccupied with the loss and have their own need for adjustment after the divorce (408). Another way the theme of anger correlates with

research is through acting out. Children are so angry that the only way they can get over the divorce is by letting their anger show, or as Karen Appel calls it, becoming the troublemaker (qtd. in Dickinson and Leming 409). On the opposite end of the spectrum, some children think they have to be perfect in order to keep the family together. They are angry on the inside for a variety of reasons: having to take on this role, having to go through the divorce in the first place, and having to accept that the divorce is going to happen. The role they take on is that of the placater (qtd. in Dickinson and Leming 409).

Though this only occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a level of expectation that the children act more like adults. This theme occurred four times in the 40 books I read (10%). According to Amato in his article “Family Processed in One-Parent, Step-parent, and Intact Families,” there are more responsibilities in a one-parent household (336). It is safe to say that after a divorce, there is going to be an increase in responsibilities. There are fewer people in the house and just as many, if not more, things to do. Though it is hard and there is a loss of childhood, it is obviously part of the divorce process.

There are many other areas that remain the same across the decades. Through all four decades, the children miss their parents after the divorce. This occurred in 15 of the 40 books (38%). This is legitimate because they are seeing the parents less because they are not in the house anymore. They may only get to see them once a week. Another theme that occurred in three of the four decades (1970s, 1980s, and the 1990s) was the children having questions about the divorce. This occurred in 12 of the 40 books (30%). With everything changing, it is no wonder that the children have questions about why it is happening, what is going to happen to them, whether their parents still love them, and if

they are to blame. The list can go on and on because the children are so confused. There can also be questions on how the children will fit in once their parents start dating again. Concerns about dating occurred in three of the four decades (1970s, 1980s, and 2000). The theme occurred in six of the 40 books (15%). There is quite a bit to get used to when parents start dating. There are questions about how the person feels about them, how they will fit into their lives, and most troubling, are they going to get married? There is also a level of jealousy because the child once again feels out of sorts and like they have been replaced.

In three of the four decades (1970s, 1980s, and 1990s), the children wanted things to be the same. This occurred in twelve out of the 40 books I read (30%). They remembered the good times and the happy memories, focusing less often on the fighting and angry moments between their parents. In order for their parents to realize they are making such a mistake, two decades had books that focused on running away (1970s and 2000). Out of the 40 books, five dealt with the theme of running away (13%). The children feel like they are making a point by running away and that somehow their parents will begin talking and in the midst of the panic, decide they are meant to be together. Unfortunately, the child ends up in a bad situation and their parents do not end up getting back together.

A few themes emerged in the four decades that I studied that were limited to a particular time period. In the 1970s, one theme that was not seen anywhere else was the feeling about being scared about the divorce. This occurred in four of the forty books (10%). I was surprised that I did not see this more and it may have been something I overlooked when studying the books. The idea is an expected reaction to the

announcement of the divorce because everything is going to change and they do not know where they are going to go. A second theme that was found only in the 1970s was the fact that the children involved in the divorce did not want to get married. This was found in two of the 40 books (5%). Once again, I was surprised not to have seen the theme. These children do not see positive relationships, so how can they expect things to be any different for them in the future?

In the 1980s, the theme of feeling lost was limited to this decade and occurred in two of the 40 books (5%). They do not know where they belong, who loves them, and what the future holds. This theme was not seen often, but is worth noting as a theme seen during this decade.

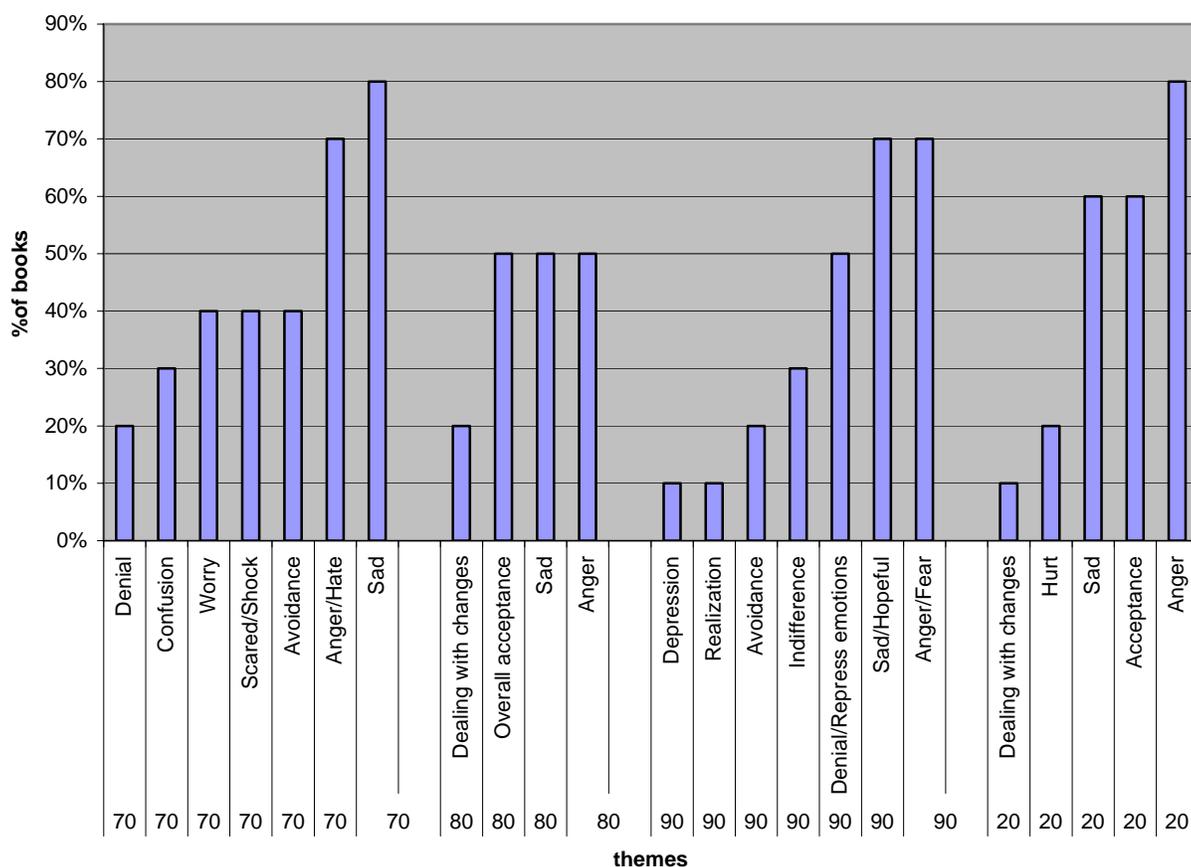
In the 1990s, a unique theme that emerges is that of indifference. This occurs in three of the 40 books (8%). Denial, avoidance, and anger were all emotions that were logical to the process. It was surprising to find three books that had the characters acting like they do not care. It is a way to handle the divorce because it helps them escape from reality. However, it was surprising to see it so often in only one decade.

In 2000, the unique theme that emerges is that of using the divorce to get what the child wants. This only occurred in one book (3%), but it does not occur until this decade. I wonder if that has to do with the fact that children are more often getting what they want after the divorce? Or it could have to do with the fact that children are just getting what they want period, whether or not their parents are getting a divorce? It would be interesting to see if the divorce influenced whether the child got what he wanted or if it is society today.

Comparison through Graphs

In order to truly understand how the themes emerged in my study of divorce in children's literature, I decided to plot my themes in graphs. The first series of themes I looked at was in the category of coping. In looking at the graph, being sad about the divorce received some of the highest percentages throughout the decades. It was not always the top theme, but it was a significant one throughout all the books. Anger is another theme that was also elevated. However, there was a significant drop in the 1980s followed by a continual rise through 2000. Though it is less than the other decades, it is still a top theme, which shows it was still an emotion that arises when divorce is announced.

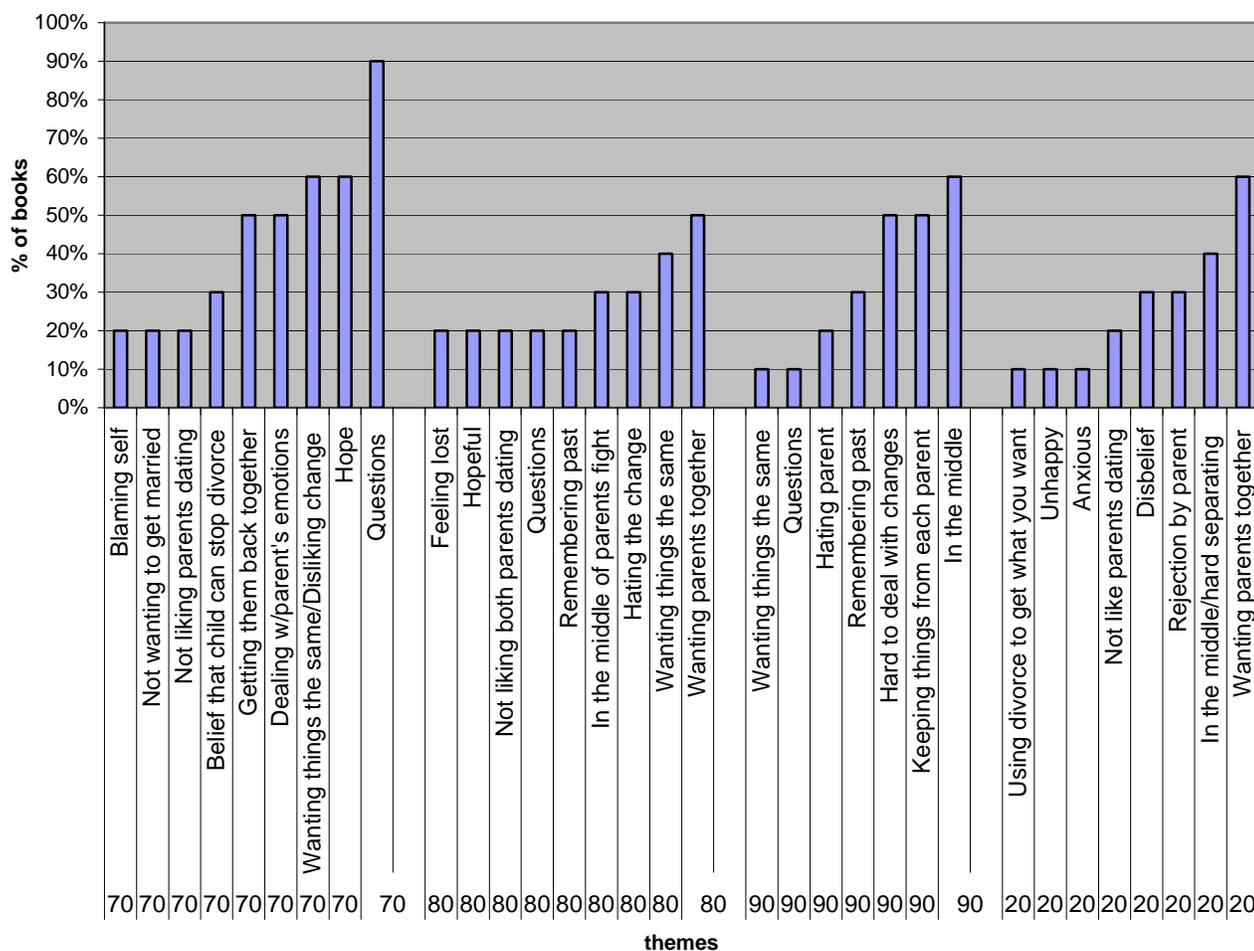
Themes Across Decades: Category Coping



In the category of response, the top themes for each decade are different. For the 1970s, having questions about the divorce yielded the highest rate, which also ended up being the highest rate across all four decades. The 1980s had wanting their parents to get back together, the 1990s was being in the middle of the divorce, and 2000 also had the child wanting their parents to get back together. Between 1980 and 2000, there was a 10% increase in the amount of books dealing with the children wanting their parents together. Another instance that emerged was the decrease of questions from 90% in the 1970s, 20% in the 1980s, 10% in the 1990s, and nonexistent in 2000. It is such a drastic

decrease, which is odd because it can be assumed that most children have questions about their parent's divorce. It may be due to the fact that children are not overtly asking questions or that if they remain mute about the subject, it will not happen. This could also be due to the fact that divorce became more mainstream after the 1970s. More people were going through divorces and there was more literature available. Since children of divorce have more resources to turn to, it makes sense that they would ask fewer questions. One theme of interest is the child trying to get their parents back together. It appears in the 1970s, 1980s, and 2000 and remains relatively steady throughout. It is interesting that the theme does not show up in the 1990s. It could be assumed that theme would be seen throughout the decades, so it may have to do with the books I read. It may also have to do with the fact that the children were put in the middle more frequently and therefore did not desire their parents getting back together.

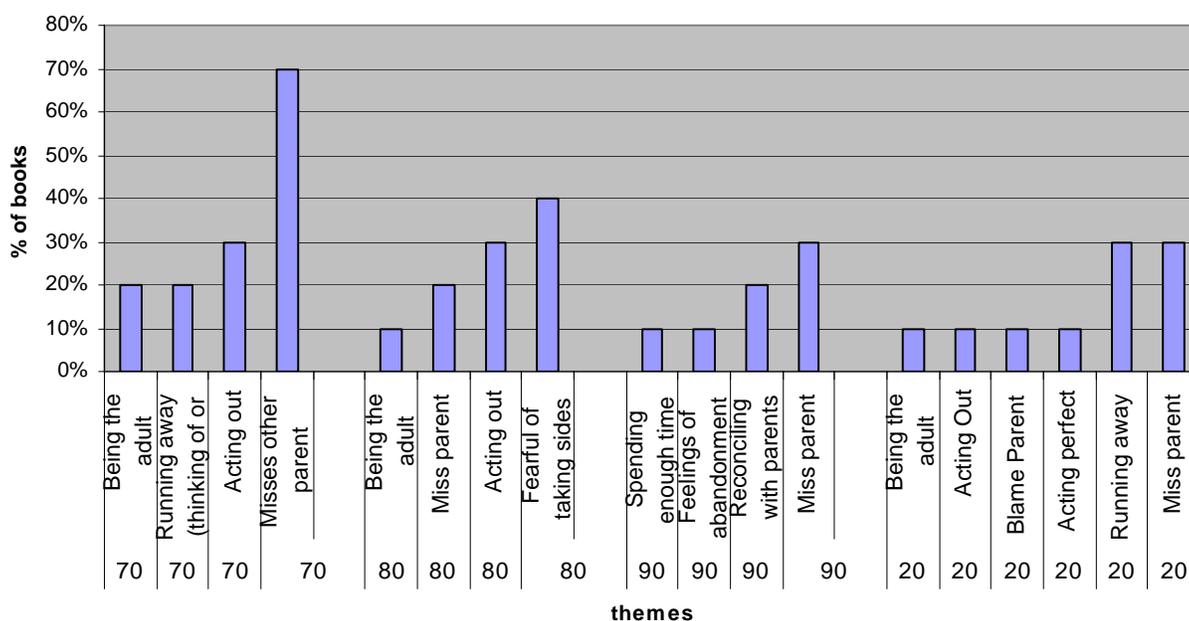
Themes Across Decades: Category Response



In the area of trends, missing the parent that is not living at home is one of the themes that appears throughout all four decades. It starts out at a peak in the 1970s, which is the highest theme in all decades. It declines in the 1980s, and steadies out in the 1990s and 2000. A reason the theme may have decreased since the 1970s is because parents are making it a priority to spend more time with their children after the divorce. Amato and Fowler stated that support by the parents is necessary for the child's wellbeing (703). Another theme that appears in the 1970s is the child having to act like

an adult. It is only seen in a small amount of the books studied, but it continues to appear in the 1980s and 2000. Acting out is a theme that is relatively high in the 1970s and 1980s, but fails to appear in the 1990s and drops 20% in 2000. This is interesting because the reaction was so high early on, so why does it drop so significantly over 20 years? Finally, a theme that emerges in the 1970s is running away. This disappears in the 1980s and 1990s, but reappears and also increases in 2000.

Themes Across Decades: Category Trends



After looking at each of the tables, I decided to compare the coping category to the response and trends category to see if interesting trends emerged. In the coping category, the themes of sadness and anger were always the top reactions to the divorce. Therefore, I decided to look at the trends and responses according to those two themes. I marked all the themes in the two categories as being either passive or active in terms of

how the child dealt with the divorce. I defined active as the child actually trying to get better, to understand, or to get their parents back together. Passive was defined as the child internalizing their feelings and not seeking a way to change what is going on.

In looking at the category of responses, I divided the themes up by decade. After I categorized the themes, I found that there was very little difference between active and passive coping skills. Only in the 1970s was there a great difference, which were six active and three passive. The other decades only differed by one theme. Therefore, it appears that in the 1970s, children were more forceful in terms of getting their parents back together or coming to terms with the divorce.

In the trends category, things were a little different. In the 1970s, there was a high level of active coping. The 1980s and 1990s remained equal in terms of how the children coped with the divorce. Finally, 2000 showed a dramatic increase in the number of active coping responses. There were five active responses and only one passive response. The children were acting out more in terms of both extremely bad and extremely good behavior. It seems the children realized that the only way to survive the trials of divorce is to take matters into their own hands.

Conclusion

Importance of Study

Divorce has been on the rise for the last 50 years, but really has only been accepted in the last 30. There has been an increase in the amount of literature produced involving divorce. In order to understand the changes involved with the area of divorce,

it is important to read children's literature, understand what is being presented, and work out a way to help children whose parents are going through a divorce.

Advantages and Disadvantages

There are advantages to performing a content analysis on divorce in children's literature. I actually did expect more of a difference between the decades, but overall, I feel that my findings make sense. The way the children dealt with divorce relates to what researchers are saying in the field of counseling. I think it is an advantage to have a list of books and an annotation regarding divorce in one resource. It allows people to see what the book is about and decide which would be the best for the person they plan to give it to.

There are also a number of disadvantages to the study. Though I randomly selected the books, the themes that emerged were based on my opinions and therefore may not have represented all that was out there. I did not have someone perform intercoder reliability, so what is presented in this paper is purely from my point of view. It may also be worthwhile to use more books to find more consistent themes in the research. That may be considered in further studies.

In studying the response area, I found that the child being in the middle of the parent's divorce was the highest theme in the 1990s. It also appears in 2000. It would be interesting to do further research on the topic in order to see why it only appeared in the later decades.

Final Thoughts

Overall, I found that the trends were about the same for each decade, though there were a few surprises at what appeared and did not. I was also surprised by the differences within the decades. I did not expect to see such a wide range between the themes. This held true when I looked across the decades. There are different ways in dealing with the topic of divorce as well as different ways that children respond to it. It is therefore necessary that people working with these children have an idea of what they are putting in their hands. Hopefully, this will provide a resource for understanding as well as a guide that can be used to help.

Appendix A: List of Books

The 1970s

Adler, C.S. The Silver Coach. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1979.

Chris and Jackie's mother has to leave them with their grandmother for the summer while she finishes nursing school. Chris is very unhappy about her relationship with her mother and wants to live with her father. After spending the summer with her grandmother and seeing her father again, Chris realizes that things are better with her mother and comes to terms with what is going on.

Blue, Rose. A Month of Sundays. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1972.

Jeffrey has to move from his home in suburban New York to the city. Not only does he have to leave his friends behind, but he also has to deal with his parent's divorce and only seeing his father on Sundays.

Blume, Judy. It's Not the End of the World. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury Press, 1972.

Karen's parents announce they are going to get a divorce and everything falls apart. She feels like she is losing her friends, her brother is acting up and decides to run away, and her sister is such a baby! After her brother gets back, things get back to normal, though she is still sad about her father leaving.

Brooks, Jerome. Uncle Mike's Boy. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973.

Pudge has a lot to get used to. His dad and mom are divorcing and his dad has to go to an institution because of severe depression. Uncle Mike, his father's brother, takes him under his wing so that he can feel better about what is going on.

Christopher, Mike. The Fox Steals Home. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978.

Bobby finds out his parents are getting a divorce. The only worth playing is baseball, but his mom does not like for his dad to help him. They sneak around, but then he finds out his father is moving. Not only is he dealing with the divorce, but he also has to say goodbye to his dad.

Clewes, Dorothy. Missing from Home. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.

Carrie and Maxwell are very surprised when their father leaves them for Carrie's friend, Madeleine. In order to make their mom get out of her funk and to get their parents back together, the children run away. After they return, their father realizes the error of his ways, and returns home too.

Hunter, Evan. Me and Mr. Stenner. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1976.

Abby O'Neill's mother is going to get married to a man she does not know if she likes, Mr. Stenner. She has to deal with that as well as questions from both her mother and father about how they treat her.

Okimoto, Jean Davies. My Mother is not Married to my Father. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979.

In this book, Cynthia and Sara have to deal with their parents divorce and also with the new girlfriend his dad left them for. With the help of their friend, Harry, the girls begin enjoying time with their father again.

Mann, Peggy. My Dad Lives in a Downtown Hotel. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1973.

Joey is surprised when one morning his father is no longer living at home. When he asks his mom, she tells him he has moved out and they are getting a divorce. He goes to his dad to see if he will change his mind, but in the end, he has to come to terms with the reality of the divorce.

Wolitzer, Hilma. Out of Love. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976.

Teddy doesn't understand why her parents got a divorce, especially when she reads their old love letters. She wishes her mother was a little more put together in order for her dad to come back, but in the end she knows that will not happen.

The 1980s

Cleary, Beverly. Dear Mr. Henshaw. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1983.

This involves a series of letters and journal entries to his favorite author, Mr. Henshaw. Through these letters he perfects his writing and also comes to terms with his parents divorce and not seeing his father, who is a truck driver.

Danzinger, Paula. The Divorce Express. New York: Delacorte Press, 1982.

Phoebe's parents decide that she has to move in with her father in Woodstock, NY and take the Divorce Express every weekend to the city to see her mother. She is not happy with the decision because she has to leave her friends and boyfriend. Once she meets Rosie, she finds that Woodstock and her dad are not so bad after all.

Danzinger, Paula. It's an Aardvark-Eat-Turtle World. New York: Delacorte Press, 1985.

In the sequel to The Divorce Express, Phoebe and Rosie are now "sisters" when their parents decide to move into together. At first things are fine, but then Phoebe becomes

angry with the changes that come with a new family and has to deal with emotions from her parent's divorce.

Fine, Anne. Alias Madame Doubtfire. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1988.

Lydia, Christopher, and Natalie have to deal with the hostile relationship between their parents. Plus, their mother, Miranda, does not like them spending time with him. When she puts an ad in the newspaper for a sitter, Daniel takes the job under the alias Madame Doubtfire.

Giff, Patricia Reilly. Rat Teeth. New York: Delacorte Press, 1984.

Cliffie is a child with unusually large teeth. He acts mean so that people do not find out about his parent's divorce. He is already upset by the change and he does not want anyone to feel sorry for him. He decides he is better off on his own, but finds it is not as great as he thinks it is.

Hurwitz, Johanna. DeDe Takes Charge! New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984.

After the divorce, DeDe's father moved to New York City and her mom had to take on two jobs to make ends meet. She doesn't get to see either one of them as often as she had before, so it is up to her to make sure that they spend the time with her she feels she deserves.

Pfeffer, Susan Beth. Dear Dad, Love Laurie. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1989.

This book is a series of letter between Laurie and her father, who lives across the country. She talks about what is going on, how she is reacting to the divorce, and how she misses him.

Roy, Ron. The Chimpanzee Kid. New York: Clarion Books, 1985.

Harold has no friends, his parents are divorced, his dad moved away, and his mom is more interested in golf than she is in him. He is interested in saving the planet, and when he finds a place he thinks is performing experiments on chimpanzees, he decides to try and save them. By getting in trouble, his mom pays more attention and they try to start over.

Ruby, Lois. Pig-Out Inn. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987.

Dovi and her mother open up a new restaurant which they call the Pig-Out Inn. One day Tag and his father show up and the next day his father is gone. It turns out he dropped Tag at the restaurant/inn to hide out during a custody dispute. The story follows what happens and has a happy outcome for both Tag and his father.

Talbert, Marc. Thin Ice. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986.

Martin is very angry since his dad divorced his mom and moved to Alaska. He also lost his best friend because of his anger and his mom has just begun dating his teacher, Mr. Raven. Slowly, but surely, Martin is able to get over his anger with the help of Mr. Raven entering his life.

The 1990s

Danzinger, Paula. Amber Brown is Feeling Blue. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1998.

Amber Brown is torn between spending Thanksgiving with her mom and her mom's boyfriend and spending time with her dad, who is moving home from Paris, France. Not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings, Amber tries to find a way to make everybody happy.

Danzinger, Paula. Amber Brown Goes Fourth. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.

Amber Brown is starting fourth grade without her best friend. Her parents just got divorced and nothing is the same. She is worried about making a new friend and what her new teacher will be like (Will she be better than Mr. Cohen?).

Fine, Anne. Step by Wicked Step. Boston: Little, Brown, 1996.

This book involves five school children who are forced to ride together on a school trip to a house. They do not get along, but find they have something in common. They find out that they are all children of divorce. When they get there, they find out the room they share used to belong to a little boy who also had family problems. After reading his journal, each of the five children begins to discuss what has been going on in their lives regarding divorce, remarriage, and their parent's fights. In the end, they become friends and learn they are not alone in their dealing with their parent's problems.

Franklin, Kristine L. Lone Wolf. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 1997.

Perry lives in the forest of Minnesota with his dad in complete solitude until neighbors move in next door. At first he is angry about the invasion, but then realizes how much he misses family life. He and his dad start to communicate more and he seeks out his mom, who he has not talked to since the divorce.

Klass, Sheila Solomon. Next Stop: Nowhere. New York: Scholastic Inc, 1995.

Beth's mother decides that Beth has to go live with her dad while she starts her new life. Beth isn't that happy about it because she and her dad don't really get along. Since she has no choice, she tries to make the best of a bad situation.

Napoli, Donna Jo. Changing Tunes. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1998.

Eileen loves to play to piano, but is hurt when her dad takes it after the divorce. She has to play at the school now and ends up befriending the janitor, Mr. Poole. Eileen uses her music to work through her grief.

Shreve, Susan. The Formerly Great Alexander Family. New York: Tambourine Books, 1995.

When Liam finds out his parents are getting divorced, he does not want to do anything fun. How can he when all of his friends think his family is so great? Everyone will think he is a failure! However, he learns that his friends will still be his friends no matter what-family or no family.

Siebold, Jan. Rope Burn. Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman & Company, 1998.

Richard is assigned by his English teacher to write about how a proverb is similar to his life. The chapters are arranged by nine different proverbs, and we see how he adjusts to life after his parent's divorce.

Smith, Robert Kimmel. The Squeaky Wheel. New York: Delacorte Press, 1990.

When Mark's parents divorce, he has to move from his home and all his old friends. Worst of all is that he cannot spend as much time with his father and when he does, he has to with his girlfriend and her daughter. When he finally speaks up, they work out a way to spend more time together.

Wilson, Nancy Hope. The Reason for Janey. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994.

Philly's mother has decided to take in a woman from the state hospital, named Janey. At first Philly is not happy about this, but once they spend time together, Janey helps Philly understand herself and her parent's divorce in a different light.

2000-2004

Alvarez, Julia. How Tia Lola Came to Visit, Stay. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001.

Miguel and his family have moved to New Jersey (without his dad) from New York after the divorce. His mom asks her favorite aunt, Tia Lola, to come from the Dominican Republic and help out as she settles down. At first Miguel does not like having her around, but then he finds out he does not want her to leave.

Bateson, Catherine. Rain May and Captain Daniel. St. Lucia, Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2002.

Rain May moves with her mom to the country in Australia after her parent's divorce. She becomes friends with her neighbor, Daniel, who is obsessed with the series, Star Trek. He is unpopular and afraid that she will leave him once school starts. However, they still remain friends. She helps him recover from his heart surgery and he helps her accept her parent's divorce and her dad's new girlfriend.

De Guzman, Michael. Melonhead. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2002.

Sidney does not like splitting his time between his mom's home in Seattle (with his evil stepfather) and his dad's apartment in Los Angeles. He feels that no one wants him, so he takes his savings and goes on a bus trip across the nation. He ends up at his grandmother's house, who works to make his parents understand that they need to be better parents.

Hobbs, Valerie. Charlie's Run. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000.

When his parents announce they are getting a divorce, Charlie, who is the "good child" of the family, decides he needs to do something about it. He decides to run away, but only far enough to teach his parents a lesson and get them back together. He takes up with this girl, Doo, who is headed to Los Angeles to see her dad. After a series of misadventures, Charlie sees how important his family is to him and is relieved when he finally gets to go home.

Hurwitz, Johanna. One Small Dog. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000.

When Curtis's parents get a divorce, he is very upset. He has to move into a small apartment and share a room with his baby brother! In order to make things better, his mom allows him to get a dog. Things go down hill when the dog bites his mom, then his brother, and then him!

Koss, Amy Goldman. Stranger in Dadland. New York: Dial Books, 2001.

Every summer, John leaves his mom's house in Kansas for a week with his dad in California. And every year he is disappointed. Will his dad change, or will this be like every other summer where he is ignored and treated as if he is not there.

Krishnaswami, Uma. Naming Maya. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2004.

Maya has gone with her mom to India to sell her grandfather's house. Her dad has just left their home in New Jersey and moved to Texas. Things are not good because no one will talk with her about the divorce and she does not know what is going on. Through the process of selling the house, Maya learns to not only accept the divorce but understand her heritage.

Moss, Marissa. Max's Logbook. New York: Scholastic Press, 2003.

A unique book because it is actually a diary of sorts that chronicles not only Max's science experiments, but also his parent's unexpected divorce.

Rodowsky, Colby. Spindrift. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000.

It is summertime and Cassie and her family are eagerly awaiting the birth of her sister's new baby. However, things turn sour when Cassie sees her sister's husband with another man. Disappointed that the brother-in-law is a flake, she tries to come to terms with the many different changes in her life that go on at the same time.

Springer, Nancy. Separate Sisters. New York: Holiday House, 2001.

Donni and Trisha are two sisters who could not be more opposite. After her parent's divorce and she goes to live with her dad, she begins to act up. To make things worse, her sister Trisa, who lives with her mom, is Ms. Perfect. In order to make things better in their family, they have to work together and big to like each other again.

Appendix B

The 1970s	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Category	%
Denial		x								x	2	coping	20%
Confusion		x				x			x		3	coping	30%
Worry		x	x			x			x		4	coping	40%
Scared/Shock			x	x	x				x		4	coping	40%
Avoidance	x	x							x	x	4	coping	40%
Anger/Hate	x	x	x		x		x	x	x		7	coping	70%
Sad and lonely	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	8	coping	80%
Blaming self		x	x								2	response	20%
Not wanting to get married		x					x				2	response	20%
Not liking parents dating								x	x		2	response	20%
Belief that child can stop divorce	x	x	x								3	response	30%
Getting them back together		x	x	x	x	x					5	response	50%
Dealing w/parent's emotions/parents taking out on children				x	x	x			x	x	5	response	50%
Wanting things the same/Disliking Change	x	x		x	x		x	x			6	response	60%
Hope	x	x	x				x	x		x	6	response	60%
Questions (about divorce or from parents)	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	9	response	90%
Having to be older than really are		x								x	2	trend	20%
Running away (thinking of or doing)	x				x						2	trend	20%
Acting out	x	x							x		3	trend	30%
Misses other parent	x	x	x	x	x	x			x		7	trend	70%

A: A Month of Sundays

B: It's Not the End of the World

C: My Dad lives in a Downtown Hotel

D: Uncle Mike's Boy

E: Missing from Home

F: Me and Mr. Stenner

G: Out of Love

H: The Fox Steals Home

I: My Mother is not married to My Father

J: The Silver Coach

The 1980s	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Category	%
Dealing with changes	x		x								2	coping	20%
Overall acceptance	x	x	x		x			x			5	coping	50%
Sad		x	x		x	x	x				5	coping	50%
Anger	x	x				x	x		x		5	coping	50%
Feeling lost						x	x				2	response	20%
Hopeful	x						x				2	response	20%
Not liking both parents dating	x									x	2	response	20%
Questions			x					x			2	response	20%
Remembering past			x	x							2	response	20%
In the middle of parents fight/talking badly about each other	x		x						x		3	response	30%
Hating the change					x		x	x			3	response	30%
Wishing it never happened/not understand				x	x		x		x		4	response	40%
Wanting parents together	x	x			x	x				x	5	response	50%
Growing up quickly	x										1	trend	10%
Miss parent		x						x			2	trend	20%
Acting out	x				x	x					3	trend	30%
Fearful of taking sides/Hate sharing time			x	x				x	x		4	trend	40%

A: The Divorce Express

B: Dear Mr. Henshaw

C: De De Takes Charge

D: Rat Teeth

E: Chimpanzee Kid

F: It's an Aardvark Eat Turtle

G: Thin Ice

H: Pig Out Inn

I: Alias Madame Doubtfire

J: Dear Dad, Love Laurie

The 1990s	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Category	%
Depression				x							1	coping	10%
Realization			x								1	coping	10%
Avoidance	x			x							2	coping	20%
Indifference	x	x							x		3	coping	30%
Denial/Repress	x		x	x	x		x				5	coping	50%
Sad/Hopeful	x	x	x	x			x		x	x	7	coping	70%
Anger/Fear	x		x	x		x	x		x	x	7	coping	70%
Wanting things the same	x										1	response	10%
Questions				x							1	response	10%
Hating parent			x	x							2	response	20%
Remembering past					x		x	x			3	response	30%
Hard to deal with changes					x	x		x	x	x	5	response	50%
Keeping things from each parent					x	x	x	x		x	5	response	50%
In the middle	x	x	x			x		x		x	6	response	60%
Spending enough time w/parent						x					1	trend	10%
Feelings of abandonment			x								1	trend	10%
Reconciling with parents							x			x	2	trend	20%
Miss parent						x	x	x			3	trend	30%

- A: The Squeaky Wheel
- B: The Reason for Janey
- C: Next Stop, Nowhere
- D: The Formerly Great Alexander Family
- E: Amber Brown Goes Fourth
- F: Step by Wicked Step
- G: Lone Wolf
- H: Amber Brown is Feeling Blue
- I: Changing Tunes
- J: Rope Burn

2000-2004	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Total	Category	%
Trying to understand								x			1	coping	10%
Hurt			x				x				2	coping	20%
Sad	x	x	x	x					x	x	6	coping	60%
Acceptance	x	x	x			x			x	x	6	coping	60%
Anger	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	8	coping	80%
Using divorce to get what you want		x									1	response	10%
Unhappy							x				1	response	10%
Anxious							x				1	response	10%
Not like parents dating						x		x			2	response	20%
Disbelief			x								3	response	30%
Rejection by parent					x	x	x				3	response	30%
In the middle/hard separating both lives				x			x	x		x	4	response	40%
Hoping they'll get back together/Fix it	x	x		x				x	x	x	6	response	60%
Being the adult	x										1	trend	10%
Acting Out					x						1	trend	10%
Blame Parent					x						1	trend	10%
Acting perfect to keep everyone happy					x						1	trend	10%
Running away	x	x					x				3	trend	30%
Miss parent								x	x	x	3	trend	30%

- A: Charlie's Run
 B: One Small Dog
 C: Spindrift
 D: How Tia Lola Came to ~~Visit~~ Stay
 E: Separate Sisters
 F: Stranger in Dadland
 G: Melonhead
 H: Rain May and Captain Daniel
 I: Max's Logbook
 J: Naming Maya

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