

**Individual, Failing: An Analysis of Film Portrayals of the Causes of Young Adult
Coresidence from 2010-2020**

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Abstract

Although researchers have observed that film depictions of coresiders tend to be negative, no research has systematically analyzed or explored such portrayals. Adapting Qualitative Content Analysis, this study examined portrayals of Canadian and American young adult/parent coresidence in films released between 2010 and 2020, seeking to ascertain the explanations for coresidence, (i.e., how do films portray why young adults coreside). Analysis of 18 films yielded eight distinct forms of explanations for coresidence, with the two most common being those that rendered coresidence as occurring due to either a mental health challenge or the flawed personality of the coresider. Broadly, film portrayals depicted coresidence as symptomatic of an individualized failing of young adults. Interpreting these findings through the lens of psychocentrism, we argue that film constructions pathologize coresidence and responsiblize coresiders. Further, and in contrast to news media, film constructions ignore systemic or structural drivers of coresidence. This research is the first to examine film portrayals of coresidence in depth, highlights distinct depictions of young adults in film media, and draws attention to the discrepancies between documented reasons for coresiding and those portrayed in on-screen storytelling.

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In July of 2020, 52% of young adults in the United States (18 to 35 years old) (Knudson & Mazurik, 2020) lived with their parents – a coresidence rate greater than during any other period in American history for which data is available (Fry et al., 2020). While in the U.S. this percentage began to decline by October of 2020 (McCue, 2021), in Canada, after rising for more than a decade, the percentage of young adults living with their parents has remained relatively stable between 2016 and 2021, at 35% (Statistics Canada, 2022). And, globally, coresidence rates continue to rise (Esteve & Reher, 2021; Pilkauskas et al., 2020). Numerous social scientists have suggested that media portrayals of coresidence present this living arrangement in a simplistic, negative light (Casares & White, 2018; Mazurik et al., 2020; Tomaszczyk & Worth, 2020). However, only Mitchell and Lennox (2020) have conducted targeted empirical research on media portrayals of coresidence in news reports. To date, no studies have analysed contemporary depictions of adult-child and parent coresidence in film. As media depictions both represent and shape reality, representations of coresidence in these works could have important implications for young adults and families engaged in this living arrangement. In the current project, film portrayals of coresidence were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. We argue that film depictions of coresidence are largely negative, depicting coresiders as deviant and coresidence itself as indicative of individual fault or failure. Moreover, the social, cultural, and economic factors known to drive coresidence in contemporary American and Canadian society (Newman, 2012; Tomaszczyk & Worth, 2020) are largely absent in these films. Consequently, these films contribute to the ongoing stigmatization of coresiders and coresidence and attribute the ‘failure’ to achieve residential autonomy to individual rather than macrosocial factors.

Literature Review

Why do Young Adults Stay or Return Home?

Research on the drivers of coresidence in the United States and Canada point to numerous structural influences. Cultural values and expectations play a role in young adults' decisions to coreside (Newman, 2012; Tomaszczyk & Worth, 2020). Cepa and Kao (2019), for example, point to the importance of familism (i.e., the needs of the family prioritised over any one individual within the family, see Kamo, 2000, for more details) in promoting coresidence amongst some cultural groups. These authors point out that Black, Latino, and Asian young adults evidence higher rates of coresidence and are more likely to emphasise familism than their White counterparts. However, they note that culture alone does not alone predict coresidence.

In Western countries, young adults consistently cite economic concerns as the primary reason for returning to, or remaining in, the parental home. Structural factors, such as unfavourable labour markets and reduced job security (labour union decline, globalization of markets, and rising demands for post-secondary education coupled with declining returns), and rising home prices create challenges for young adults seeking residential independence (Khran et al., 2018; Lersch & Uunk, 2017; Newman, 2012). In this context, parental support in the form of coresidence helps young adults manage the challenges of labour and housing markets and avoid impoverished living (Arundel & Ronald, 2016; Creamer et al., 2020). Engelhart and colleagues (2016) note that job loss is a frequent cause of young adults returning to the parental home. There is also clear evidence that young adults showed increased interest in moving back home during the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by the group's greater online research into moving home during that period (Lei & Liu, 2022). Regarding within-group variations, other authors note that visible minorities are more likely to face systemic employment challenges that

might prevent them from living independently, contributing to higher rates of coresidence in those groups (Britton, 2013; Hardie & Seltzer, 2016). Given that coresidence helps young adults avoid or recover from financial damages, several researchers describe this living arrangement as part of a parental safety net which shields young adults from experiencing homelessness (Mann-Feder et al., 2014; Merten et al., 2018; Swartz et al., 2011). The financial support provided by coresiding enables young adults to focus on preparing for, establishing, or recovering their ability to live independently.

The financial support provided by coresidence also benefits young adults engaged in formal educational pursuits. In Canada, coresiding while pursuing educational goals can result in lower personal debt loads for young adults (though this sometimes means higher educational debt for the household generally) (Maroto, 2019). Many young adults continue to coreside throughout their formal education, believing it to be an economically wise decision (Sironi & Billari, 2019). Some also return home for a period after completing post-secondary education (Roberts et al., 2016). Indeed, as education rates increase, job competition intensifies, and returns on undergraduate degrees diminish in Western nations, young adults with degrees are remaining in the family home for longer periods in search of employment (Hertel & Pfeffer, 2016). Staying at home to pursue higher education is not, however, strictly an extension of financial considerations. The parental home is also often identified as a place where other forms of support are available to young adults.

Some young adults also choose coresidence, in part, to exchange emotional support and family care. That is, family bonds influence young adults' home-leaving trajectories. For example, if the individuals in a family feel cared for and loved by one another, their perspectives on family members leaving home are likely to be influenced (Sørensen & Nielsen 2020). Indeed,

Akın and colleagues (2020) report that parental warmth predicts later departures and support for autonomy predicts earlier departures. For some young adults, the sense of familial solidarity and mutual reliance found in the parental home are themselves powerful motivators for coresiding (Tomaszczyk & Worth, 2020). Literal caregiving can also flow in the reverse direction, with some young adults feeling it is their responsibility to stay or return home to care for the parents they love (Dehn, 2017; Koltz, 2015; Napolitano, 2015)

In sum, social science research affirms that young adults coreside for numerous, often interacting, reasons. Economic factors combine with individual factors such as caregiving, emotional closeness, and cultural expectations to play a role in whether a young adult can, will, or wants to coreside. Media portrayals of coresidence and coresiders, however, have not reflected these nuances.

Coresidence in the Media

Surprisingly little research has explored how coresidence is portrayed in contemporary media, despite the high rates of young adult coresidence in both Canada and the United States. At present, only Mitchell and Lennox (2020) have empirically studied portrayals of coresidence in Canadian news media. Their investigation incorporated two forms of data collection and analysis – content analysis of news articles of coresidence from 2012 to 2017 and interviews with young adult Canadian coresiders.

Content analyses of news articles ($n = 44$) revealed that 57% suggest that contemporary coresidence is largely driven by macrosocial (i.e., historical, societal, demographic, and cultural level) forces, such as fluctuating labour markets, high student debt loads, high housing prices, and changing social norms. For example, several news articles reviewed by Mitchell and Lennox noted that young adults face vastly more expensive housing prices than previous generations and

fewer opportunities for full-time employment with competitive wages. These factors are cited in the news articles to explain why young adults might take longer to vacate the family home. Mitchell and Lennox report that while news media highlighted macrosocial shifts for young adult coresidence, they simultaneously portrayed this phenomenon as a temporary delay in consumption patterns, and ultimately anticipated that young adults would pursue the typical developmental trajectory that defined previous generations (school, job, marriage, home ownership, etc.). Even though over half of the articles pointed out that social and economic changes have made independent living more challenging for young adults than previous generations, 23% of all articles also contended young adults should be able to overcome such challenges through individual effort. Further, the remaining 20% of articles depicted coresiders as either personally to blame for failing to achieve independence or as a “mooch” and drain on their parents (Mitchell & Lennox, 2020, p. 226). Thus, while news media have started to acknowledge that young adults face greater economic obstacles to home ownership and financial independence than previous generations, they do not portray such macrosocial shifts as a terminal threat to residential independence. Moreover, while news portrayals construct coresidence as – at least in part – a mode of coping with challenging socioeconomic circumstances, it is also a sign of failure or parasitism.

The second part of Mitchell and Lennox’s (2020) study involved interviews with Canadian young adult coresiders ($n = 20$) regarding their perspectives on adulthood, leaving home, and returning to the family home. Content analyses revealed that participants echoed some of the same stigmatizing discourses present in news media to describe their own experiences of coresidence. Notably, participants felt compelled to position their living situation as both temporary and driven by financial need. In situations where financial motives were not the

primary or sole reason for coresiding, such as following a divorce, participants frequently described themselves and their living situation in terms of defeat or failure (Mitchell & Lennox, 2020). Moreover, amongst those who coresided to save money, returning to or remaining home for emotional support was considered a sign of defeat or poor decision-making. Broadly speaking, young adult participants positioned the pursuit of independent residence as an important developmental aim and described coresidence as a living arrangement that should only be engaged in “grudgingly” (Mitchell & Lennox, 2020, p. 230-231). In sum, young adults described coresidence in a manner which placed the onus on them to both legitimize and, ultimately, escape their current living situation. Taken together, Mitchell and Lennox’s news media analysis and interview data suggest that expectations about home-leaving in Canada and the U.S. have not significantly changed despite strong evidence of macrosocial shifts that have restricted and delayed young adults’ ability to achieve residential and financial independence.

Critical Reflection on the State of the Literature

Media portrayals have the capacity to shape how Canadians and Americans think about coresidence. Unfortunately, little is known about how this living arrangement is portrayed in contemporary media. Our study examined causes of coresidence in films released between 2010 and 2020. We considered the extent to which these portrayals aligned with contemporary social science research regarding prominent drivers of coresidence in the United States and Canada. We argue that dominant depictions of coresiders in contemporary Canadian and American films place responsibility for coresidence squarely on the shoulders of young adults, and, further, portray coresidence as the domain of the ill, flawed, or otherwise vulnerable individual. Potential implications in terms of social and internalized stigma are discussed.

Research Approach

Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

Our investigation is situated within a social constructionist epistemology, which treats meaningful reality as constructed, developed, and transmitted through interactions between humans and their world (Crotty, 1998). As social and cultural objects, films – both in their making and viewing – play a role in the construction and transmission of meanings within society. They also come to be within particular social and cultural worlds. As McEwan (2003) points out, “a filmmaker cannot produce a film out of his own consciousness that does not bear the marks of his social and political context” (p. 72). Consequently, films both represent and shape the worlds in which they emerge.

Simply put, films tell stories that are specific to certain historical, cultural, and social contexts. As Tomashevski notes, a story can be thought of as “a journey from one situation to another” (as cited in Todorov, 1981, p. 49). Such journeys contain elements of temporality (the sequence or order of events) and causality (the forces that drive changes in thinking, feeling, being, and doing). In the current project, temporality was examined by attending to how the films portray the sequence or order of events leading to, maintaining, or ending a young adult’s coresidence. Causality was examined by attending to the events and forces that initiated or sustained coresidence, be they intrapsychic or external. We turn now to a description of the methodology used to gather and analyse data for the current study, namely, Qualitative Content Analysis.

Methodology

An adapted form of Schreier’s (2012) Qualitative Content Analysis was used to explore film portrayals of the drivers of young adult coresidence. This methodology involves collecting data sources, developing a provisional coding frame that is both data- and theory-driven

(inductive and deductive), piloting the preliminary coding frame and refining as needed, and then coding all data using the revised coding frame. Schreier distinguishes between latent content, (i.e., content requiring some manner of context or interpretation; grasping satire, for example, requires context and interpretive steps), and manifest content (i.e., literal, or obvious content), and encourages the researcher to consider both in their analyses, but notes that drawing conclusions based on these requires additional evidence; external validation (Schreier, 2012, p. 182). As such, this approach to content analysis urges researchers to collect and analyse data in a methodical manner while also encouraging inferential leaps and creative interpretation.

Data Collection

To locate films suitable for analysis, the first author undertook targeted searches through the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) and Google. To be included in the study, films had to satisfy the following inclusion criteria: length (\geq 70 minutes); fiction; English language; mentions a young adult (18-35) protagonist (main character) or deuteragonist (secondary main character) residing in the parental home in the plot synopsis or trailer; released after January 1, 2010, and before January 1, 2021; and filmed and set in the United States or Canada. The following exclusion criteria were used to eliminate candidate films: shorts (films under 60 minutes); non-fiction or documentary films; those in languages other than English; films where tertiary characters were the coresiders; cases where the plot synopsis or trailer did not mention the coresidence of protagonists or deuteragonists; films released before January 1, 2010, or after December 31, 2020; and those filmed and set outside the United States or Canada. These criteria were implemented to restrict the data set to films developed within a particular sociocultural world and time period. As coresidence experiences and expectations differ greatly across cultures and historical periods (cf. Hardie & Seltzer, 2016; Li & Hung, 2019; Smorti et al.,

2020), we chose to focus on contemporary representations of Canadian and American experiences. For a flow diagram of the above screening process and details on each of the 18 films included in the analysis, please see the supplementary materials.

Analysis

Following data collection, we familiarized ourselves with the films by reviewing available trailers and synopses. Next, we collaboratively constructed a provisional coding frame. Development of the provisional coding frame began with each author independently viewing *The King of Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020) and taking notes on how the film portrayed the causes of coresidence. This film was chosen as the shared target film because all authors were familiar with the work and felt it contained a good breadth of relevant content. We then independently screened one of three additional films (*Room for Rent*, *Always be my Maybe*, or *Adoptation*), again taking notes on how the motives and forces driving coresidence were portrayed. These three films were selected for their apparent deviation from *The King of Staten Island*, and one another in terms of genre, tone, and the nature of coresidence showcased within the work. Based on our combined impressions of these films, we individually constructed a coding frame focused on why coresiders were depicted as living at home. All three coding frameworks included hierarchically-organized dimensions that encompassed relevant categories and subcategories. In line with Schreier's (2012) recommendations, all categories were unidimensional, mutually exclusive, exhaustive in relation to the research question, and referenced in at least one film.

Following the construction of individual coding frames, we met several times to discuss and merge these frameworks. Each author shared their frame with the group, and discussions were held about similarities and differences in interpretations. In the process of merging these frames, we removed duplicate dimensions and categories, added new dimensions and categories

developed through group dialogue, modified the hierarchy and organization of dimensions and categories, and addressed disagreements in the nature or assignment of categories. Following this exercise, each author independently viewed *The King of Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020) again to pilot the provisional coding frame. After confirming that the provisional frame adequately accommodated the diverse content of this film in the assignment of data to specific categories, all films were coded in Excel by the first author using this framework.

Double-coding was subsequently used to explore the reliability of the coding process (Schreier, 2012). Two weeks after initial coding, five films were re-coded by the first author to explore similarities and differences in coding over time. Following the completion of coding, we gathered to reflect on the data as a whole. Borrowing from Rothe's (2000) notion of Deep Structure Analysis, we considered patterns in the distribution of categories across movies, attended to the relationships amongst various categories and dimensions, and considered how film portrayals of young adult coresidence were related to broader sociocultural processes, practices, and discourses. The results of these analyses are presented below.

Findings

Our qualitative content analysis yielded eight dimensions and numerous categories and subcategories related to why young adult characters were depicted as living at home (see Table 1 for a summary of results). These dimensions and categories reflect a regrouping of various intentions, aims, events, and experiences that were depicted as driving coresidence in the films examined. Sixteen of these works suggested multiple explanations for why young adult characters lived with their parents, representing differing character perspectives as well as shifting realities within the film. In what follows, we present each of the resulting dimensions in descending order of proportion of references in the films and note important categories and

subcategories within these broad regroupings. For a full account of which films were coded for each dimension and category, please see the supplementary materials for this article.

Table 1.

Overview of Findings

Dimension	Number of References	Films Present (of 18)
1 Mental Health Challenges	53	11
2 Flawed Personalities	45	13
3 Transitional Moments	17	11
4 Toxic Parenting	7	4
5 Financial Need	6	6
6 Caregiving	6	3
7 Home as Refuge	2	2
8 Normalized Portrayals	2	2

Mental Health Challenges: Coresiders as Psychologically Unwell

The most common reason for coresidence portrayed in the films was young adult mental health challenges (53 references; 11/18 films). Here, the coresider is depicted as unable or unwilling to leave the parental home due to struggles with mental health.

The most common category within this dimension cast coresiders as living with psychological disorders that precluded independent living (27 references; 8/18 films). In such instances, specific mental illness/es symptomology/ies are positioned as either directly bringing about, or significantly contributing to the need for coresidence. For example, *Night Clerk* (Cristofer, 2020) and *Silver Linings Playbook* (Russell, 2012) directly attribute the coresidence of Bart and Pat, respectively, to mental illness. Pat is required to live with his parents as a condition of release from a psychiatric facility after being treated for bipolar disorder and Bart is portrayed as needing caregiver support to manage the challenges of living with autism spectrum

disorder. In comparison, in *King of Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020) coresider Scott attributes his lack of personal success and need to live at home to Attention Deficit Disorder and depression; the film, however, suggests that while these challenges contribute to Scott's coresidence, they are not solely or directly responsible for his coresidence. In these film portrayals, young adults with specific mental illnesses are depicted as being or feeling too vulnerable, unpredictable, or irresponsible to live independently.

The next most common category in this dimension attributed coresidence to diffuse psychological unwellness on the part of young adult coresiders (14 references; 8/18 films). In such instances, coresidence is portrayed as resulting from maladaptive ways of thinking, feeling, or behaving that are not explicitly tied to specific mental disorders but nevertheless precluded the young adult from living independently. For example, part of the unwellness of Abe in *Dark Horse* (Solondz, 2010, 0:38:00) includes a spiteful fixation on staying in his parents' home, to the point that he suggests to his fiancé that they simply move into his room after their marriage:

...at least only for a little while...Don't worry. We'd move into my parents' bedroom after the move to Florida...We could keep this home in our family for, like, generations. Our kids could give it to their kids and then to their kids. Only instead of assholes, everyone would be totally cool and respectful.

Interestingly, some instances also suggested that the act of coresiding itself contributed to this unwellness. After Laurel in *The Pretty One* (LaMarque, 2013, 0:8:30) is outed for having a sexual relationship with a minor, she hides in a tree; her twin sister Audrey links this and other behaviour to the fact she still lives at home, stating, "You need to get out of this place. You're screwing a minor? And, you act like Dad's wife Laurel, it's fucked." The references in this

category point to coresidence occurring due a diffusely compromised mental state which is displayed through particularly maladaptive behaviour or thinking.

Traumatic death as a cause of coresidence was the third most common category in this dimension (10 references; 6/18 films). In these instances, a traumatic death (most commonly of a parent) drives the coresider to remain in or return to the parental home. In films where the young adult has never left the parental home, the death is depicted as thwarting the typical developmental trajectory in some fashion. For example, Marcus in *Always be my Maybe* (Khan, 2019), stubbornly avoids all forms of risk, including leaving home, after the death of his mother, while Pete in *Pete and Cleo* (Hamilton, 2010, 0:58:50) had to give up “everything” and become his brother Cleo’s male parent following the death of their father. While Jeff’s reasons for staying at home in *Jeff, who Lives at Home* (Duplass & Duplass, 2011, 0:58:45) are ambiguous, Jeff identifies the death of his father as both a contributor to his unhappiness and as the cause of his distracted search for “signs” from the universe. In films in which the young adult returns home, the return is driven by a need for the perceived safety of the parental home. Only two films in this category, *Almost Friends* (Goldberger, 2016) and *Promising Young Woman* (Fennell, 2020) involve a young adult returning home; also, the only films to involve a traumatic death of someone other than a parent (Charlie accidentally kills a drunk driver, and Cassie’s best friend dies, respectively). The trauma related to these deaths is depicted as the most significant driver of both young adults’ returns to the parental home. All portrayals in this category depict a traumatic death causing the young adults to seek out, remain in, or feel obligated to the parental home.

Flawed Personalities: Coresiders as Self-centred, Financially Imprudent, Lazy

The second most common dimension (45 references; 13/18 films) involved portrayals of coresidence driven by personality flaws that prevented young adults from fulfilling typical developmental milestones. This dimension regroups various ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are depicted as contributing to coresidence but are not tied to unwellness by the film.

The most common category in this dimension, Resistance to Change (12 references; 8/18 films) depicts coresidence as an attempt to avoid or prevent change. In some instances, the coresider's fear of change is tied to the threat of failure and an unwillingness to disrupt the reassuring familiarity of life in the family home. Such fearful avoidance of action is evident and directly linked to coresidence in *Always be my Maybe*, (Khan, 2019, 1:08:30) when co-protagonist Sasha tells coresider Marcus, "Well what about you? Stuck at home with your dad and that car?...really, it's because you're scared." For coresiders like Matt in *Take Me Home Tonight* (Dowse, 2011), the resistance to change is borne out of the paralyzing fear of making the wrong choice about their life. Still other instances of young adults resisting change point to the sense of being directionless – stuck in a holding pattern that often lacks intelligibility. In *Jeff, who Lives at Home* (Duplass & Duplass, 2011, 0:18:30), Jeff's mother explains his state to his brother using just these terms: "Do you understand? He's stuck, honey. He's stuck." This category captured references to coresidence as driven by the young adult's unwillingness or inability to take actions which would facilitate progress toward independent living (including post-secondary education, securing a job, or committing to a romantic partner).

Self-centredness (10 references; 7/18 films) included depictions of the coresider as selfish and/or self-interested and portrayed coresidence as linked to the character's willingness to rely on or take advantage of others. Examples include Abe in *Dark Horse* (Solondz, 2011, 0:53:00)

who is accused of coresiding because he is “a cheapskate and a freeloader.” In *Room for Rent* (Atkinson, 2017, 0:45:20), Mitch’s willingness to rely on others is similarly positioned as parasitic: the film’s antagonist describes Mitch’s extended coresidence as related to his disease-like self-centeredness: “You’re a cancer Mitch. You infect the people around you...and suck the life out of them.” This category reflects instances where coresiders are constructed as preying on the generosity of parents and others.

Equally common, financial imprudence (10 references; 7/18 films) pointed to instances where coresiders were portrayed as unable to afford independent residences due to their own financial mismanagement or an unwillingness to spend money on residential costs. For example, Mitch from *Room for Rent* (Atkinson, 2017) managed to waste the entirety of his \$3.5 million-dollar lottery winnings by, among other things, converting his parents’ basement into a Tiki bar, trademarking odd phrases, and investing in dubious inventions (like a time machine). Harry in *Rocky Road* (2014) buys expensive gifts for his parents that they neither want nor use for years, and expenses so many items that he loses his job at an investment firm, leading to his coresidence. In these instances, coresiders either have (or had) the financial resources to live independently, but are portrayed as coresiding due to financial naivety or irresponsibility.

Laziness was the third most common personality flaw tied to coresidence (7 references; 7/18 films). Here, coresidence is depicted as driven, in part, by the coresider’s indolent refusal to work to provide for their own needs. This laziness includes instances where the coresider is shown avoiding chores, avoiding or complaining about employment, or otherwise evidencing a lack of motivation to pursue activities necessary to secure and maintain independent residence. In *Tiny Furniture* (Dunham, 2010) for example, coresider Aura progresses from contributing some labour around the home to neglecting chores entirely and stealing her mother’s food.

Likewise, Jeff, in *Jeff, who Lives at Home* (Duplass & Duplass, 2011) has to be threatened with eviction by his mother, on her birthday, before he agrees to buy wood glue to perform a simple repair at home. These depictions suggest that young adults coreside, in part, to avoid the work involved in employment, tasks of self-care, and the responsibilities of home keeping and maintenance.

Delusional aspirations were the fourth most common category in this dimension (6 references; 4/18 films). Such instances portrayed the coresider as holding naive plans for their lives that prevented them from taking realistic steps toward independent living (notably, securing fulltime employment). As an example, *King of Staten Island's* Scott plans to open a combination restaurant and tattoo shop; when Scott's sister questions his sincerity for this plan, he replies, "I am being real. It's never been done before. I looked it up. I Googled it. It's never been done, not even as a joke!" (Apatow, 2020, 0:20:06). Likewise, Lou, in *Adoptation* (Knoblauch & Matukewicz, 2016, 0:44:15) has a Craigslist contractor spray-paint a coffee bean logo and business name 'Bean Jones' onto his car, despite his coffee shop being in the planning stages; planning which amounts to little more than a binder of ideas he loses in a car theft and a readily available filtration technique he was told about by the operator of another coffee shop in his town. Here, coresiders are depicted as fixated on unrealistic goals that delay their exit from the parental home.

Transitional Moments: Coresiders as at a Crossroads

The third-most common dimension tied coresidence to transitioning from one state, status, or role to another and depicted the family home as a safe and comfortable place to experience such shifts (17 references; 11/18 films). Although a variety of transitions were included here, such as release from a residential psychiatric facility (*Silver Linings Playbook*)

and returning home after a job loss (*Rocky Road*), most of the references in this dimension were related to educational transitions.

Two categories in this dimension – drop-outs (8 references; 5/18 films) and recent graduates (7 references; 3/18 films) – link coresidence to either completing or failing to complete educational projects. For dropouts, post-educational coresidence is ultimately tied to a generalized lack of commitment and motivation on the part of the coresider. For example, Scott in *The King of Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020) drops out of art school; part of a trend for the character, who also refuses to commit to his romantic partner, and is constantly claiming to be figuring things out. Depictions of drop-out related coresidence treat this living arrangement as extended – Cassie in *Promising Young Woman* (Fennell, 2020) and Charlie in *Almost Friends* (Goldberger, 2016) live at home for multiple years after dropping out. In comparison, young adult characters who coreside immediately after finishing post-secondary pursuits are portrayed as using the family home as a space to temporarily regroup and make plans before (presumably) moving on to fulltime employment or additional educational pursuits and re-vacating the family home. For example, Lou in *Adoptation* (Knoblauch & Matukewicz, 2016, 0:09:27) tells his mother, “I’m sort of in, uh, in transition right now....” after he moves back in after graduation in order to plan out the next steps in his life. Some young adults, like Aura (Dunham, 2010, 0:51:30) are portrayed as feeling entitled to this support due to the challenges entailed by such transitions, as she complains that “I just got out of school. This is a very hard time for me...I am a young, young person, who is trying very hard.”

However, within all films where coresidence follows graduation, there is a sense that young adults risk falling into extended coresidence due to the comfort and security of the family home. In such instances, parents evidence anxiety over the prospect of sustained coresidence. For

example, in *Take me Home Tonight*, Matt's father confronts him about his failure to advance his career and move out, "You said, 'just give me the summer to figure things out.' Well guess what? The summer's over!" (Dowse, 2011, 0:11:36). The suggestion of such reactions is that support for this transitional period is, or should be, one of limited duration.

Toxic Parenting: Coresiders as Victims of Over-Indulgent or Controlling Parents

Toxic parenting (7 references; 4/18 films) contained references to coresidence as driven by patterns of parental indulgence or control. The over-indulgent category (4 references; 3/18 films) points to instances that suggest parental coddling has delayed the maturity and independence of the coresider. For example, in *King of Staten Island* (Apatow, 2020, 0:55:36), Margie, suggests that she contributed to the lack of independence shown by her son Scott when she tells him: "I think I've been there for you too much..." The controlling category (3 references; 1/18 films) links coresidence to excessive management of the young adults' everyday life. In *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010), Nina's mother exercises control using infantilization and emotional abuse, leaving Nina, at times, too dependent and frightened to leave. Both over-indulgent and over-controlling parenting are presented as forms of caregiving that pervert the typical development of young adults and preclude coresiders from developing the self-reliance, independent decision-making, and personal responsibility that are a part of the traditional markers of adulthood in contemporary Western societies – even as many traditional markers lose their applicability for some young adults (Settersen et al., 2015).

Financial Need: Coresiders as Low-Income or Unemployed

This dimension (6 references; 6/18 films) encapsulated portrayals of coresidence as driven by genuine financial need (in contrast with the more reckless or self-indulgent financial need created by financial imprudence). While some films suggest coresiders lack the means to

live independently, few depict financial need as a central motive for coresidence. Where financial need drives coresidence, it is portrayed as the result of low paying jobs (2 references; 2/18 films) or unemployment (4 references; 4/18 films). Interestingly, even the circumstances which brought about or continue this financial need are often depicted as self-inflicted. In three of the films included in this dimension (*Tiny Furniture*, *Room for Rent*, and *Promising Young Woman*), coresiders are depicted as doing little to improve their financial situation despite opportunities to do so. Cassie in *Promising Young Woman* (Fennell, 2020), for example, is offered a significant promotion but turns it down, claiming she does not want to follow a conventional path (Fennell, 2020). Such depictions suggest that if young adults simply apply themselves or truly want to live independently, their legitimate financial needs could be readily met.

Caregiving: Coresiders as Providers of Care

The caregiving dimension (6 references; 3/18 films) captured portrayals of coresidence driven by familial need. For example, Pete in *Pete and Cleo* (Hamilton, 2010) dropped out of high school, secured employment, and remained in the family home after the death of his father so that the family did not lose their house. Interestingly, the remaining films in this dimension, *Always be my Maybe* (Khan, 2019) and *The Pretty One* (LaMarque, 2013), depict coresiders as justifying their coresidence to others by sincerely claiming to be engaged in parental care provision without actually engaging in any necessary caregiving. In both films, coresiders' caretaking claims are actively contested by other characters, including the very parents for whom they claim to be caring. From the perspective of these young adult characters, parental care provides a legitimate reason for a young adult to be living at home. Where others challenge such

motives, the films suggest some young adults might duplicitously claim caregiver status to continue residing in the parental home without stigma.

Home as Refuge: Coresiders and the Psychosocial Comfort of Home

The refuge dimension (2 references; 2/18 films) portrayed coresidence as motivated by the young adult's desire for a safe, supportive environment. In both *Adoption* and *Almost Friends*, the coresider identifies the parental home as a site of temporary refuge. For Lou in *Adoption* (Knoblauch & Matukewicz, 2016, 0:09:30), this refuge is needed following graduation as he seeks the "peace of home" while he figures his life out. For Charlie in *Almost Friends* (Goldberger, 2016, 0:57:30) the safety and emotional comfort of home following the death of a stranger in an automotive collision is a chimeric "Devil's deal" which brings him contentment but leaves him without ambition and terrified of leaving his sanctuary. However, both Charlie and Lou seek out the parental home based on a similar belief that it is a place where they can experience warmth and support by going back home.

Normalized Portrayals: Contemporary Coresidence as Unremarkable

Whereas most films treated coresidence as a noteworthy living arrangement and went out of their way to explain why young adults were living in the family home, two films portrayed coresidence as an unremarkable aspect of the storyline. *Preggoland* (Tierney, 2014) and *Alexander IRL* (Levin, 2017) both feature young adults who live at home, but neither film depicts this living arrangement as important to the plot, a source of concern, or requiring defence or explanation. Moreover, while these characters have individual failings and flaws, these are depicted as coinciding with, rather than contributing to, coresidence. In these rare portrayals, coresidence is depicted as not simply unproblematic, but also as potentially advantageous. In *Alexander IRL* (Levin, 2017), for example, the coresider E.J. uses coresiding to focus on building

his career and capitalizing on opportunities he would have missed if he lived outside the parental home; and at no point does the film suggest his coresidence is noteworthy.

Discussion

Individual vulnerability and deviance were frequently portrayed as driving coresidence in the films sampled. Most frequently, coresiders were depicted as living at home due to mental health or personality flaws. Together, these dimensions and their categories accounted for 98/138 (71%) of causal representations in the films studied. Whereas Mitchell and Lennox (2020) found that news portrayals often acknowledge macrosocial shifts, it seems that film portrayals are less likely to mention broader sociocultural contexts in favour of person-centred explanations of coresidence. Generally speaking, the focus is on flawed *people*, not defective *systems*.

Taken together, the current analysis and the findings of Mitchell and Lennox (2020) suggest that media portrayals of coresidence tend to devalue and stigmatize this living arrangement. How are we to make sense of such largely negative portrayals, which position coresidence as a result of desperation (news media) or individual weaknesses/flaws (film)? How are we to reconcile such despondency, deviance, failure, and flaw with social science findings that suggest coresidence is not only an increasingly common living arrangement, but also a largely positive experience for parents and young adults (Caputo, 2019; Fingerman et al., 2017). What might be the possible causes and consequences of portraying coresidence as the domain of the odd and unwell?

To reflect on our findings, we turn to Rimke's (2016b) notion of psychocentrism. Rimke defines psychocentrism as the "cultural corollary of neoliberalism" and notes that this process positions those who actively resist – or highlight via their very existence – the inequalities propagated by Western economic, social, and political systems as inherently flawed (Rimke,

2016b, p. 21). The theory posits that those who draw attention to the inequitable distribution of opportunities and resources in Western societies see their critique of neoliberalism delegitimized by psychological discourses that paint such disruptors as disorderly, dangerous, or personally deficient (Rimke, 2016b). Via psychocentrism, complex human problems become pathologies of the individual (Rimke, 2016a) and persons are cast as responsible for their lot in life. Such “pathologization and responsabilization” (Dej, 2016, p. 118) strips away much of the social, economic, and political context in which individual struggles become intelligible, and paves the way for negative judgements about, and ill treatment of, those who resist or fail to attain normalized or idealized states.

Film depictions of coresidence from 2010-2020 suggest aspects of psychocentrism in portrayals of this living arrangement. At no point in the films analysed were macrosocial issues portrayed as meaningfully contributing to coresidence. The idea that systemic inequalities – including those tied to pervasive racism, economic opportunity, or intergenerational trauma – might meaningfully contribute to patterns of coresidence was raised in only one film, and was immediately dismissed by another other character. In *Pete and Cleo* (Hamilton, 2010, 0:17:46), coresident Pete suggests that the larger colonial system, as represented by the “white man,” bears significant responsibility for his position in life on the Navajo Nation. His brother Cleo denies this explanation, noting: “it has nothing to do with the white man, you have the choice to be where you are.” Such responsabilization strips coresidence of its macrosocial context and positions young adults and their families as responsible for stigmatized living situations (Dej, 2016; Rimke, 2016b). Pathologization of coresiders is also evident in the films via portrayals of mental illness, personality deviance, trauma, and psycho-emotional unwellness, coresiders are positioned as ‘other’ to the healthy, typical majority. At times, this unwellness is also depicted as

a contagious threat to others, thereby also positioning this group as potentially dangerous (Rimke, 2016a). Scott, for example, is told by his romantic interest that “You are so crazy that you make everyone around you feel fucking crazy...” (Apatow, 2020, 1:33:15).

Film depictions consigning coresidence to the realm of the ill and immature are blatantly at odds with established research: cultural, institutional, and economic factors have tended to be much more reliable predictors of young adults’ living arrangements in North America compared to psychological factors such as self-efficacy, emotional autonomy, depressive symptoms, or negative mood (see Mazurik et al., 2020 for a review). Indeed, despite strong evidence that educational pursuits and cultural attitudes influence coresidence preferences and practices (Britton, 2013; Cepa and Kao, 2019; Jeong et al., 2014; Kamo, 2000; Maroto, 2019; Sironi & Billari, 2019), such themes were absent in the films analysed. Moreover, while financial reasons are a commonly cited motivation for coresidence amongst studies of young adults (Creamer et al., 2020; Engelhart et al., 2016; Merten et al., 2018), film portrayals tended to downplay both the commonness and legitimacy of this cause. Where characters lacked the financial means to live independently, this was attributed to fiscal impropriety or an unwillingness to enthusiastically pursue gainful employment. While social scientists point to growing wealth gaps, corporation-favouring labour laws, and other globalization-linked barriers that restrict or delay residential independence amongst contemporary young adults (Newman, 2012), films present simplistic portraits of laziness and irresponsibility.

Moreover, by problematizing coresidence and tying this living arrangement to unwellness and abnormality, film portrayals suggest that this arrangement is undesirable – an option of last resort. News portrayals which point to desperate economic times (Mitchell & Lennox, 2020) present coresidence in similar terms. Yet, many coresident young adults report that their decision

to live at home was driven, at least in part, by a sense of family solidarity and mutual aid (Tomaszacyk & Worth, 2020) or a desire to care for parents as “a matter of choice and as reflecting close relationships, love, and obligation” (Dehn, 2017, p. 76). Beyond this, research suggests that American young adults who live with their parents experience more positive relational experiences than negative ones (Fingerman et al., 2017) and nearly two-thirds of Canadian parents with a coresiding adult are very satisfied with the amount of time they spend with their children – a proportion greater than the 49% of parents who live separately from their offspring (Turcotte, 2006). Such lines of research suggest that more than economic necessity or personal need is at play. As the emotional intimacy within Western families has intensified and the demographic make-up of North America diversifies, the claim that coresidence in Canada or the U.S. always represents a situation driven by necessity seems increasingly untenable.

The implications and consequences of negative media portrayals are unclear. These films depict an incredibly common and largely beneficial living arrangement as both deviant and indicative of failure, flaw, or weakness on the part of young adults. The extent to which such portrayals influence public perceptions of coresidence remains uncertain. The relationship between film depictions of coresidence and young adult or parent self-esteem is similarly unclear, as is the impact such depictions might have on coresidence experiences or residential decision-making. Also unknown is the extent to which media portrayals reflect common understandings of coresidence amongst various sections of the broader Canadian and American populations. In future research, the tension between stigmatizing media portrayals and the growing trend of young adult and parent coresidence requires greater attention.

Given that this is the first study of film portrayals of young adult and parental coresidence, numerous directions for future research are evident. Notably, future research should

attend to variations in portrayals of coresidence in non-English films within the United States and Canada, and those set and developed outside Canada and the United States. While our linguistic and geographic limits were necessary to limit the scope of our project, analysis of films from other regions and languages could reveal important nuances and differences in coresidence portrayals within various subgroups and across cultures. Similarly, while we restricted ourselves to analysing contemporary film portrayals, much could be learned by comparing these to representations from previous eras. Exploring film portrayals of specific relationships within coresident households (e.g., coresider-parent or coresider-sibling) also provides the opportunity to glean insight into cultural constructions of coresidence and contemporary family roles.

In sum, our analysis both extends and complicates our understanding of media portrayals of coresidence. The current findings support Mitchell and Lennox's (2020) assertion that a neoliberal ethos permeates contemporary media portrayals of coresidence by depicting coresiders as responsible for their living situation and suggesting that residential independence is something anyone can accomplish through personal effort. Film portrayals seem to depart from news media in the frequent pathologization of coresiding young adults living with parents, and the denial or dismissal of macrosocial drivers. Together, this responsabilization and pathologization point to a form of psychocentrism which suggests that coresiding young adults do not deserve, or could not manage, residential independence due to individual failings. Thus, while film portrayals of coresiding young adults released between 2010 and 2020 might have moved beyond the simplistic caricatures of prior decades, they continue to depict coresidence as an extraordinary and problematic living arrangement. Such portrayals leave out voices and perspectives in which coresidence is an expected and enjoyable part of contemporary development that benefits both adult children and parents.

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